REVERSE COATTAILS EFFECT 2016-2020

For Our Future & Run For Something

NOVEMBER 2021

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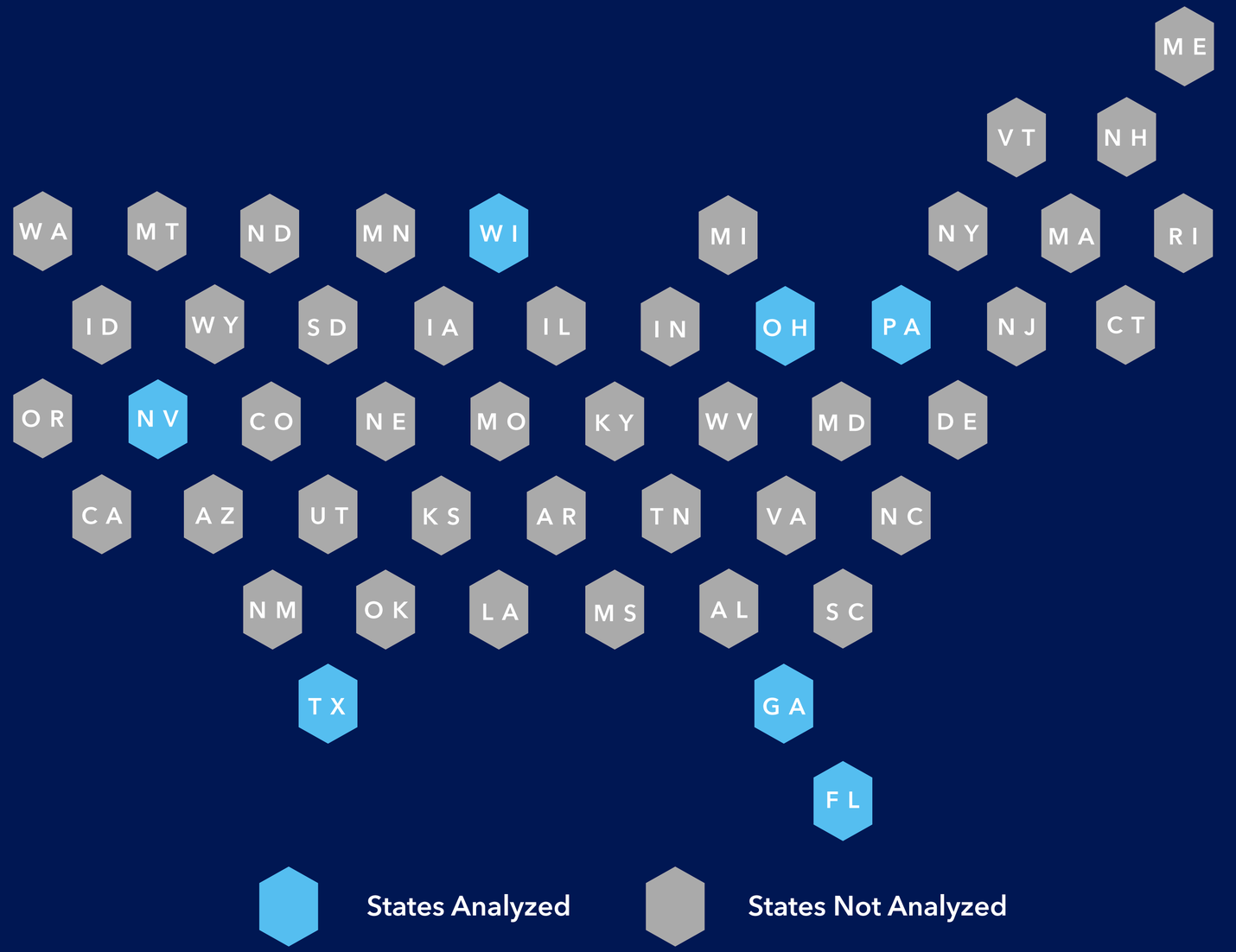
REVERSE COATTAILS

OVERVIEW OF ANALYSIS

The coattail effects, where top-of-the-ticket candidates help sweep same-party down-ballot candidates into office, is a well-documented phenomenon. How top-of-the-ticket campaigns affect down-ballot races is highly visible across cycles, but what is less apparent is what, if any, down-ballot campaign effects there are on the top-of-the-ticket.

For Our Future and Run For Something asked BlueLabs to estimate **the effect of having Democratic candidates contest state legislative seats on statewide Democratic vote-share in battleground states.** BlueLabs developed these estimates using models built with precinct-level demographic data and election results from the 2016, 2018, and 2020 elections.



REVERSE COATTAILS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DEMOCRATS CONTESTING STATE LEGISLATIVE SEATS INDUCES A SMALL BUT MEANINGFUL INCREASE IN TOP-OF-THE-TICKET DEMOCRATIC VOTE-SHARE.

In the states we examined, we see small increases in statewide Democrat's vote share within precincts where every state legislative seat on the ballot was contested by both parties. Analysis of the 2020 implications of this effect suggests that the effect could have a meaningful impact on net votes, and we believe this may have been the case in GA in 2020. Further research into the turnout vs. support implications of contesting state legislative races could clarify this finding.

