

**Controversial Narratives 2020**  
**Wave VI (N = 1118)**  
**Nov 18<sup>th</sup> – 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Belief in controversial narratives**

“To what extent do you believe the following statement is true?”

**Statements:**

- a) “Vote-counting machines overcounted the Biden votes.”
- b) “News media called the election for Biden too soon and had to take it back.”
- c) “Joe Biden is mentally unfit to be the U.S. President.”
- d) “Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud.”
- e) “The number of people who voted is higher than the number of eligible voters.”

| Narratives  | Candidate preference | Definitely false | Likely false | Likely true | Definitely true |
|---|----------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Machines overcounted the Biden votes                        | Trump/Pence          | 20 (5.4%)        | 74 (19.9%)   | 132 (35.5%) | 146 (39.2%)     |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 341 (58.0%)      | 108 (18.4%)  | 85 (14.5%)  | 54 (9.2%)       |
|   | Other*               | 39 (25.8%)       | 48 (31.8%)   | 41 (27.2%)  | 23 (15.2%)      |
|   | Total                | 404 (36.1%)      | 230 (20.6%)  | 260 (23.3%) | 224 (20.0%)     |
| News media called early and retracked the election results  | Trump/Pence          | 30 (8.1%)        | 72 (19.4%)   | 134 (36.0%) | 136 (36.6%)     |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 293 (49.8%)      | 135 (23.0%)  | 87 (14.8%)  | 73 (12.4%)      |
|   | Other*               | 46 (30.5%)       | 35 (23.2%)   | 46 (30.5%)  | 24 (15.9%)      |
|   | Total                | 374 (33.5%)      | 242 (21.6%)  | 269 (24.1%) | 233 (20.8%)     |
| Joe Biden is cognitively compromised                        | Trump/Pence          | 13 (3.5%)        | 53 (14.2%)   | 117 (31.5%) | 189 (50.8%)     |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 375 (63.8%)      | 83 (14.1%)   | 60 (10.2%)  | 70 (11.9%)      |
|   | Other*               | 42 (27.8%)       | 30 (19.9%)   | 46 (30.5%)  | 33 (21.9%)      |
|   | Total                | 433 (38.7%)      | 167 (14.9%)  | 224 (20.0%) | 294 (26.3%)     |
| Mail-in ballots cause fraud                                 | Trump/Pence          | 13 (3.5%)        | 47 (12.6%)   | 142 (38.2%) | 170 (45.7%)     |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 328 (55.8%)      | 112 (19.0%)  | 98 (16.7%)  | 50 (8.5%)       |
|   | Other*               | 33 (21.9%)       | 40 (26.5%)   | 50 (33.1%)  | 28 (18.5%)      |
|   | Total                | 378 (33.8%)      | 199 (17.8%)  | 292 (26.1%) | 249 (22.3%)     |
| The number of people who voted is more than eligible voters | Trump/Pence          | 29 (7.8%)        | 64 (17.2%)   | 142 (38.2%) | 137 (36.8%)     |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 275 (46.8%)      | 113 (19.2%)  | 91 (15.5%)  | 109 (18.5%)     |
|   | Other*               | 31 (20.5%)       | 40 (26.5%)   | 54 (35.8%)  | 26 (17.2%)      |
|   | Total                | 338 (30.2%)      | 219 (19.6%)  | 289 (25.8%) | 272 (24.3%)     |

\*Note: Other includes participants did not vote or voted for third-party candidates.

**Awareness of controversial narratives through the internet or social media**

STIMULUS EXAMPLE: “Have you encountered this, or similar stories about this issue, on social media or the internet?”

Joe Biden's Claims of Cognitive Tests Unclear as Campaign Hides Results [/politics/2020/...](#)



Joe Biden's Claims of Cognitive Tests Unclear as Campaign Hides Re...  
Joe Biden said that he has taken a cognitive test, but his campaign will not specify what exactly that means.

