Forecasting the 2024 US Presidential Election*

Analyzing Demographic Patterns and Predicting Swing States

Tina Kim   David Flores   Kevin Shao

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Our analysis of swing state polls for the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election shows a close race. Republicans lead in most key states like Michigan, Georgia, Nevada, Wisconsin, and Pennsylvania, while Democrats have a slight edge in Arizona. The national average also leans Republican, suggesting a Republican win in the 2024 Election.

1 Introduction

Overview paragraph: The 2024 United States of America Presidential Election is to elect the fourty-seventh president of USA, with the two candidates as Donald Trump, the fourty-fifth president of the United States and representative of the Republican Party, and Kamala Harris, current vice president of the United States and representative of the Democratic Party, after Joe Biden announced that he will not continue participate in this presidential election anymore (Jr (2024)). Democracy can be described as liberal and left-leaning, with the emphasis of economy intervention with implementation of policies such as minimum wage and progressive tax rates. Members of the Republican party tend to follow the free economy, and can be described as right-leaning ("Democrat Vs. Republican" (n.d.)). The results of the 2024 Presidential Election will determine which political party, Republican or Democratic, will become the leader of the United States for the next four years, largely affecting the policies implemented in the United States during this time period. Due to the strong nation power of the United States, this may even affect the world's economic trends in the four years. Therefore, predicting results of the upcoming 2024 United States Presidential Election is a necessary action.

Estimand paragraph: To predict results of the 2024 United States of America Presidential Election, our aim is clearly to conclude which candidate, either Harris or Trump, is more likely to win this election. Our response variable is in turn the probability of one candidate

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*Code and data are available at: https://github.com/DavidFJ207/USPresidentialForecast

winning the election based on poll data, with our chosen poll as Emerson. When the supporting percentage of one candidate, or the party s/he represents, is only slightly less than 50%, we cannot clearly determine whether s/he would be predicted to have been elected as the fourty-seventh US President or not, since there is a group of people who did not choose to participate in the voting process. Therefore, to increase accuracy of predictions, we will build two models, one model with the estimand as the probability of Harris, or the Democratic party, winning the election, and another with the estimand as the probability of Trump, or the Republican party, winning the election. By comparing the two predictions, one can get a final prediction of who is more likely to be elected as the next President of the United States of America.

Results paragraph: Summarize the key findings of the model, highlighting its predictive accuracy and implications.

Why it matters paragraph: Explain the broader significance of accurately forecasting election results for politics, society, and policymaking.

Telegraphing paragraph: The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 details the data and measurement process; Section 3 covers model development and results; Section 4 discusses implications and future steps. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2….

2 Data

2.1 Overview

We sourced the "Presidential General Election Polls" dataset from FiveThirtyEight (FiveThirtyEight 2024) and performed an in-depth analysis using the statistical programming language R (R Core Team 2023).

Our primary objective was to clean, organize, and analyze U.S. presidential election polling data to provide insights into voter preferences by state. This involved selecting data from reputable pollsters, organizing it by state, and addressing any missing or incomplete entries. Additional datasets were merged where necessary, and after thoroughly addressing missing values, we finalized a polished dataset ready for analysis. Below is a table summarizing the polling data by state, showcasing voter preferences by party and demographic breakdowns. The table highlights key trends and differences across states in terms of party lean and demographic distribution. Figure 1 and Figure 2 provides a snapshot of these findings.

Latest Poll Points by Party

State	Democrat Pct	Republican Pct	Voted Biden 2020	Voted Trump 2020
Arizona	48.2	50.5	46.0	45.2
Georgia	49.8	49.7	44.5	44.3
Michigan	49.7	49.6	57.9	26.8
Nevada	49.2	48.1	57.9	26.8
New Hampshire	50.9	47.2	51.8	35.8
North Carolina	48.2	50.2	46.0	45.2
Pennsylvania	49.0	50.7	45.3	44.9
Wisconsin	49.2	49.9	58.2	28.7

Figure 1: **?(caption)**

State	High Educated	Low Educated	Female	Male	Nonbinary	Caucasian	Minority Ethnicity
Arizona	22.1	24.3	51.8	46.4	1.8	80.2	19.8
Georgia	23.8	24.1	49.8	49.5	0.7	86.5	13.5
Michigan	27.2	22.6	53.0	46.2	0.8	60.3	39.7
Nevada	27.2	22.6	53.0	46.2	0.8	60.3	39.7
New Hampshire	30.1	17.7	52.5	46.7	0.8	68.3	31.7
North Carolina	22.1	24.3	51.8	46.4	1.8	80.2	19.8
Pennsylvania	25.8	21.8	53.7	44.6	1.7	60.9	39.1
Wisconsin	28.7	19.5	51.9	47.1	1.0	49.1	50.9

Figure 2: **?(caption)**

2.2 Measurement

We chose Emerson as our primary pollster, and the reasoning for this is detailed in **?@sec-appenA**. Emerson's polls offered crucial information, such as polling dates, party affiliations, sample sizes, and the percentage of support for each political party.