DEMOCRATS SHOULD RUN EVERYWHERE WHEN THERE IS AN IMPORTANT STATEWIDE ELECTION.

Across states and cycles, we estimate that the size of the effect ranges between a 0.4% and a 2.3% bump in top-of-ticket vote share. In no state or election cycle, did we find a statistically significant effect that running Democrats in state legislative seats *negatively* impacted top-of-the-ticket performance. While Democratic candidates running in districts that would be otherwise uncontested Republican races may not win those seats, they may provide an important vote share bump in close statewide contests (POTUS, Senate, Governor).

THE CONSERVATIVE SKEW OF THE CONTESTED AND UNCONTESTED REPUBLICAN PRECINCTS ANALYZED MAY LIMIT THE GENERALIZABILITY OF OUR FINDINGS.

The underlying demographics of the precincts analyzed tend to skew them more conservative, less diverse, lower educated, and rural. While this likely mirrors the uncontested Republican state legislative races nationwide, it is an important caveat to the analysis.

METHODOLOGY

ANALYSIS PROCESS

STEP 1

DATA COLLECTION

We collected precinct results for statewide and state legislative elections in Battleground states for 2016, 2018, and 2020. We then identified precincts where Democrats had candidates for **every** state legislative seat up for election in that precinct or not.

STEP 2

CREATE A SYNTHETIC CONTROL

Because the type of districts Democrats contest are quite different from ones they do not, and because uncontested districts change between cycles, we used propensity matching to create a synthetic control group, that would allow our modeling to estimate causal effect sizes among demographically comparable precincts.

STEP 3

ESTIMATE THE EFFECT SIZE WITHIN EACH STATE

We built state-level regression models to estimate the effect of Democrats contesting at the state legislative level on top-of-ticket two-way vote share. Where possible, we also estimated the effect in a given state across cycles.

STEP 4

VALIDATING THE RESULTS

Finally, we performed several exercises to validate our regression models, including comparing them to the results from our propensity matching, as well as pooling the precinct data across states to ensure that the effects were not just idiosyncrasies from the state regressions.

Note: For the purposes of this analysis, precincts that were contested by only one major party but also included a non-trivial third party candidate were not included, and by "uncontested Republican" we mean precincts where the state legislative seats were won by Republicans and Democrats did not have state legislative candidates on the ballot.

METHODOLOGY

MODEL VARIABLES

In building individual state regression models for each state, we chose among the variables listed below.

MODEL VARIABLES

- *TargetSmart Partisanship Score*
- *Democratic Performance in 2012, 2016*
- *Urbanicity*
- *Race and Ethnicity*
- *College Attainment*
- *Income*
- *Age*
- *TargetSmart Evangelical Score*
- *Foreign Born Percentage*
- *Median Duration of Residency*
- *Recession Sensitivity*
- *Manufacturing Sector*
- *Energy Production Sector*

METHODOLOGY

STATES AND CYCLES MODELED

We created state-level models where the precinct level data was sufficient to do so. For 2016 and 2020, this meant estimating the effect of having Democrats contesting both chambers of the state legislature in a precinct had on the presidential race.

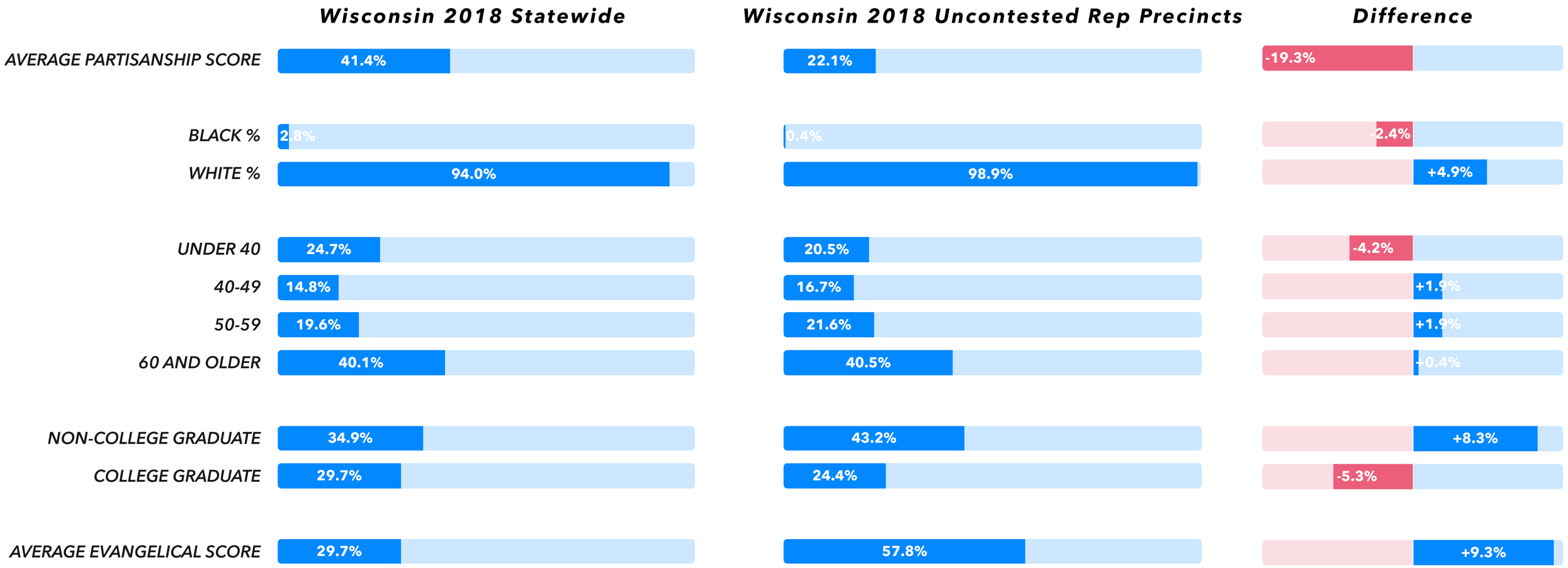
For 2018, this meant estimating the same effect on U.S. Senate races (or, in the case of Georgia, the gubernatorial race.)

