

**Controversial Narratives 2020**  
**Wave III (N = 587)**  
**Oct 2<sup>nd</sup> - 13<sup>th</sup>, 2020**

**Belief in controversial narratives**

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

**Statements:**

- a) "The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation sponsored a vaccine that causes polio in Africa."
- b) "QAnon is correct that pedophiles and cannibals currently serve in US government positions."
- c) "Face masks increase the risk of spreading and contracting COVID-19. "
- d) "Joe Biden is mentally unfit to be the U.S. President."
- e) "Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud."

Narratives	Candidate preference	Definitely false	Likely false	Likely true	Definitely true
Gates Foundation funded vaccine causes polio	Trump/Pence	43 (21.9%)	65 (33.2%)	50 (25.5%)	38 (19.4%)
	Biden/Harris	103 (35.0%)	96 (32.7%)	68 (23.1%)	27 (9.2%)
	Other*	26 (27.1%)	38 (39.6%)	24 (25.0%)	8 (8.3%)
	Total	172 (29.5%)	199 (33.9%)	142 (24.2%)	73 (12.4%)
QAnon fights pedophiles in US government	Trump/Pence	42 (21.4%)	42 (21.4%)	65 (33.2%)	47 (24.0%)
	Biden/Harris	104 (35.4%)	80 (27.2%)	78 (26.5%)	32 (10.9%)
	Other*	26 (27.1%)	36 (37.5%)	23 (24.0%)	11 (11.5%)
	Total	172 (29.5%)	158 (26.9%)	166 (28.3%)	90 (15.3%)
Masks spreads COVID-19	Trump/Pence	95 (48.5%)	48 (24.5%)	24 (12.2%)	29 (14.8%)
	Biden/Harris	207 (70.4%)	26 (8.8%)	39 (13.3%)	22 (7.5%)
	Other*	55 (57.3%)	21 (21.9%)	15 (15.6%)	5 (5.2%)
	Total	357 (61.0%)	95 (16.2%)	78 (13.3%)	56 (9.5%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Trump/Pence	17 (8.7%)	34 (17.3%)	72 (36.7%)	73 (37.2%)
	Biden/Harris	183 (62.2%)	59 (20.1%)	37 (12.6%)	15 (5.1%)
	Other*	22 (22.9%)	30 (31.2%)	27 (28.1%)	17 (17.7%)
	Total	222 (37.8%)	123 (21.0%)	136 (23.2%)	106 (18.1%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Trump/Pence	15 (7.7%)	35 (17.9%)	83 (42.3%)	63 (32.1%)
	Biden/Harris	126 (42.9%)	61 (20.7%)	78 (26.5%)	29 (9.9%)
	Other*	20 (20.8%)	31 (32.3%)	32 (33.3%)	13 (13.5%)
	Total	161 (27.4%)	137 (25.2%)	151 (27.8%)	104 (19.1%)

\*Note: Other includes participants who have not decided, decided not to vote, and preferred 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
Gates Foundation funded vaccine causes polio	Trump/Pence	38 (19.4%)	61 (31.1%)	56 (28.6%)	41 (20.9%)
	Biden/Harris	136 (46.3%)	75 (25.5%)	58 (19.7%)	25 (8.5%)
	Other*	38 (39.6%)	33 (34.4%)	20 (20.8%)	5 (5.2%)
	Total	212 (36.3%)	169 (28.8%)	134 (22.8%)	71 (12.1%)
QAnon fights pedophiles in US government	Trump/Pence	44 (22.4%)	51 (26.0%)	61 (31.1%)	40 (20.4%)
	Biden/Harris	112 (38.1%)	84 (28.6%)	72 (24.5%)	26 (8.8%)
	Other*	42 (43.8%)	29 (30.2%)	20 (20.8%)	5 (5.2%)
	Total	198 (33.9%)	164 (27.9%)	153 (26.1%)	71 (12.1%)
Masks spreads COVID-19	Trump/Pence	56 (28.6%)	56 (28.6%)	44 (22.4%)	40 (20.4%)
	Biden/Harris	133 (45.2%)	64 (21.8%)	66 (22.4%)	31 (10.5%)
	fOther*	46 (47.9%)	27 (28.1%)	19 (19.8%)	4 (4.2%)
	Total	235 (40.2%)	147 (25.0%)	129 (22.0%)	75 (12.8%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Trump/Pence	26 (13.3%)	35 (17.9%)	77 (39.3%)	58 (29.6%)
	Biden/Harris	112 (38.1%)	70 (23.8%)	76 (25.9%)	36 (12.2%)
	Other*	33 (34.4%)	24 (25.0%)	31 (32.3%)	8 (8.3%)
	Total	171 (29.3%)	129 (22.0%)	184 (31.3%)	102 (17.4%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Trump/Pence	20 (10.2%)	32 (16.3%)	70 (35.7%)	74 (37.8%)
	Biden/Harris	67 (22.8%)	64 (21.8%)	95 (32.3%)	68 (23.1%)
	Other*	24 (25.0%)	26 (27.1%)	34 (35.4%)	12 (12.5%)
	Total	111 (19.1%)	122 (20.8%)	199 (33.9%)	154 (26.2%)