Our analysis centered on voter preferences by party rather than individual candidates. This approach was more relevant for identifying overall trends and helped us forecast which states might swing in future elections, especially swing states. We will discuss this focus further in our results section, Section 4.

The Emerson dataset also included valuable demographic data, voting history, and approval ratings. To ensure a consistent analysis, we concentrated on questions that were uniformly asked across all states. This approach allowed us to aggregate and analyze data at the state level without being limited by state-specific polling variations.

2.3 Outcome Variables

Our initial analysis of the dataset revealed important trends in party preferences across states. In Figure 3, we show which states have the strongest leanings toward the Democratic or Republican parties. This visualization is crucial for identifying key swing states, which lie near the center of the graph and show nearly equal support for both parties. These states are especially important for predicting the 2024 election outcome.

From this analysis, we identified eight critical swing states: Michigan, Georgia, Nevada, North Carolina, New Hampshire, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, and Arizona. These states will be central to our election prediction. Although Minnesota emerged as a potential swing state, we excluded it due to the wide range of polling data, as explained in Table 3. Additionally, we will consider the national average in our overall prediction.

Beyond identifying swing states, it's also important to understand the differences between the strongest Democratic ("blue") and Republican ("red") states. The bar graph in Figure 4 highlights these differences. It focuses on key factors that create the biggest contrasts between Democratic-leaning and Republican-leaning states, helping to show how these factors differ between the most extreme red and blue states.

To start, the graph features two bars, one for Democratic points and one for Republican points, reflecting the responses to questions asked by Emerson Pollster about voting intentions. These responses closely align with the percentages shown for each state, giving us a clear picture of voter preferences.

The Figure 4 visualization gives us valuable insight into how people's poll responses may influence their political leanings.
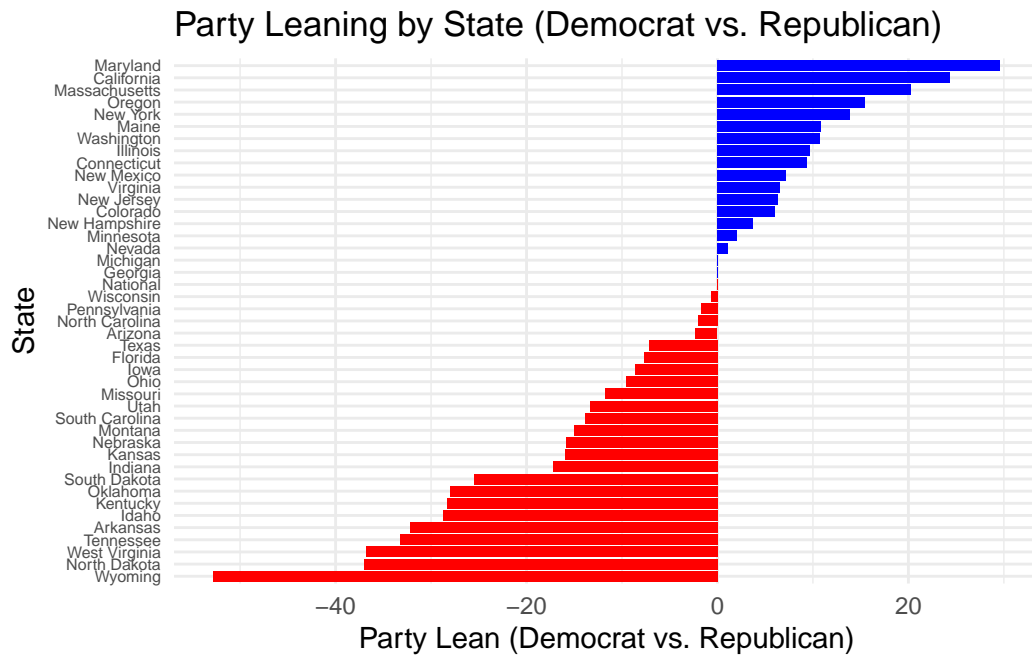
Figure 3: Example Predictor Variable Visualization