STATE	2016	2018	2020
FL	✓		
GA	✓	✓	✓
NV	✓	✓	
OH	✓		
PA	✓	✓	✓
TX	✓	✓	✓
WI	✓	✓	✓

REVERSE COATTAILS

GENERALIZING THE FINDINGS: LIMITED DEMOGRAPHICS

Precincts that Democrats did not contest on the state legislative level tend to be more white, rural, evangelical, Republican, and have lower levels of college attainment. This makes direct comparisons to contested precincts difficult.

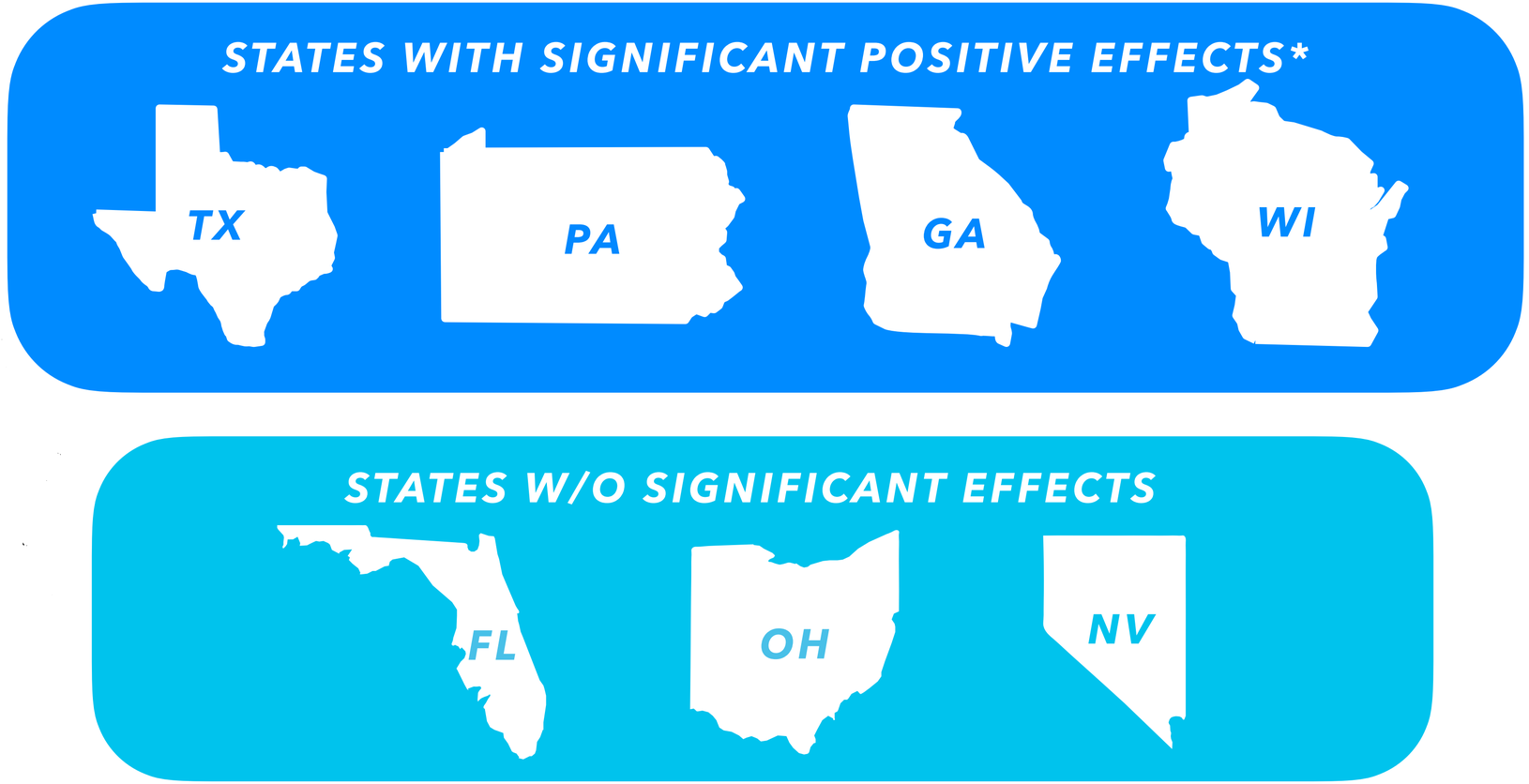


METHODOLOGY

STATE MODELS AND STATISTICAL POWER

Due to the fact that the amount of precincts that are uncontested, as well as their underlying demographics, change every cycle, the availability of precinct data to do this analysis changes cycle-to-cycle and state-to-state.

