

Controversial Narratives 2020
Wave II (N = 544)
Sep 9th - 26th, 2020

Belief in controversial narratives

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

Statements:

- a) "The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) manipulated the death toll of COVID-19 to exaggerate its impact on Americans."
- b) "President Trump went to the hospital last year because he suffered a stroke."
- c) "Joe Biden is mentally unfit to be the U.S. President."
- d) "Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud."

Narratives	Partisanship	Definitely false	Likely false	Likely true	Definitely true
CDC manipulated COVID-19 death toll	Democrat	101 (39.1%) ¹	68 (26.4%)	57 (22.1%)	32 (12.4%)
	Independent	39 (36.1%)	28 (25.9%)	25 (23.1%)	16 (14.8%)
	Republican	41 (23.0%)	40 (22.5%)	53 (29.8%)	44 (24.7%)
	Total	181 (33.3%)	136 (25.0%)	135 (24.8%)	92 (16.9%)
Trump suffered a stroke	Democrat	53 (20.5%)	83 (32.2%)	86 (33.3%)	36 (14.0%)
	Independent	33 (30.6%)	49 (45.4%)	21 (19.4%)	5 (4.6%)
	Republican	95 (53.4%)	57 (32.0%)	19 (10.7%)	7 (3.9%)
	Total	181 (33.3%)	189 (34.7%)	126 (23.2%)	48 (8.8%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Democrat	143 (55.4%)	47 (18.2%)	42 (16.3%)	26 (10.1%)
	Independent	29 (26.9%)	26 (24.1%)	25 (23.1%)	28 (25.9%)
	Republican	19 (10.7%)	20 (11.2%)	43 (24.2%)	96 (53.9%)
	Total	191 (35.1%)	93 (17.1%)	110 (20.2%)	150 (27.6%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Democrat	106 (41.1%)	72 (27.9%)	49 (19.0%)	31 (12.0%)
	Independent	24 (22.2%)	31 (28.7%)	37 (34.3%)	16 (14.8%)
	Republican	22 (12.4%)	34 (19.1%)	65 (36.5%)	57 (32.0%)
	Total	152 (27.9%)	137 (25.2%)	151 (27.8%)	104 (19.1%)

¹ %s in this report are row percentages

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	Partisanship	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
CDC manipulated COVID-19 death toll	Democrat	88 (34.1%)	66 (25.6%)	67 (26.0%)	37 (14.3%)
	Independent	43 (39.8%)	34 (31.5%)	23 (21.3%)	8 (7.4%)
	Republican	54 (30.3%)	43 (24.2%)	52 (29.2%)	29 (16.3%)
	Total	185 (34.0%)	143 (26.3%)	142 (26.1%)	74 (13.6%)
Trump suffered a stroke	Democrat	73 (28.3%)	55 (21.3%)	71 (27.5%)	59 (22.9%)
	Independent	37 (34.3%)	34 (31.5%)	25 (23.1%)	12 (11.1%)
	Republican	85 (47.8%)	46 (25.8%)	21 (11.8%)	26 (14.6%)
	Total	195 (35.8%)	135 (24.8%)	117 (21.5%)	97 (17.8%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Democrat	86 (33.3%)	73 (28.3%)	59 (22.9%)	40 (15.5%)
	Independent	38 (35.2%)	30 (27.8%)	31 (28.7%)	9 (8.3%)
	Republican	50 (28.1%)	31 (17.4%)	49 (27.5%)	48 (27.0%)
	Total	174 (32.0%)	134 (24.6%)	139 (25.6%)	97 (17.8%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Democrat	72 (27.9%)	49 (19.0%)	72 (27.9%)	65 (25.2%)
	Independent	30 (27.8%)	24 (22.2%)	37 (34.3%)	17 (15.7%)
	Republican	29 (16.3%)	29 (16.3%)	64 (36.0%)	56 (31.5%)
	Total	131 (24.1%)	102 (18.8%)	173 (31.8%)	138 (25.4%)