Table 3: **?(caption)**

(a) Final Summary Table of 95% Confidence Intervals for Common States

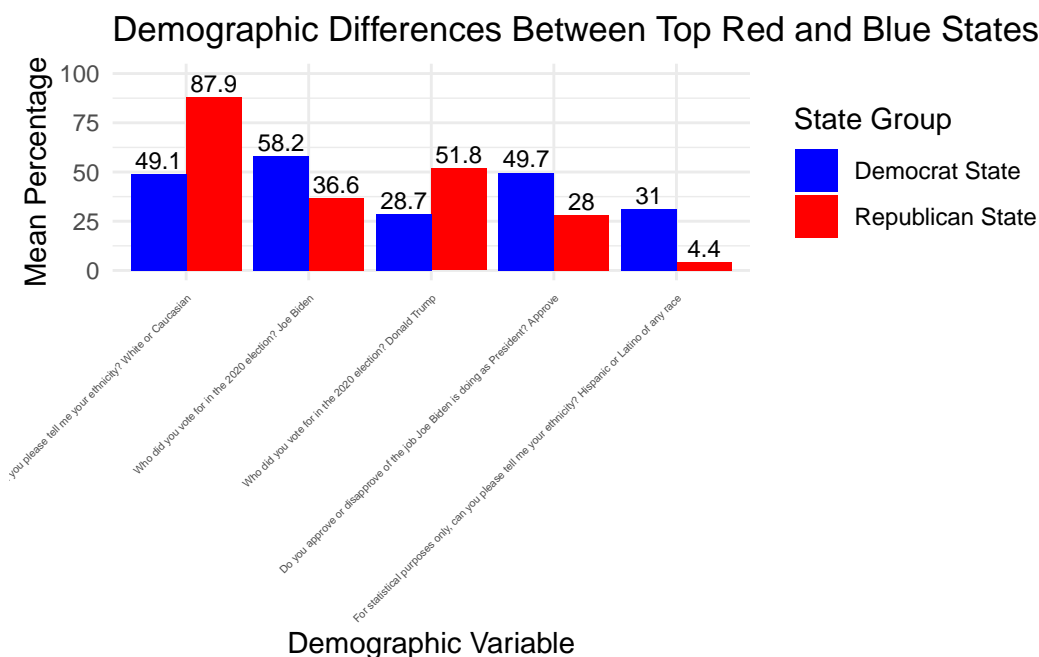| State	DEM Mean (%)	DEM Lower 95%	DEM Upper 95%	REP Mean (%)	REP Lower 95%
Arizona	42.5	40.8	44.2	47.1	45.
Georgia	42.8	41.0	44.7	47.8	46.
Michigan	44.9	43.4	46.4	45.6	44.
National	42.4	41.5	43.3	43.7	42.
Nevada	41.8	39.6	44.0	45.9	44.
New Hampshire	44.8	42.6	47.0	41.6	39.
North Carolina	43.2	40.4	46.0	48.6	47.
Pennsylvania	44.2	42.5	45.9	47.6	46.
Wisconsin	44.4	42.7	46.0	46.5	45.

Figure 4: Demographic Differences Between Top Red and Blue States

Through these visualizations, we not only identify which states are most likely to swing in future elections but also better understand the public opinions driving these partisan divides.

2.4 Predictor Variables

We then take a closer look at the demographic and social factors that shape voter preferences. The predictors we analyze include education levels, gender, and past voting behavior. These variables are important because they significantly impact political leanings and can influence how a state is likely to vote.

In Figure 5, we examine how these factors correlate with party lean across U.S. states. This analysis helps identify which factors have the greatest influence in each state, providing a clearer understanding of what drives voter behavior.

The correlation matrix in Figure 5 shows how different predictors relate to party preferences. We can see which factors, like education or gender, are more strongly tied to Democratic or Republican leanings. Blue shading indicates stronger Democratic support, while red shows stronger Republican support. Key observations include higher education being linked to Democratic support and lower education favoring Trump in 2020. Minority groups generally lean Democratic, while Caucasian/White voters tend to support Trump. Past voter behavior shows
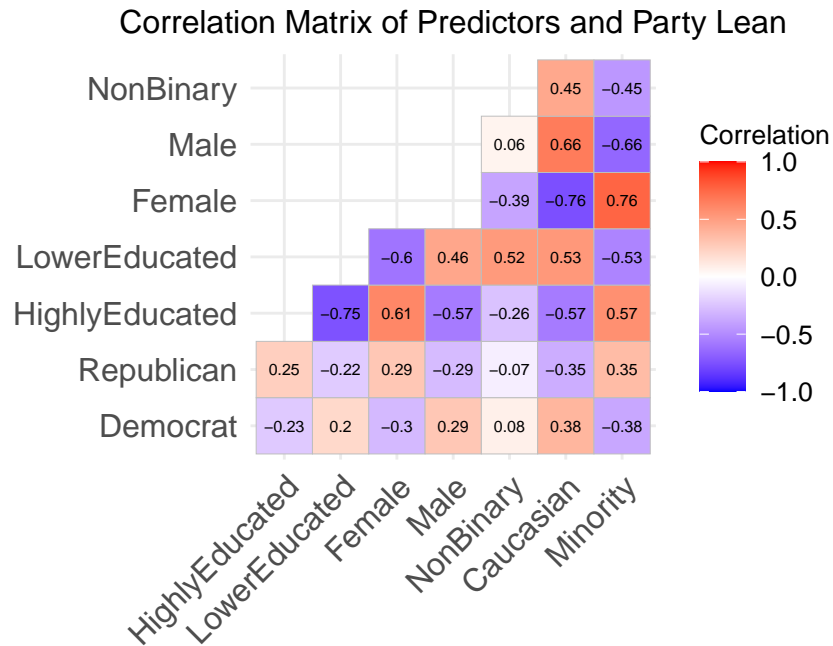
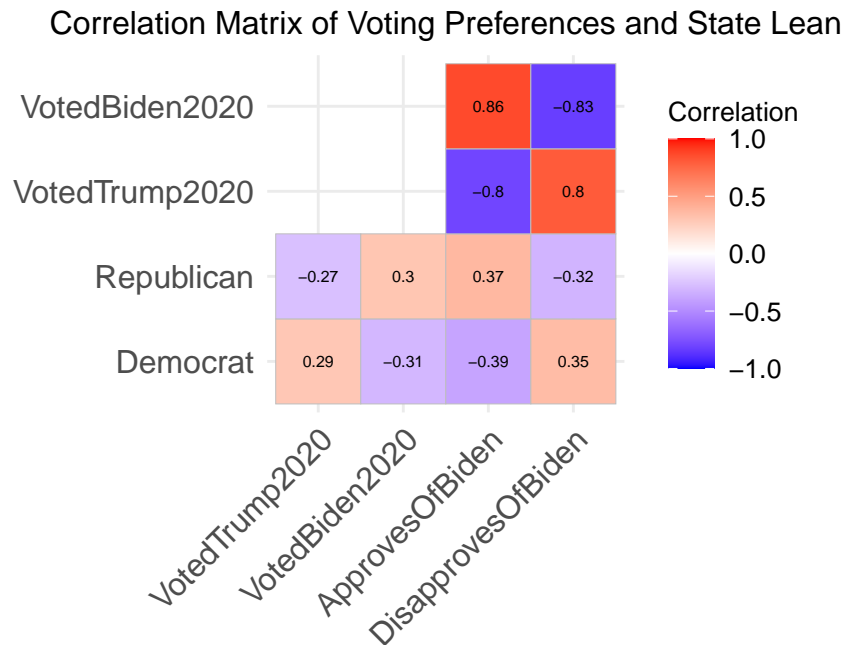Figure 5: Example Predictor Variable Visualization