Among the states with enough data to model, we found that states either had statistically significant positive effects, or no statistically significant effect. We did not find any state with a statistically significant negative effect.



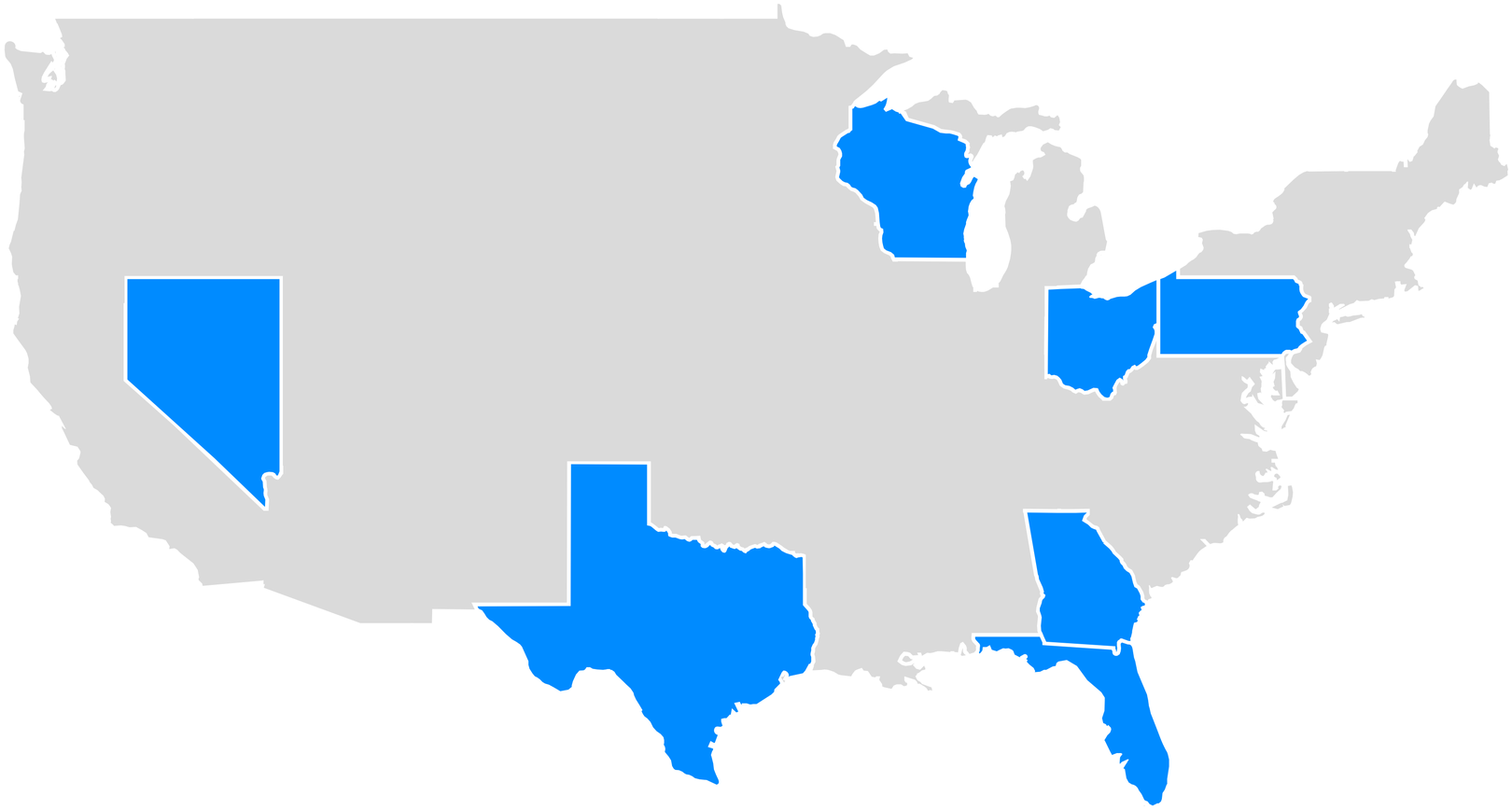
*Note: PA's effect size was statistically significant for 2016 and 2018, but not 2020. WI's effect size was significant for 2018 and 2020, but not 2016.

REVERSE COATTAILS

VALIDATING INDIVIDUAL STATE RESULTS

We used two methods to validate our state-level models: pooled regression modeling and propensity matching.

We found that these approaches validated our state level results of a small but positive statistically significant reverse coattails effect.