Belief in controversial narratives, social media users vs. non-users

Narratives	Social Media Users or not	Definitely false	Likely false	Likely true	Definitely true
CDC manipulated COVID-19 death toll	Users	133 (30.6%)	108 (24.8%)	116 (26.7%)	78 (17.9%)
	Non-users	48 (44.0%)	28 (25.7%)	19 (17.4%)	14 (12.8%)
Trump suffered a stroke	Users	140 (32.2%)	154 (35.4%)	103 (23.7%)	38 (8.7%)
	Non-users	41 (37.6%)	35 (32.1%)	23 (21.1%)	10 (9.2%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Users	143 (32.9%)	84 (19.3%)	89 (20.5%)	119 (27.4%)
	Non-users	48 (44.0%)	9 (8.3%)	21 (19.3%)	31 (28.4%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Users	114 (26.2%)	113 (26.0%)	120 (27.6%)	88 (20.2%)
	Non-users	38 (34.9%)	24 (22.0%)	31 (28.4%)	16 (14.7%)

Awareness of controversial narratives, social media users vs. non-users

Narratives	Social Media Users or not	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
CDC manipulated COVID-19 death toll	Users	137 (31.5%)	117 (26.9%)	117 (26.9%)	64 (14.7%)
	Non-users	48 (44.0%)	26 (23.9%)	25 (22.9%)	10 (9.2%)
Trump suffered a stroke	Users	152 (34.9%)	113 (26.0%)	93 (21.4%)	77 (17.7%)
	Non-users	43 (39.4%)	22 (20.2%)	24 (22.0%)	20 (18.3%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Users	131 (30.1%)	110 (25.3%)	112 (25.7%)	82 (18.9%)
	Non-users	43 (39.4%)	24 (22.0%)	27 (24.8%)	15 (13.8%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Users	99 (22.8%)	85 (19.5%)	146 (33.6%)	105 (24.1%)
	Non-users	32 (29.4%)	17 (15.6%)	27 (24.8%)	33 (30.3%)

Demographics

“What is your year of birth?”

Age (Aggregated by decade)	Counts
18-29	93 (17.1%)
30-39	96 (17.6%)
40-49	102 (18.8%)
50-59	78 (14.3%)
60-69	114 (21.0%)
70+	59 (11.3%)
Total	542

“What is your gender?”

Gender	Counts
Male	300 (55.1%)
Female	243 (44.7%)
Other	1 (.2%)
Total	544

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

Party Identification 1	Counts
Democrat	220 (40.4%)
Republican	143 (26.5%)
Independent	144 (26.3%)
No preference	18 (3.3%)
Other	16 (2.9%)
Total	541

“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	38 (7.0%)
Republican Party	35 (6.4%)
Neither	97 (17.8%)
Don't know	8 (1.5%)
Total	178 (32.7%)

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

Race/ethnicity	Counts
White	309 (56.8%)
Black or African American	75 (13.8%)
Multi-racial	61 (11.2%)
Hispanic or Latino/a	50 (9.2%)
Asian	33 (6.1%)
Other	10 (1.8%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	6 (1.1%)
Total	544

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

Education Level	Counts
Less than high school degree	17 (3.1%)
High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	199 (36.6%)
Some college but no degree	97 (17.8%)
Associate degree in college (2-year)	64 (11.8%)
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	102 (18.8%)
Master's degree	45 (8.3%)
Professional degree	10 (1.8%)
Doctoral degree	10 (1.8%)
Total	544

Methodology

This is the second of a six-part series of reports tracking the diffusion of misinformation in the 2020 U.S. presidential election. Data in this wave were collected from an online panel of American adults, collected by Qualtrics. Data were collected from 9th to 26th September 2020. The sample size was 544 (margin of error \approx 4%). The sample was 45% female. The average age was 48.2 (SD = 17), with a range of 18 to 88. The sample was 56.8% white, 14% African American, and 9% Latino.