

# SCIENTISTS BACK BIDEN FOR US PRESIDENT IN NATURE POLL

Readers cite climate change and the pandemic as their chief worries in the election.

By **Giuliana Viglione**

The bitterly contested US presidential election is under way, with many Americans already casting ballots by mail and at select polling places. National polls give Democratic challenger Joe Biden a moderate lead. But scientists seem to overwhelmingly want the former

vice-president as the next US leader, according to a *Nature* survey of nearly 900 readers. They identified climate change and the US response to the COVID-19 pandemic as the main issues that have influenced who they support (see ‘Scientists and the US election’).

Many respondents to the survey – which is not representative of working scientists or the United States as a whole – also expressed

fear over US President Donald Trump being re-elected, and distress over the potentially lasting damage to scientific integrity that he has wrought. Responses to the poll were solicited on *Nature*'s website, through its e-mail newsletter and on social media. Respondents hailed from both the United States and abroad.

Biden currently leads Trump by about ten percentage points, according to the poll-analysis site FiveThirtyEight, which considers national and state-level polls. But the divide among Biden and Trump supporters in *Nature*'s readership is substantially larger: of 892 respondents in total, 86% supported the Democratic candidate. Roughly the same percentage of respondents who are intending to vote – out of 579 in total – backed Biden.

It is surprising to see just how large the margin of Biden's support is among *Nature*'s survey respondents, says Cindy Kam, a political scientist at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. But she notes that because *Nature*'s audience is mainly composed of scientists, there's no reason to expect that the results are representative of the broader US public.

The survey also asked respondents to indicate their broad field of study. Social scientists showed the highest margin of support for Biden, at more than 90%, whereas among physical and computer scientists, support for the former vice-president was at 83%. This trend mirrors survey results from the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California, Los Angeles, which have shown sociologists to have more left-leaning views than their counterparts in the physical sciences.

The COVID-19 pandemic has ensured that, unlike in most previous elections, scientific issues have taken centre stage. Twenty-six per cent of respondents who support Biden selected pandemic response from the set of offered options as their most pressing issue, nearly one-third selected climate change and 18% chose social justice. “The last four years have felt like a continuous assault on women, people of colour, science, decency and ethics. Without change in the White House, these can't be addressed,” one Biden supporter wrote.

By contrast, about 43% of Trump-supporting respondents cited the economy as the biggest issue of the election, followed by about 16% who picked immigration. “Although I support Trump for economic reasons, I would like him to do a better job embracing science, supporting the scientific community and not contradicting expert scientific advice,” one respondent wrote.

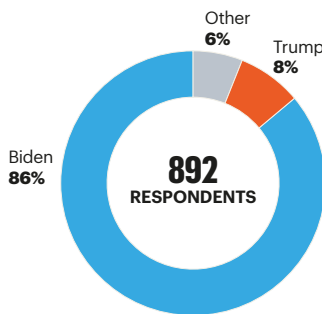
That Biden and Trump supporters have such different priorities isn't a surprise, Kam says. These trends are roughly in line with what supporters of the two candidates tend to focus on, she adds. When properly contextualized, such surveys can provide a useful lens on election attitudes, Kam says. “Even if they're not representative, they can be informative.”

## SCIENTISTS AND THE US ELECTION

*Nature* surveyed its audience ahead of the presidential election.

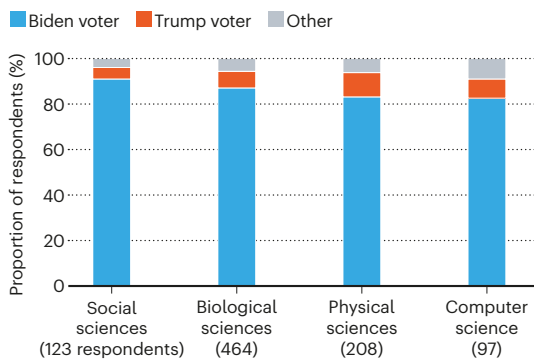
### Biden favoured

The majority of respondents to *Nature*'s survey support Joe Biden rather than Donald Trump.



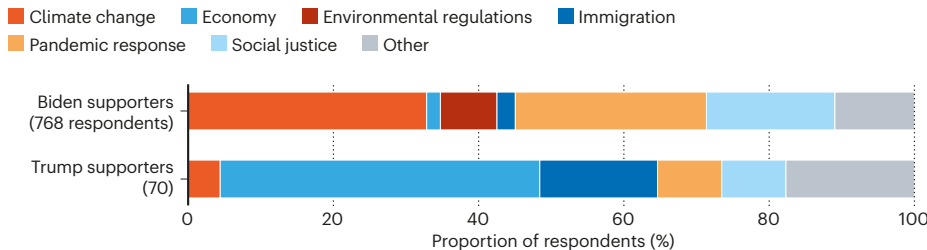
### Specialism has an effect

Among respondents, social scientists are stronger supporters of Biden than are computer scientists.



### Top issues vary

Biden supporters ranked climate change as their most important issue, whereas Trump supporters picked the economy.



Outside the United States, both Biden and Trump supporters place less emphasis on pandemic response and more on climate change and social justice.