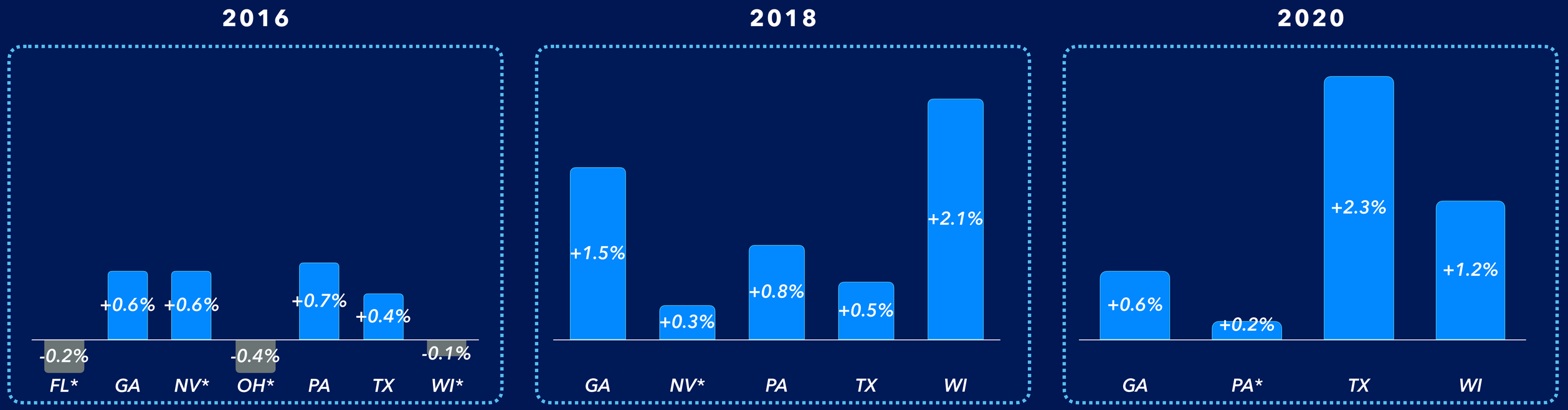
FINDINGS

FINDINGS

DEM VOTE-SHARE INCREASED IN A MAJORITY OF STATES ANALYZED

After controlling for the underlying demographics of the precincts, **statewide Democrats earn small but relatively consistent vote share increases in precincts with fully contested state legislative races**. We also see more pronounced effect sizes in more recent cycles.