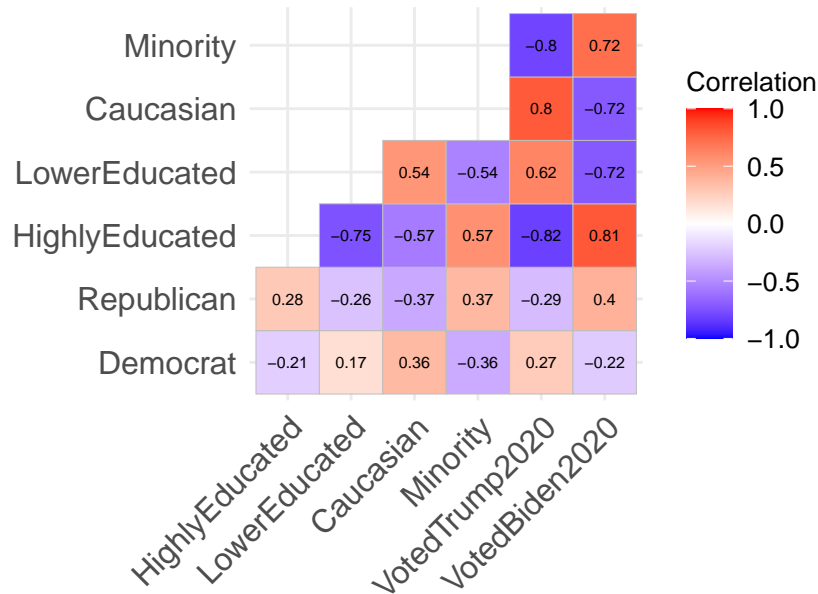Figure 6: Example Voting and Approval Predictor Variable Visualization

Figure 7: Correlation Matrix of Education, Race, and Past Voting Behavior

Biden supporters remain Democratic, and Trump supporters disapprove of Biden. Additionally, women lean slightly more Democratic compared to men, who often lean Republican.

Lastly, we examine Democratic and Republican support alongside Biden's approval over time, marking July 21st when Joe Biden concluded his campaign, as reported by Rabson (2024). During this period, Democratic support was initially low but increased following this change. By analyzing specific demographic factors and previous voting behavior, we aim to predict the 2024 election outcome.

Key predictor variables:

