

Controversial Narratives 2020
Wave IV (N = 606)
Oct 15th - 24th, 2020

Belief in controversial narratives

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

Statements:

- a) “President Trump faked COVID-19 to win support before the election”
- b) “Joe Biden is mentally unfit to be the U.S. President”
- c) “Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud”
- d) “If re-elected, Trump plans to terminate Social Security and Medicare”
- e) “The FBI spied on Trump and his 2016 campaign”

Narratives	Candidate preference	Definitely false	Likely false	Likely true	Definitely true
Trump faked COVID-19	Trump/Pence	137 (68.2%)	30 (14.9%)	16 (8.0%)	18 (9.0%)
	Biden/Harris	63 (20.0%)	71 (22.5%)	117 (37.1%)	64 (20.3%)
	Other*	24 (26.7%)	23 (25.6%)	32 (35.6%)	11 (12.2%)
	Total	224 (37.0%)	124 (20.5%)	165 (27.2%)	93 (15.3%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Trump/Pence	9 (4.5%)	24 (11.9%)	62 (30.8%)	106 (52.7%)
	Biden/Harris	211 (67.0%)	50 (15.9%)	35 (11.1%)	19 (6.0%)
	Other*	12 (13.3%)	32 (35.6%)	30 (33.3%)	16 (17.8%)
	Total	232 (38.3%)	106 (17.5%)	127 (21.0%)	141 (23.3%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Trump/Pence	17 (8.5%)	32 (15.9%)	78 (38.8%)	74 (36.8%)
	Biden/Harris	147 (46.7%)	64 (20.3%)	70 (22.2%)	34 (10.8%)
	Other*	13 (14.4%)	33 (36.7%)	31 (34.4%)	13 (14.4%)
	Total	177 (29.2%)	129 (21.3%)	179 (29.5%)	121 (20.0%)
Trump will terminate Social Security and Medicare	Trump/Pence	122 (60.7%)	39 (19.4%)	19 (9.5%)	21 (10.4%)
	Biden/Harris	21 (6.7%)	71 (22.5%)	130 (41.3%)	93 (29.5%)
	Other*	17 (18.9%)	34 (37.8%)	30 (33.3%)	9 (10.0%)
	Total	160 (26.4%)	144 (23.8%)	179 (29.5%)	123 (20.3%)
The FBI spied on Trump campaign	Trump/Pence	12 (6.0%)	25 (12.4%)	73 (36.3%)	91 (45.3%)
	Biden/Harris	84 (26.7%)	102 (32.4%)	97 (30.8%)	32 (10.2%)
	Other*	15 (16.7%)	37 (41.1%)	28 (31.1%)	10 (11.1%)
	Total	111 (18.3%)	164 (27.1%)	198 (32.7%)	133 (21.9%)

*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
Trump faked COVID-19	Trump/Pence	110 (54.7%)	40 (19.9%)	25 (12.4%)	26 (12.9%)
	Biden/Harris	85 (27.0%)	59 (18.7%)	86 (27.3%)	85 (27.0%)
	Other*	25 (27.8%)	27 (30.0%)	27 (30.0%)	11 (12.2%)
	Total	220 (36.3%)	126 (20.8%)	138 (22.8%)	122 (20.1%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Trump/Pence	35 (17.4%)	40 (19.9%)	70 (34.8%)	56 (27.9%)
	Biden/Harris	129 (41.0%)	78 (24.8%)	67 (21.3%)	41 (13.0%)
	Other*	27 (30.0%)	36 (40.0%)	22 (24.4%)	5 (5.6%)
	Total	191 (31.5%)	154 (25.4%)	159 (26.2%)	102 (16.8%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Trump/Pence	24 (11.9%)	27 (13.4%)	77 (38.3%)	73 (36.3%)
	Biden/Harris	58 (18.4%)	45 (14.3%)	125 (39.7%)	87 (27.6%)
	Other*	26 (28.9%)	23 (25.6%)	27 (30.0%)	14 (15.6%)
	Total	108 (17.8%)	95 (15.7%)	229 (37.8%)	174 (28.7%)
Trump will terminate Social Security and Medicare	Trump/Pence	100 (49.8%)	41 (20.4%)	27 (13.4%)	33 (16.4%)
	Biden/Harris	70 (22.2%)	54 (17.1%)	107 (34.0%)	84 (26.7%)
	Other*	25 (27.8%)	25 (27.8%)	32 (35.6%)	8 (8.9%)
	Total	195 (32.2%)	120 (19.8%)	166 (27.4%)	125 (20.6%)
The FBI spied on Trump campaign	Trump/Pence	32 (15.9%)	46 (22.9%)	53 (26.4%)	70 (34.8%)
	Biden/Harris	101 (32.1%)	76 (24.1%)	88 (27.9%)	50 (15.9%)
	Other*	26 (28.9%)	30 (33.3%)	30 (33.3%)	4 (4.4%)
	Total	159 (26.2%)	152 (25.1%)	171 (28.2%)	124 (20.5%)

“Are you currently following any elected officials, candidates for office, or other political figures in social media?”