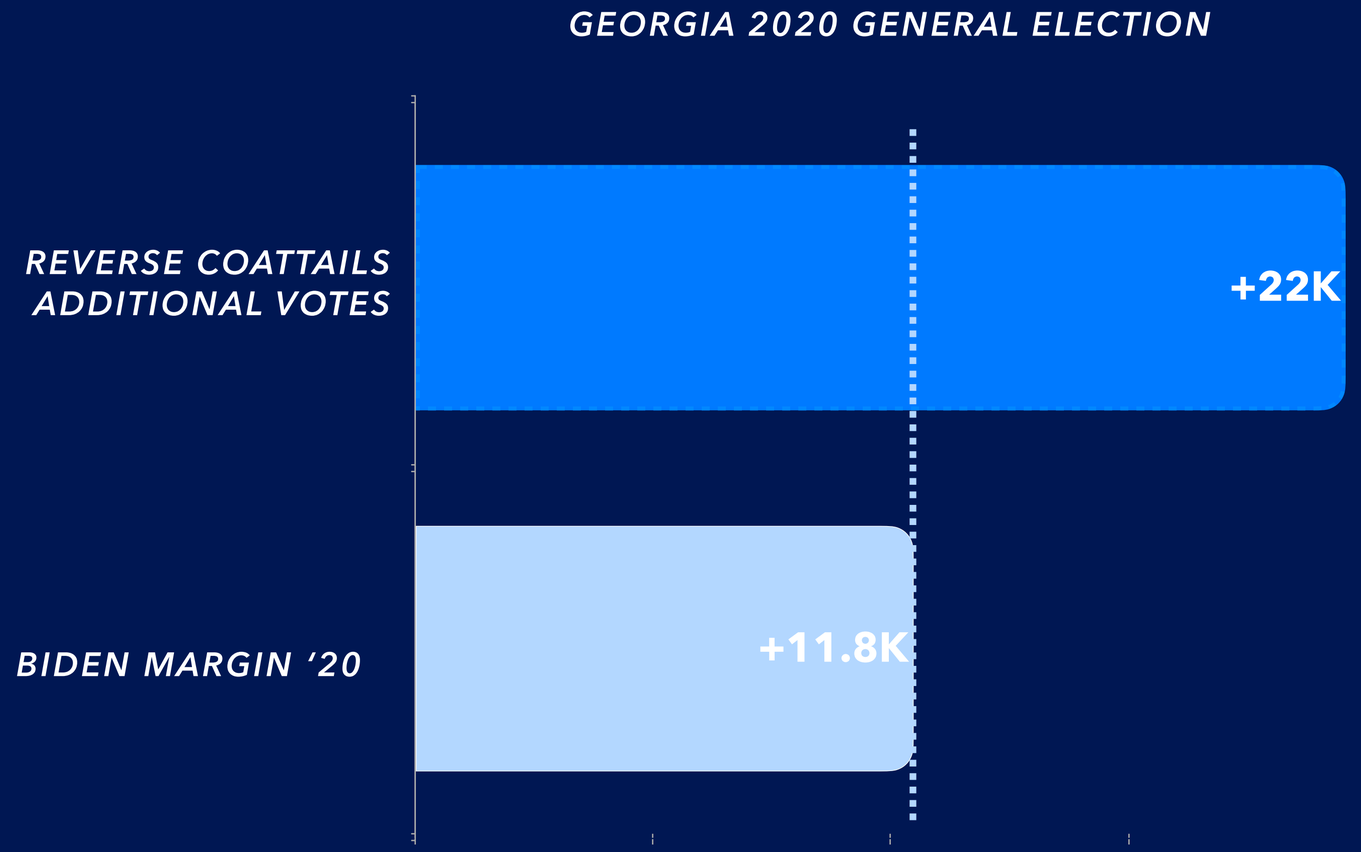
CHANGE IN DEMOCRATIC VOTE SHARE WITHIN FULLY CONTESTED PRECINCTS



*Note: P-Value > 0.05

THE REVERSE COATTAILS EFFECT IN GEORGIA: A DECISIVE FACTOR?

Separating the reverse coattails effect on turnout from the effect on topline support was outside the scope of this analysis. Some have argued that contested races may increase turnout for both parties complicating the effect on total net votes. **However, if we were to assume the effect is limited to support, the estimated effect in GA could have netted Biden up to 22,000 additional votes–nearly double the eventual margin.**



FINDINGS

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

A FULL, NATIONWIDE ANALYSIS

We saw small but notable effects in nearly all of the states and cycles we looked at, but our analysis was limited to a subset of states that are competitive for Democrats statewide. A national dataset would not only allow for more granular estimates, but also give us insight into how this effect does or does not manifest in uncompetitive states.

ANALYZING THE RELATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS OF SUPPORT VS. TURNOUT TO THE REVERSE COATTAILS EFFECT

As we noted in GA, this effect may be of significant consequence to the outcome of statewide elections. However, analyzing the turnout effects of contesting these races relative to the support effects detected in this analysis is essential to understanding how many net votes the effect creates.

EXAMINING THE VARIANCE IN EFFECT SIZES

The state-level estimates varied depending on which states and which cycle were being examined, and questions remained about why that is and what factors would change the effect size. Does increased spending and competitive up-ticket cause this? How much would contesting one instead of both levels of the state legislature change effect size? A better understanding of this would have many political and resource allocation implications.

THE REVERSE COATTAILS EFFECT IN OTHER POLITICAL CONTEXTS

The scope of this project was only to create estimates of Democratic abstention in state legislative on statewide Democratic performance, but it is reasonable to assume that this may extend elsewhere beyond those circumstances. If and how the reverse coattail effect manifests itself in geographies with nonpartisan races, primaries, and in seats that are uncontested by Republicans are avenues for further analysis.