- **Education**: This measures education levels, with higher education often correlating with more Democratic support.
- **Race/Ethnicity**: This examines how different racial and ethnic groups tend to align politically, with minority groups often leaning Democratic and White/Caucasian voters leaning Republican.
- **Gender**: This captures how gender influences party preference, with women generally leaning more Democratic and men more Republican.
- **Priors (Past Voting Behavior)**: This looks at who people voted for in the past, helping us understand ongoing political support or disapproval.
- **Biden's Approval Rating**: This assesses how approval or disapproval of Joe Biden impacts Democratic support, providing insight into shifting voter sentiments.
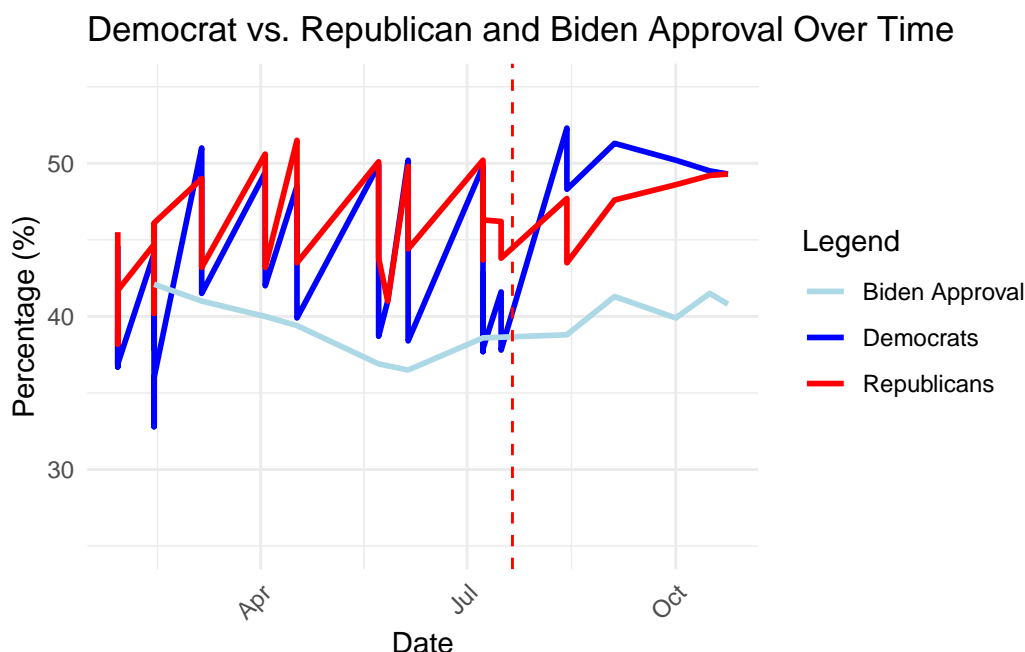
Figure 8: **?(caption)**

3 Model

3.1 Model Development

The goal of our model is to forecast the popular vote outcome of the 2024 US presidential election, focusing specifically on eight swing states. We will choose the predictor variables based on the correlation matrix we created previously (Figure 5). It is important to note that even if the percentage of people who vote for Trump (representing the Republican Party) or Harris (representing the Democratic Party) is slightly below 50%, this does not necessarily mean that the corresponding candidate will not be elected as the next President of the United States, given the percentage of people who choose not to vote.

The following Figure 10 is the histogram of the Democratic Party Supporting Rate, which describes the distribution of the response variable for the second model. Our final choice is to construct two generalized linear models: one for the percentage that Trump will become the next President and one for Harris. We can then compare the predicted percentages of people voting for each candidate to make a final prediction of who is more likely to be the next President of the United States.

To decide between using a generalized linear model or a linear model for each of the two models, we checked the normality of the response variables: the percentage of people supporting
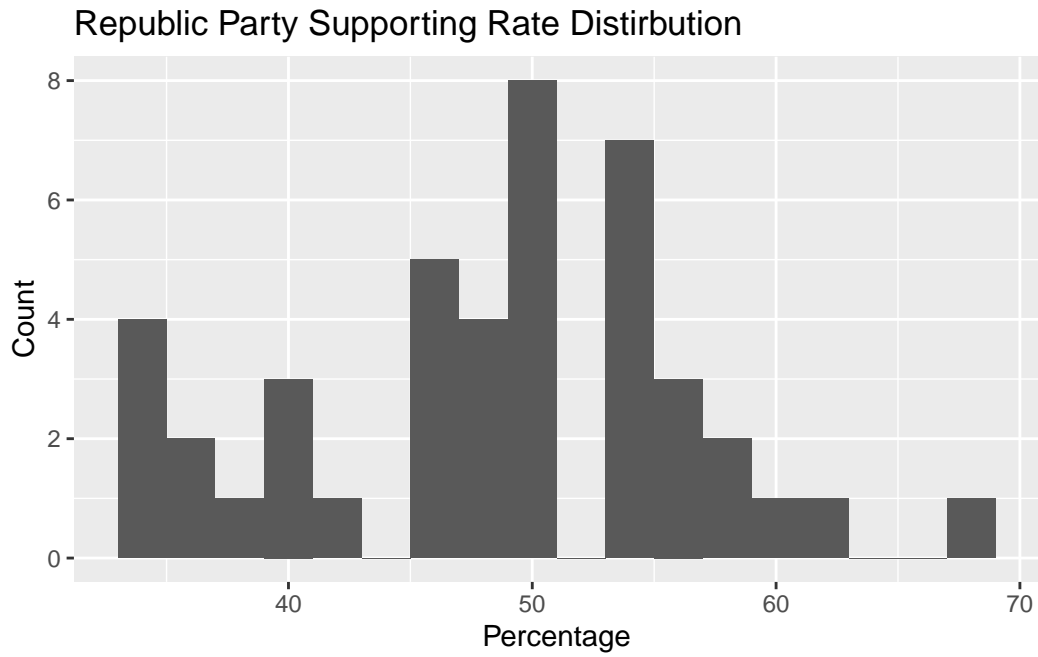
Republic Party Supporting Rate Distirbution