Following politicians on social media	Counts
Yes	196 (32.3%)
No	335 (55.3%)
Non-social media users	75 (12.4%)
Total	606

Belief in controversial narratives between followers vs. non-followers of politicians on social media

Narratives	Following Politicians on social media		Definitely false	Likely false	Likely true	Definitely true
	Yes	No				
Trump faked COVID-19	Yes		57 (29.1%)	32 (16.3%)	59 (30.1%)	48 (24.5%)
	No		125 (37.3%)	77 (23.0%)	94 (28.1%)	39 (11.6%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Yes		63 (32.1%)	30 (15.3%)	55 (28.1%)	48 (24.5%)
	No		139 (41.5%)	69 (20.6%)	57 (17.0%)	70 (20.9%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Yes		48 (24.5%)	36 (18.4%)	65 (33.2%)	47 (24.0%)
	No		99 (29.6%)	80 (23.9%)	99 (29.6%)	57 (17.0%)
Trump will terminate Social Security and Medicare	Yes		34 (17.3%)	43 (21.9%)	68 (34.7%)	51 (26.0%)
	No		94 (28.1%)	86 (25.7%)	95 (28.4%)	60 (17.9%)
The FBI spied on Trump campaign	Yes		26 (13.3%)	43 (21.9%)	76 (38.8%)	51 (26.0%)
	No		69 (20.6%)	103 (30.7%)	104 (31.0%)	59 (17.6%)

Awareness of controversial narratives between followers vs. non-followers of politicians on social media

Narratives	Following Politicians on social media	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
Trump faked COVID-19	Yes	40 (20.4%)	41 (20.9%)	54 (27.6%)	61 (31.1%)
	No	137 (40.9%)	69 (20.6%)	72 (21.5%)	57 (17.0%)
Biden is cognitively compromised	Yes	36 (18.4%)	42 (21.4%)	72 (36.7%)	46 (23.5%)
	No	121 (36.1%)	93 (27.8%)	74 (22.1%)	47 (14.0%)
Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud	Yes	13 (6.6%)	27 (13.8%)	80 (40.8%)	76 (38.8%)
	No	74 (22.1%)	61 (18.2%)	127 (37.9%)	73 (21.8%)
Trump will terminate Social Security and Medicare	Yes	36 (18.4%)	35 (17.9%)	59 (30.1%)	66 (33.7%)
	No	119 (35.5%)	71 (21.2%)	96 (28.7%)	49 (14.6%)
The FBI spied on Trump campaign	Yes	27 (13.8%)	37 (18.9%)	76 (38.8%)	56 (28.6%)
	No	99 (29.6%)	97 (29.0%)	85 (25.4%)	54 (16.1%)

Demographics

“What is your year of birth?”

Age (Aggregated by decade)	Counts
18-29	138 (22.8%)
30-39	141 (23.3%)
40-49	77 (12.7%)
50-59	62 (10.2%)
60-69	103 (17.0%)
70+	85 (14.0%)
Total	606

“What is your gender?”

Gender	Counts
Male	316 (52.1%)
Female	289 (47.7%)
Prefer not to answer	1 (0.2%)
Total	606

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

Party Identification 1	Counts
Democrat	256 (42.2%)
Republican	182 (30.0%)
Independent	130 (21.5%)
No preference/Don't know	35 (5.8%)
Other	3 (0.5%)
Total	606

“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	49 (8.1%)
Republican Party	27 (4.5%)
Neither	79 (13.0%)
Don't know	13 (2.1%)
Total	168

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

Race/ethnicity	Counts
White	350 (57.8%)
Black or African American	84 (13.9%)
Hispanic or Latino/a	67 (11.1%)
Multi-racial	55 (9.1%)
Asian	36 (5.9%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	9 (1.5%)
Other	5 (0.8%)
Total	606

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

Education Level	Counts
Less than high school degree	16 (2.6%)
High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	161 (26.6%)
Some college but no degree	170 (28.1%)
Associate degree in college (2-year)	49 (8.1%)
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	130 (21.5%)
Master's degree	61 (10.1%)
Professional degree	5 (0.8%)
Doctoral degree	14 (2.3%)
Total	606

Methodology

This is the fourth 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 15-24 October 2020. The sample size was 606 (margin of error $\approx 4\%$). Forty seven percent of participants were female. The average age was 46.1 (SD = 18.8), with a range of 18 to 98. The sample was 57.8% white, 13.9% Black, and 11.1% Latina/Latino.