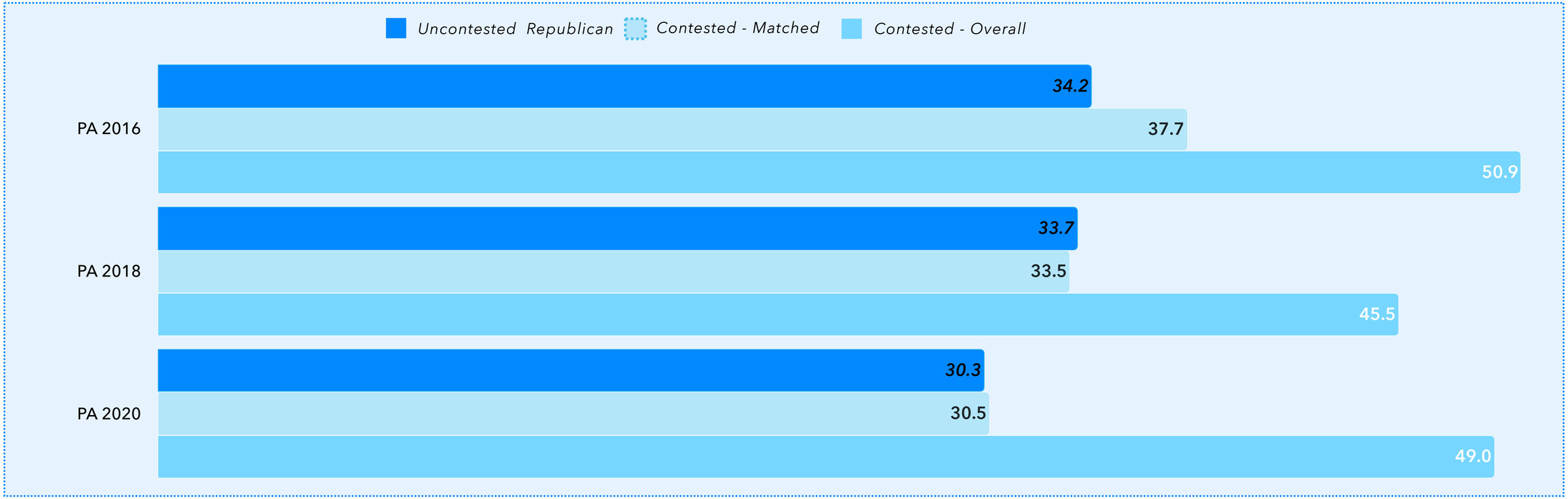
APPENDIX

REVERSE COATTAILS

CREATING A SYNTHETIC CONTROL GROUP

Because of the difficulty of direct comparison between contested precincts and precincts that Democrats did not contest, we used propensity matching to score the underlying demographics of the contested precincts and match them with uncontested ones, allowing us to make comparisons between the contested and uncontested precincts of similar demographics.

Average TargetSmart Partisanship Score of Uncontested Republican, Contested, and Matched Contested Precincts



APPENDIX

PRECINCTS EXAMINED - 2016

Lower Chamber

STATE	CONTESTED D AND R	UNCONTESTED D	UNCONTESTED R	OTHER
FL	2516	1382	1331	389
GA	413	827	1414	0
NV	1274	64	408	91
OH	6412	659	1711	148
PA	4333	2791	1769	265
TX	2613	1918	3378	814
WI	4017	1173	1141	377

Upper Chamber

STATE	CONTESTED D AND R	UNCONTESTED D	UNCONTESTED R	OTHER
FL	2809	993	1630	286
GA	622	737	1295	0
NV	693	121	0	123
OH	3571	0	848	0
PA	2106	1549	1235	0
TX	1204	1002	828	1360
WI	1920	567	518	0

APPENDIX

PRECINCTS EXAMINED - 2018

Lower Chamber

STATE	CONTESTED D AND R	UNCONTESTED D	UNCONTESTED R	OTHER
FL	3377	1501	523	227
GA	996	815	818	0
NV	1228	347	224	57
OH	8122	808	0	0
PA	5019	3096	746	297
TX	5462	1664	1223	375
WI	4767	1183	431	318

Upper Chamber

STATE	CONTESTED D AND R	UNCONTESTED D	UNCONTESTED R	OTHER
FL	2074	932	0	0
GA	981	819	854	0
NV	852	62	0	0
OH	4511	0	0	0
PA	2959	1151	158	0
TX	3487	283	0	364
WI	3020	445	233	0

APPENDIX

PRECINCTS EXAMINED - 2020

Lower Chamber

STATE	CONTESTED D AND R	UNCONTESTED D	UNCONTESTED R	OTHER
FL	4730	1054	58	50
GA	1162	863	630	0
OH	6838	618	1474	0
PA	5203	2106	1503	345
TX	4924	1635	1787	404
WI	5720	205	920	121

Upper Chamber

STATE	CONTESTED D AND R	UNCONTESTED D	UNCONTESTED R	OTHER
FL	2533	444	0	0
GA	1237	640	692	0
OH	4419	0	0	0
PA	3311	1404	175	0
TX	3618	0	474	513
WI	2348	247	461	83

APPENDIX

PRECINCTS CONTESTED AT ALL STATE LEGISLATIVE LEVELS

2016

STATE	ALL RACES CONTESTED BY BOTH PARTIES	ALL RACE UNCONTESTED BY GOP	ALL RACE UNCONTESTED BY DEMS	OTHER
FL	3278	1389	1003	4943
GA	199	1991	1086	1957
NV	1659	292	26	669
OH	8878	1882	420	2037
PA	4722	1777	3508	3855
TX	2312	2589	1224	5589
WI	5267	1364	1407	1433

2018

STATE	ALL RACES CONTESTED BY BOTH PARTIES	ALL RACE UNCONTESTED BY GOP	ALL RACE UNCONTESTED BY DEMS	OTHER
FL	4465	182	1600	2093
GA	1029	1002	1124	2028
NV	1688	117	225	665
OH	11646	0	127	1362
PA	6521	528	3271	2734
TX	7524	766	1374	2651
WI	6314	90	775	2784

2020

STATE	ALL RACES CONTESTED BY BOTH PARTIES	ALL RACE UNCONTESTED BY GOP	ALL RACE UNCONTESTED BY DEMS	OTHER
FL	6709	58	915	977
GA	1466	686	1051	1981
OH	10159	567	618	1814
PA	6241	547	2717	4042
TX	6086	1171	593	5247
WI	5413	728	115	811