Figure 9: Distribution of Republican Party Supporting Rate

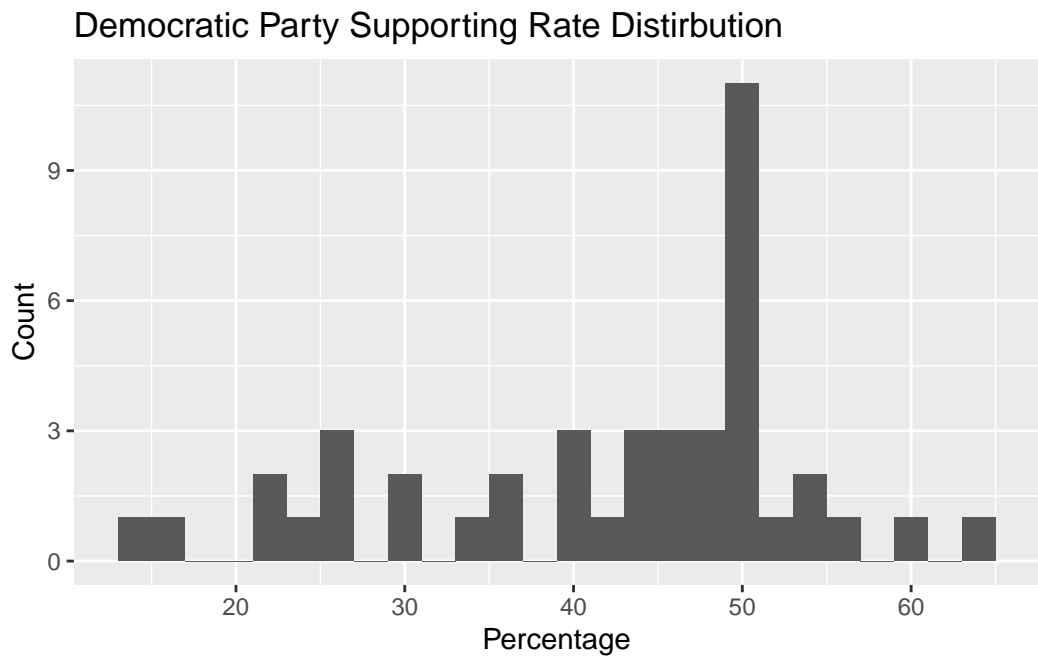## Democratic Party Supporting Rate Distirbution

Figure 10: Distribution of Democratic Party Supporting Rate

the Republican Party and the percentage supporting the Democratic Party. According to Figure 10 and Figure 9, the distributions of both response variables do not appear normal. The distribution of the Democratic Party Supporting Rate tends to resemble a Poisson distribution, with most percentages having a similar frequency and an outlier around 67-68 percent. The Republican Party Supporting Rate distribution has a maximum frequency around 50 percent, with similar frequencies around 25-26 percent and 48-49 percent, suggesting a potential violation of the normal distribution assumption.

Therefore, since the response variables are not normally distributed, we will use a generalized linear model for both models to better capture the characteristics of the data.

The goal of our model is to forecast the likely vote outcome in 8 swing states for the 2024 US presidential election. This model will allow us to estimate the expected vote share for each candidate based on state-level characteristics and prior voting patterns, which are especially important in determining close elections.

3.2 Model Set-up

We define the model as a Bayesian linear model where the outcome, (y_i), represents the predicted vote share in state (i). The predictors in the model capture key demographic and historical voting patterns across swing states, and we aim to model this outcome with an intercept, ( ), and a state-specific predictor coefficient, ($_i$), that represents the effect of a given variable (x_i) on vote share.

3.2.1 Model Components and Assumptions

- **Outcome Variable:** The predicted vote share (as a percentage) for each candidate in each state.
- **Predictors:** Variables include demographic factors (e.g., education, income, race distribution) and historical voting patterns (e.g., previous election vote shares, approval ratings).
- **Intercept:** Represents the baseline vote share in the absence of additional predictors.
- **Coefficients:** These capture the effect size of each predictor on vote share, allowing for state-specific adjustments.
- **Residual Standard Deviation:** Accounts for unexplained variation in vote share predictions, assumed to follow an exponential distribution.

3.2.1.1 Assumptions

1. **Linearity:** The relationship between each predictor and vote share is assumed to be approximately linear.

2. **Independence:** Vote share predictions for each state are independent, conditional on the predictors.
3. **Normality of Errors:** Errors in vote share predictions are assumed to be normally distributed.
4. **Prior Distributions:** We use weakly informative priors to regularize predictions without imposing strong assumptions.

3.2.2 Implementation

We run this model in R using the `rstanarm` package, which provides Bayesian estimation with sensible defaults. The default priors in `rstanarm` are chosen to be weakly informative to prevent overfitting while still regularizing our model coefficients.