| Narratives  | Candidate preference | Definitely Not | Probably not | Probably yes | Definitely yes |
|---|----------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Machines overcounted the Biden votes                        | Trump/Pence          | 42 (11.3%)     | 70 (18.8%)   | 119 (32.0%)  | 141 (37.9%)    |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 247 (42.0%)    | 117 (19.9%)  | 124 (21.1%)  | 100 (17.0%)    |
|   | Other                | 41 (27.2%)     | 37 (24.5%)   | 38 (25.2%)   | 35 (23.2%)     |
|   | Total                | 335 (30.0%)    | 225 (20.1%)  | 281 (25.1%)  | 277 (24.8%)    |
| News media called early and retracted the election results  | Trump/Pence          | 61 (16.4%)     | 89 (23.9%)   | 132 (35.5%)  | 90 (24.2%)     |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 191 (32.5%)    | 127 (21.6%)  | 153 (26.0%)  | 117 (19.9%)    |
|   | Other*               | 38 (25.2%)     | 49 (32.5%)   | 47 (31.1%)   | 17 (11.3%)     |
|   | Total                | 294 (26.3%)    | 266 (23.8%)  | 333 (29.8%)  | 225 (20.1%)    |
| Joe Biden is cognitively compromised                        | Trump/Pence          | 65 (17.5%)     | 83 (22.3%)   | 125 (33.6%)  | 99 (26.6%)     |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 215 (36.6%)    | 151 (25.7%)  | 117 (19.9%)  | 105 (17.9%)    |
|   | Other*               | 43 (28.5%)     | 53 (35.1%)   | 39 (25.8%)   | 16 (10.6%)     |
|   | Total                | 326 (29.2%)    | 289 (25.8%)  | 282 (25.2%)  | 221 (19.8%)    |
| Mail-in ballots cause fraud                                 | Trump/Pence          | 37 (9.9%)      | 54 (14.5%)   | 132 (35.5%)  | 149 (40.1%)    |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 157 (26.7%)    | 129 (21.9%)  | 167 (28.4%)  | 135 (23.0%)    |
|   | Other*               | 32 (21.2%)     | 35 (23.2%)   | 58 (38.4%)   | 26 (17.2%)     |
|   | Total                | 229 (20.5%)    | 221 (19.8%)  | 358 (32.0%)  | 310 (27.7%)    |
| The number of people who voted is more than eligible voters | Trump/Pence          | 46 (12.4%)     | 74 (19.9%)   | 140 (37.6%)  | 112 (30.1%)    |
|   | Biden/Harris         | 202 (34.4%)    | 141 (24.0%)  | 127 (21.6%)  | 118 (20.1%)    |
|   | Other*               | 32 (21.2%)     | 52 (34.4%)   | 44 (29.1%)   | 23 (15.2%)     |
|   | Total                | 284 (25.4%)    | 268 (24.0%)  | 313 (28.0%)  | 253 (22.6%)    |

**Belief in controversial narratives between people who believed democracy is preferable (n =724) vs. people believe otherwise\* (n = 380)**

| Narratives  | Preference              | Definitely false | Likely false | Likely true | Definitely true |
|---|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| Machines overcounted the Biden votes                        | Democracy is preferable | 316 (43.6%)      | 142 (19.6%)  | 122 (16.9%) | 144 (19.9%)     |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 85 (22.4%)       | 88 (23.2%)   | 130 (34.2%) | 77 (20.3%)      |
| News media called early and retracked the election results  | Democracy is preferable | 298 (41.2%)      | 145 (20.0%)  | 134 (18.5%) | 147 (20.3%)     |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 72 (18.9%)       | 96 (25.3%)   | 129 (33.9%) | 83 (21.8%)      |
| Mail-in ballots cause fraud                                 | Democracy is preferable | 335 (46.3%)      | 94 (13.0%)   | 113 (15.6%) | 182 (25.1%)     |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 95 (25.0%)       | 72 (18.9%)   | 107 (28.2%) | 106 (27.9%)     |
| Joe Biden is cognitively compromised                        | Democracy is preferable | 300 (41.4%)      | 115 (15.9%)  | 148 (20.4%) | 161 (22.2%)     |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 75 (19.7%)       | 83 (21.8%)   | 137 (36.1%) | 85 (22.4%)      |
| The number of people who voted is more than eligible voters | Democracy is preferable | 286 (39.5%)      | 135 (18.6%)  | 135 (18.6%) | 168 (23.2%)     |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 50 (13.2%)       | 82 (21.6%)   | 148 (38.9%) | 100 (26.3%)     |

\* Note: Participants were asked which of the following statement they agree the most:  
 1) "Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government,"  
 2)"In certain situations an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one", 3)  
 "It doesn't matter to people like me whether we have a democratic government or a non-democratic government."