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

“I believe that loyalty to one’s ideals and principles is more important than “open-mindedness.”

Agreement level	Counts
Strongly agree (7)	92 (15.7%)
Agree (6)	113 (19.3%)
Somewhat agree (5)	106 (18.1%)
Neither agree nor disagree (4)	132 (22.5%)
Somewhat disagree (3)	69 (11.8%)
Disagree (2)	48 (8.2%)
Strongly disagree (1)	27 (4.6%)
Total	587

**Belief in controversial narratives between principled vs. open-minded thinkers\***

Narratives	Active thinking style*	Definitely false	Likely false	Likely true	Definitely true
Gates Foundation funded vaccine causes polio	Principled	57 (18.3%)	105 (33.8%)	91 (29.3%)	58 (18.6%)
	Open-minded	116 (42.0%)	94 (34.1%)	51 (18.5%)	15 (5.4%)
QAnon fights pedophiles in US government	Principled	62 (19.9%)	75 (24.1%)	104 (33.4%)	70 (22.5%)
	Open-minded	111 (40.2%)	83 (30.1%)	62 (22.5%)	20 (7.2%)
Masks spreads COVID-19	Principled	161 (51.8%)	56 (18.0%)	51 (16.4%)	43 (13.8%)
	Open-minded	197 (71.4%)	39 (14.1%)	27 (9.8%)	13 (4.7%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Principled	94 (30.2%)	70 (22.5%)	78 (25.1%)	69 (22.2%)
	Open-minded	128 (46.4%)	53 (19.2%)	58 (21.0%)	37 (13.4%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Principled	54 (17.4%)	61 (19.6%)	123 (39.5%)	73 (23.5%)
	Open-minded	107 (38.8%)	67 (24.3%)	70 (25.4%)	32 (11.6%)

\*Note: The average score for “I believe that loyalty to one’s ideals and principles is more important than “open-mindedness” was 3.38 (SD = 1.68). Based on the score, participants are divided into two groups: 311 principled thinkers (lower than average) and 278 open-minded thinkers (higher than the average).

## Demographics

“What is your year of birth?”

Age (Aggregated by decade)	Counts
18-29	142 (24.2%)
30-39	109 (18.6%)
40-49	82 (14.0%)
50-59	65 (11.1%)
60-69	89 (15.2%)
70+	98 (17.0%)
Total	587

“What is your gender?”

Gender	Counts
Male	316 (53.8%)
Female	271 (46.2%)
Total	587

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

Party Identification 1	Counts
Democrat	252 (42.9%)
Republican	167 (28.4%)
Independent	135 (23.0%)
No preference	17 (2.9%)
Other	10 (1.7%)
Total	586

“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	84 (14.3%)
Republican Party	37 (6.3%)
Neither	30 (5.1%)
Don't know	16 (2.7%)
Total	167

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

Race/ethnicity	Counts
White	335 (57.1%)
Black or African American	84 (14.3%)
Hispanic or Latino/a	73 (12.4%)
Multi-racial	50 (8.5%)
Asian	29 (4.9%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	9 (1.5%)
Other	6 (1.0%)
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	1 (0.2%)
Total	587



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

Education Level	Counts
Less than high school degree	12 (2.0%)
High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	173 (29.5%)
Some college but no degree	155 (26.4%)
Associate degree in college (2-year)	27 (4.6%)
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	117 (19.9%)
Master's degree	76 (12.9%)
Professional degree	16 (2.7%)
Doctoral degree	11 (1.9%)
Total	587

## Methodology

This is the third 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 2-13 October 2020. The sample size was 587 (margin of error  $\approx 4\%$ ). Forty five percent of participants were female. The average age was 46.5 (SD = 19), with a range of 18 to 96. The sample was 57.1% white, 14.3% Black, and 12.4% Latina/Latino.