3.3 Model Justification and Results

By using a Bayesian linear model, we leverage historical and demographic data to provide probabilistic estimates of vote share, giving us a distribution of possible outcomes for each state. This approach allows for uncertainty quantification around predictions, which is particularly important in close elections.

Our results are summarized in Table Table 4, which shows the estimated vote shares, posterior means, and credible intervals for each candidate in each swing state. These findings indicate the influence of demographic and historical factors on vote share predictions. Furthermore, the model's predictive accuracy is evaluated through posterior predictive checks, indicating how well the model captures actual voting patterns. The implications of these findings are significant for forecasting election outcomes, particularly in identifying which states are likely to be more competitive.

4 Results

Our results are summarized in Table 4.

5 Discussion

5.1 First discussion point

If my paper were 10 pages, then should be be at least 2.5 pages. The discussion is a chance to show off what you know and what you learnt from all this.

Table 4: Prediction Summary for Swing States with Declared Winner

State	Democrat Points	Republican Points	Winner
Michigan	0.49	0.50	Republican
Georgia	0.49	0.50	Republican
Nevada	0.49	0.50	Republican
North Carolina	0.49	0.49	Republican
New Hampshire	0.49	0.49	Republican
Wisconsin	0.49	0.50	Republican
Pennsylvania	0.49	0.50	Republican
Arizona	0.49	0.48	Democrat
National	0.48	0.49	Republican

5.2 Second discussion point

Please don't use these as sub-heading labels - change them to be what your point actually is.

5.3 Third discussion point

Discuss what the model reveals about the election forecast and its potential impact on understanding voting behavior.

Person C: Discuss limitations of the model and areas for further improvement.

5.4 Weaknesses and next steps

Weaknesses and next steps should also be included.

Appendix

Appendix A: Pollster Methodology Overview

Emerson College Polling was initially a college polling exercise, and is now an "innovative, nationally-ranked" non-partisan polling center ("About Us" (n.d.)). For the 2024 USA Presidential Election pollster, the Emerson College Polling defined the population to be "likely voters" of 2024 United States Presidential Election. Emerson College Polling does indicate that the targeted population of "likely voters" is based on "2024 Likely Voter Modeling." However, the methodology for this modelling and the specific model is not indicated, so the specific validity of the targeted population cannot be determine ("October 2024 National Poll: Harris 50" (2024)).

Emerson College Polling recruits people completing this survey for this national pollster by contacting mobile phones using "MMS-to-Online", "Online Opt-in Panel", and "IVR(Interactive Voice Response)" ("October 2024 National Poll: Harris 50" (2024)). In the MMS-to-Online approach, the target population were sent text messages with graphics that invite them to take a "screening questionnaire", and those who pass the questionnaire can move on to take the survey. The selected respondents were based on "state voter files provided by Aristotle." The Online Opt-in Panel approach involves respondents from the targeted population being invited to finish the survey by means of an online opt-in panel "provided by CINT" ("About Us" (n.d.)). Specifically, in the Online Panel approach, selected voters were pre-matched to "L2 voter file data provided by Rep Data" ("October 2024 National Poll: Harris 50" (2024)). Finally, the IVR approach involves making automatic telephone calls to selected "likely voters." Participants then answer the survey using their "touch-tone telephone". The email approach indicated in Emerson College Polling's official methodology ("About Us" (n.d.)) is not mentioned in the National Polling, so it can be assumed that this approach is not used in our chosen pollster data.

From the methodology of recruiting people indicated in the previous paragraph, we can see that while the targeted population of the national poll are likely voters, the sampling frame are likely voters that use phones, either mobile or landline. Emerson College Polling chooses 1000 samples from their targeted population, in this case is all likely voters of the 2024 United States Presidential Election, and it is then "weighted by gender, education, race, age, party affiliation, and region based on 2024 likely voter modeling" ("October 2024 National Poll: Harris 50" (2024)) for each national poll. As most people in the United States use phones by some means, the target population and sampling frame are highly similar, increasing the overall validity of the survey.

In the "MMS-to-Online" and "IVR(Interactive Voice Response)" approaches, random sampling is used, and in the "Online Opt-in Panel" approach, there is no indication of a specific sampling approach ("About Us" (n.d.)). We can conclude that the general approach used in this specific pollster is random sampling. Random sampling tends to reduce bias, simplify analysis, and is also easy to implement, but at the same time also requires much time and money. In

consideration with the sample size of 1000 people compared to the targeted population of likely voters, which contains most of the population of the United States of America, there is a high possibility of existing selection bias, occurring when the participants are not representative of the population.

There is also no specific indication of how non-response is treated, but the results section of national polls, such as the one from September 29 to October 1, 2024, implicates that non-response are eliminated from final recorded results of the survey. Therefore, we cannot ignore the possibility of non-response bias, occurring when non-respondents differ significantly from respondents. For example, such non-response bias occurs when non-respondents are from California, while respondents are from other states except California.