APPENDIX

MODEL STATS

2016

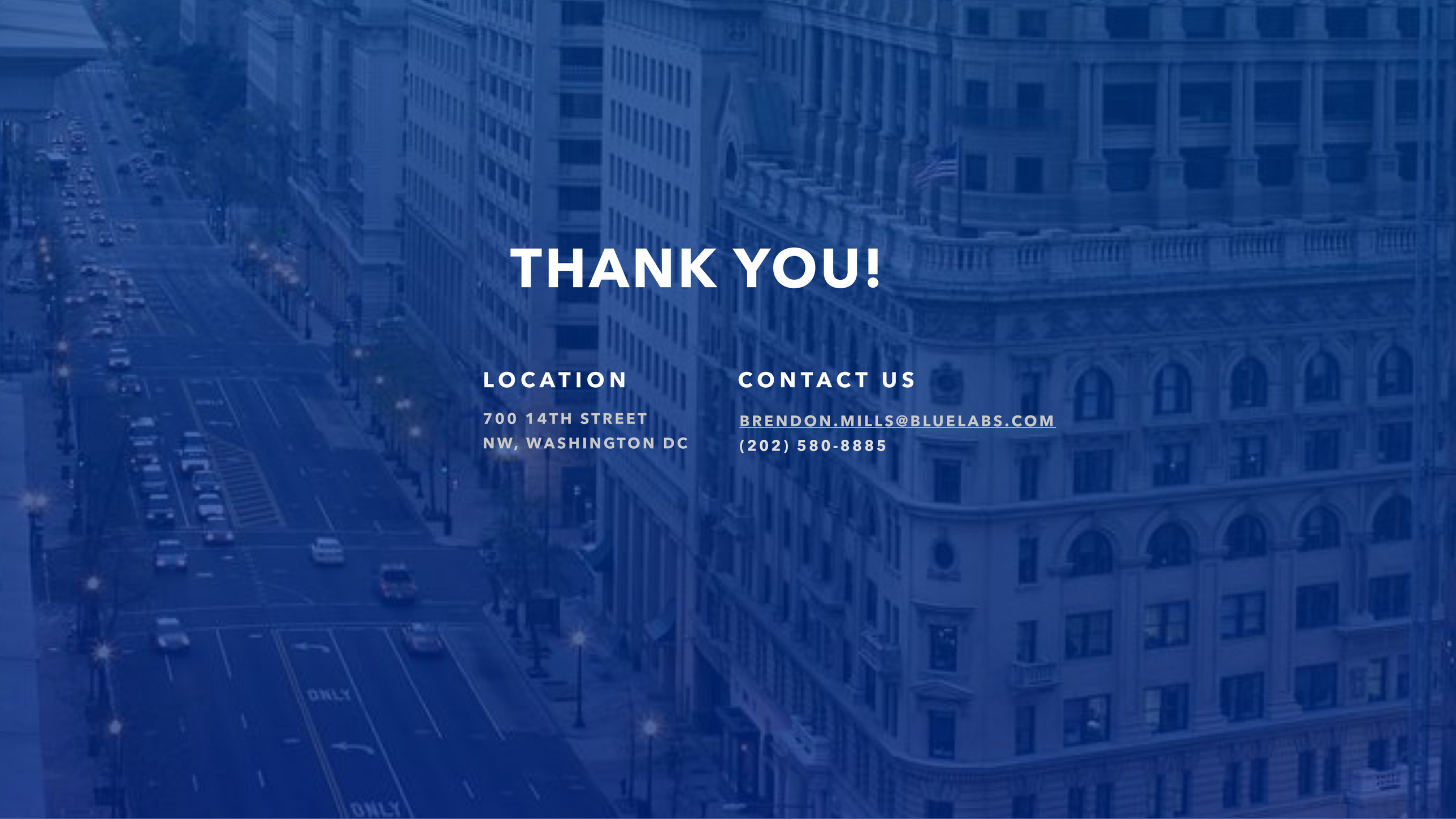
STATE	CONTESTED COEFFICIENT	P-VALUE	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL - 2.5%	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL - 97.5%
FL	-0.0028357	1.0572E-01	-0.0062715	0.0006001
GA	0.0061490	1.9900E-02	0.0009735	0.0113245
NV	0.0059870	1.3536E-01	-0.0018728	0.0138468
OH	-0.0004132	6.7626E-01	-0.0023529	0.0015265
PA	0.0067011	2.4505E-08	0.0043485	0.0090537
TX	0.0041361	2.8438E-02	0.0004366	0.0078355
WI	-0.0013742	4.4138E-01	-0.0048733	0.0021248

2018

STATE	CONTESTED COEFFICIENT	P-VALUE	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL - 2.5%	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL - 97.5%
GA	0.0145977	3.0695E-13	0.0106976	0.0184977
NV	0.0032696	6.4638E-01	-0.0107052	0.0172445
PA	0.0082786	1.2311E-07	0.0052133	0.0113439
TX	0.0051871	2.3505E-03	0.0018455	0.0085286
WI	0.0215097	3.3501E-04	0.0097595	0.0332598

2020

STATE	CONTESTED COEFFICIENT	P-VALUE	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL - 2.5%	CONFIDENCE INTERVAL - 97.5%
GA	0.0066244	3.8035E-06	0.0038209	0.0094278
PA	0.0015753	3.3166E-01	-0.0016055	0.0047560
TX	0.0231712	3.3126E-29	0.0191401	0.0272024
WI	0.01209	1.772E-02	0.0021	0.02209



THANK YOU!

LOCATION

700 14TH STREET
NW, WASHINGTON DC

CONTACT US

BRENDON.MILLS@BLUELABS.COM
(202) 580-8885