**Awareness of controversial narratives between people who believed democracy is preferable (n =724) vs. people believe otherwise (n = 380)**

| Narratives  | Preference              | Definitely not | Probably not | Probably yes | Definitely yes |
|---|-------------------------|----------------|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| Machines overcounted the Biden votes                        | Democracy is preferable | 244 (33.7%)    | 132 (18.2%)  | 168 (23.2%)  | 180 (24.9%)    |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 86 (22.6%)     | 91 (23.9%)   | 110 (28.9%)  | 93 (24.5%)     |
| News media called early and retracked the election results  | Democracy is preferable | 231 (31.9%)    | 164 (22.7%)  | 182 (25.1%)  | 147 (20.3%)    |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 58 (15.3%)     | 100 (26.3%)  | 148 (38.9%)  | 74 (19.5%)     |
| Mail-in ballots cause fraud                                 | Democracy is preferable | 250 (34.5%)    | 176 (24.3%)  | 159 (22.0%)  | 139 (19.2%)    |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 73 (19.2%)     | 110 (28.9%)  | 117 (30.8%)  | 80 (21.1%)     |
| Joe Biden is cognitively compromised                        | Democracy is preferable | 164 (22.7%)    | 122 (16.9%)  | 206 (28.5%)  | 232 (32.0%)    |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 63 (16.6%)     | 95 (25.0%)   | 149 (39.2%)  | 73 (19.2%)     |
| The number of people who voted is more than eligible voters | Democracy is preferable | 231 (31.9%)    | 159 (22.0%)  | 184 (25.4%)  | 150 (20.7%)    |
|   | vs. Otherwise           | 49 (12.9%)     | 106 (27.9%)  | 123 (32.4%)  | 102 (26.8%)    |

## Demographics

“What is your year of birth?”

| Age<br>(Aggregated by decade) | Counts      |
|-------------------------------|-------------|
| 18-29                         | 234 (20.9%) |
| 30-39                         | 246 (22.0%) |
| 40-49                         | 185 (16.5%) |
| 50-59                         | 121 (10.8%) |
| 60-69                         | 206 (18.4%) |
| 70+                           | 126 (11.3%) |
| Total                         | 1118        |

“What is your gender?”

| Gender                     | Counts      |
|----------------------------|-------------|
| Male                       | 542 (48.5%) |
| Female                     | 573 (51.3%) |
| Prefer not to answer/Other | 3 (0.3%)    |
| Total                      | 1118        |

“Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a Republican, a Democrat, an Independent, or what?”

| Party Identification 1   | Counts      |
|--------------------------|-------------|
| Democrat                 | 470 (42.0%) |
| Republican               | 330 (29.5%) |
| Independent              | 240 (21.5%) |
| No preference/Don't know | 56 (5.0%)   |
| Other                    | 14 (1.3%)   |
| Total                    | 1110        |

“Do you think of yourself as closer to the Republican or Democratic Party?”  
(Ask only Independent/No preference/Other participants in Party Identification 1)

| Party Identification 2 | Counts      |
|------------------------|-------------|
| Democratic Party       | 86 (7.7%)   |
| Republican Party       | 59 (5.3%)   |
| Neither                | 141 (12.6%) |
| Don't know             | 24 (2.1%)   |
| Total                  | 310         |

“What is your racial or ethnic background? (Check all that apply)”

| Race/ethnicity                   | Counts      |
|----------------------------------|-------------|
| White                            | 688 (61.5%) |
| Black or African American        | 149 (13.3%) |
| Multi-racial                     | 108 (9.7%)  |
| Hispanic or Latino/a             | 95 (8.5%)   |
| Asian                            | 61 (5.5%)   |
| American Indian or Alaska Native | 10 (0.9%)   |
| Other                            | 7 (0.6%)    |
| Total                            | 1118        |



“What is the highest level of education you have completed?”

| Education Level  | Counts      |
|--|-------------|
| Less than high school degree   | 38 (3.4%)   |
| High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED) | 328 (29.3%) |
| Some college but no degree   | 294 (26.3%) |
| Associate degree in college (2-year)                                   | 81 (7.2%)   |
| Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)                                  | 221 (19.8%) |
| Master's degree  | 117 (10.5%) |
| Professional degree  | 22 (2.0%)   |
| Doctoral degree  | 17 (1.5%)   |
| Total  | 1118        |

## Methodology

This is the sixth of a six-part series of reports tracking the diffusion of misinformation in the 2020 U.S. presidential election campaign period. Data in this wave were collected from an online panel of American adults, recruited by Qualtrics. Data were collected from 18 to 27 November 2020. The sample size was 1118 (margin of error  $\approx$  3%). Fifty one percent of participants were female. The average age was 46.03 (SD = 17.5), with a range of 18 to 98. The sample was 61.5% white, 13.3% Black, and 8.4% Latina/Latino.