The questionnaire set by Emerson College Polling for this survey, based on the national polls set from September 29 to October 1, 2024, compose mostly of questions with most common choices listed as choices, and also allowing participants to type in their own answer if it is not included in the list of most common choices. The questionnaire is generally written in an objective voice, and all questions only allow participants to make only one choice. All questions in the questionnaire are relatively-common, including ones about ethnicity, age range, region, and education which collects demographical data, and ones that are related to actual presidential-election predictions, including opinions about Joe Biden's performance, the two major parties (Democratic and Republican), whether s/he would vote, and voting inclinations. The only issue observed in the questionnaire is that it is too lengthy, containing more than 20 questions, which may decrease participants' motivations to complete the survey, even after starting it ("October 2024 National Poll: Harris 50" (2024)).

Therefore, after analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of this pollster about the 2024 United States Presidential Elections by Emerson College Polling, we can conclude that Emerson College Polling can improve their pollster by implementing the following approaches. Emerson can consider increasing the sample size in order to make their survey more representative of the targeted population, explicitly describing their definition of the targeted population "likely voters" and the model used to determine characteristics of the targeted population. Emerson can also consider changing from simple random to stratified sampling, based on different states or other demographical features based on their targeted population model, making their sample more representative of the population, decrease the length of the questionnaire, and also explicitly explain their treatment of non-response, which will increase the validity of the study. Overall, this pollster is still highly valid, and generally reliable for predicting the 2024 United States Presidential Election.

Appendix B: Idealized Survey Design for $100K Budget

Introduction

This appendix introduces an idealized methodology and survey to forecast the US presidential election with a budget of $100k. The goal is to use a sample survey that effectively captures public opinion and demographic characteristics.

Sampling Approach

In order to most accurately represent the sample population of US voters, we will be using a stratified random sampling approach. Stratified random sampling efficiently and fairly samples data from strata that are representative of a population compared to simple random sampling since it also reflects the population of interest's underrepresented subgroups, ultimately reducing potential bias.

The sample population will be taken from 10,000 eligible US voters represented in strata divided into different demographic factors such as age, gender, race, education level, income level, and political affiliation. This sample size can provide a statistically significant confidence interval for the strata.

Respondent Recruitment

We will be using 70% of our budget for respondent recruitment, and the remaining 30% for implementing the survey and validating results.

A proportion of our budget of $20,000 will be used for advertising on various social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter to reach around 10,000 respondents. This online advertising is a good way to reach target respondents based on different demographics we are interested in, especially for younger or hard-to-reach populations.

Since digital ads may result in higher dropout rates and lower response quality, the majority of our budget will be allocated to make up for this limitation. A budget of $40,000 can be used to hire professional survey panels that work with companies that can provide large databases of target respondents that have been pre-screened to match our demographic of interest. Lastly, since pre-screened professional survey panels can introduce bias from being frequent survey responders, we will also use incentivized online survey platforms to recruit various participants that fit our demographics of interest. Participants will be offered small monetary incentives with our budget of $10,000, which can greatly increase completion rates and result in better response quality.

Data Validation

First, we need pre-screening questions to confirm the eligibility of respondents such as eligibility to vote to prevent bots and fake responses. For instance, asking whether they are a US citizen, and then asking if they are eligible to vote in the upcoming US presidential election. If their answers contradict these two questions, we know that their response lacks validity.

Additionally, we have attention checks to identify if respondents are paying attention to and understanding the survey questions. For example, we can ask them if they are paying attention to the question, and if they answer no, we know that they might be rushing or answering the survey carelessly.

Furthermore, we want consistency checks that include similar questions which are paraphrased in different parts of the survey to ensure that respondents are answering consistently.

Lastly, IP address monitoring can be used to prevent duplicate responses from the same person.

Poll Aggregation

We can collect poll data from various reputable polling sources that have good pollster reliability and are from more recent polls. This way, we can weigh the polls according to their quality. For instance, we would assign higher weights to pollsters that have a high rate of pollster reliability based on past results. We would also give higher weights to more recent polls that better showcase the current opinions of the upcoming US election. Lastly, we would emphasize the weight of larger sample sizes since these provide more accurate representation of the population of interest. We can also incorporate the Bayesian Inference method when updating new polls to adjust prior distributions with new information.

Survey Link: https://forms.gle/vm3gKbsMAZvzakFn8

Copy of Survey

.1 Additional Data & Model Details

Include any technical details on data cleaning, model diagnostics, and posterior checks.

A Additional data details

B Model details

B.1 Posterior predictive check

In **?@fig-ppcheckandposteriorvsprior-1** we implement a posterior predictive check. This shows...

In **?@fig-ppcheckandposteriorvsprior-2** we compare the posterior with the prior. This shows...

Examining how the model fits, and is affected
by, the data

Figure 11: **?(caption)**

B.2 Diagnostics

?@fig-stanareyouokay-1 is a trace plot. It shows... This suggests...

?@fig-stanareyouokay-2 is a Rhat plot. It shows... This suggests...

Checking the convergence of the MCMC
algorithm

Figure 12: **?(caption)**

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