Controversial Narratives 2020
Wave V (N = 564)
Oct 27th – Nov 2nd, 2020

Belief in controversial narratives

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

Statements:
a) ""Hunter Biden's laptop reveals connections to child pornography."
b) "The book/TV series 'The Handmaid's Tale' is based on the secretive religious group, People of Praise, to which the recently confirmed Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett belongs."
c) "Joe Biden is mentally unfit to be the U.S. President."
d) "Mail-in ballots cause voter fraud."
e) "The proposed Biden/Harris insurance reform will eliminate private health insurance plans for over 180 million people."

Narratives	Candidate preference	Definitely false	Likely false	Likely true	Definitely true
Hunter Biden laptop connects to child porn	Trump/Pence	16 (7.5%)	61 (28.6%)	85 (39.9%)	51 (23.9%)
	Biden/Harris	141 (49.0%)	96 (33.3%)	35 (12.2%)	16 (5.6%)
	Other*	6 (9.5%)	27 (42.9%)	27 (42.9%)	3 (4.8%)
	Total	163 (28.9%)	184 (32.6%)	147 (26.1%)	70 (12.4%)
Amy Coney Barrett inspired "The Handmaid's Tale"	Trump/Pence	51 (23.9%)	76 (35.7%)	66 (31.0%)	20 (9.4%)
	Biden/Harris	56 (19.4%)	116 (40.3%)	84 (29.2%)	32 (11.1%)
	Other*	7 (11.1%)	28 (44.4%)	23 (36.5%)	5 (7.9%)
	Total	114 (20.2%)	220 (39.0%)	173 (30.7%)	57 (10.1%)
Joe Biden is cognitively compromised	Trump/Pence	11 (5.2%)	18 (8.5%)	77 (36.2%)	107 (50.2%)
	Biden/Harris	193 (67.0%)	52 (18.1%)	21 (7.3%)	22 (7.6%)
	Other*	12 (19.0%)	19 (30.2%)	26 (41.3%)	6 (9.5%)
	Total	216 (38.3%)	89 (15.8%)	124 (22.0%)	135 (23.9%)
Mail-in ballots cause fraud	Trump/Pence	10 (4.7%)	39 (18.3%)	104 (48.8%)	60 (28.2%)
	Biden/Harris	118 (41.0%)	83 (28.8%)	54 (18.8%)	33 (11.5%)
	Other*	7 (11.1%)	19 (30.2%)	31 (49.2%)	6 (9.5%)
	Total	135 (23.9%)	141 (25.0%)	189 (33.5%)	99 (17.6%)
Biden/Harris will eliminate private insurance	Trump/Pence	11 (5.2%)	34 (16.0%)	105 (49.3%)	63 (29.6%)
	Biden/Harris	103 (35.8%)	95 (33.0%)	60 (20.8%)	30 (10.4%)
	Other*	4 (6.3%)	19 (30.2%)	36 (57.1%)	4 (6.3%)
	Total	118 (20.9%)	148 (26.2%)	201 (35.6%)	97 (17.2%)

*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
Hunter Biden laptop connects to child porn	Trump/Pence	43 (20.2%)	55 (25.8%)	72 (33.8%)	43 (20.2%)
	Biden/Harris	125 (43.4%)	85 (29.5%)	47 (16.3%)	31 (10.8%)
	Other*	22 (34.9%)	18 (28.6%)	21 (33.3%)	2 (3.2%)
	Total	190 (33.7%)	158 (28.0%)	140 (24.8%)	76 (13.5%)
Amy Coney Barrett inspired "The Handmaid's Tale"	Trump/Pence	69 (32.4%)	67 (31.5%)	47 (22.1%)	30 (14.1%)
	Biden/Harris	83 (28.8%)	87 (30.2%)	84 (29.2%)	34 (11.8%)
	Other*	20 (31.7%)	19 (30.2%)	20 (31.7%)	4 (6.3%)
	Total	172 (30.5%)	173 (30.7%)	151 (26.8%)	68 (12.1%)
Joe Biden is cognitively compromised	Trump/Pence	21 (9.9%)	49 (23.0%)	87 (40.8%)	56 (26.3%)
	Biden/Harris	116 (40.3%)	66 (22.9%)	60 (20.8%)	46 (16.0%)
	Other*	15 (23.8%)	17 (27.0%)	27 (42.9%)	4 (6.3%)
	Total	152 (27.0%)	132 (23.4%)	174 (30.9%)	106 (18.8%)
Mail-in ballots cause fraud	Trump/Pence	17 (8.0%)	36 (16.9%)	85 (39.9%)	75 (35.2%)
	Biden/Harris	67 (23.3%)	61 (21.2%)	98 (34.0%)	62 (21.5%)
	Other*	14 (22.2%)	20 (31.7%)	23 (36.5%)	6 (9.5%)
	Total	98 (17.4%)	117 (20.7%)	206 (36.5%)	143 (25.4%)
Biden/Harris will eliminate private insurance	Trump/Pence	22 (10.3%)	41 (19.2%)	85 (39.9%)	65 (30.5%)
	Biden/Harris	77 (26.7%)	86 (29.9%)	83 (28.8%)	42 (14.6%)
	Other*	19 (30.2%)	16 (25.4%)	23 (36.5%)	5 (7.9%)
	Total	118 (20.9%)	143 (25.4%)	191 (33.9%)	112 (19.9%)

Belief in controversial narratives between younger vs. older respondents (split by median age = 43)

Narratives	Age group	Definitely false	Likely false	Likely true	Definitely true
Hunter Biden laptop connects to child porn	Younger	56 (20.1%)	104 (37.4%)	81 (29.1%)	37 (13.3%)
	Older	107 (37.4%)	80 (28.0%)	66 (23.1%)	33 (11.5%)
Amy Coney Barrett inspired "The Handmaid's Tale"	Younger	28 (10.1%)	96 (34.5%)	108 (38.8%)	46 (16.5%)
	Older	86 (30.1%)	124 (43.4%)	65 (22.7%)	11 (3.8%)
Joe Biden is cognitively compromised	Younger	91 (32.7%)	55 (19.8%)	70 (25.2%)	62 (22.3%)
	Older	125 (43.7%)	34 (11.9%)	54 (18.9%)	73 (25.5%)
Mail-in ballots cause fraud	Younger	38 (13.7%)	70 (25.2%)	107 (38.5%)	63 (22.7%)
	Older	97 (33.9%)	71 (24.8%)	82 (28.7%)	36 (12.6%)
Biden/Harris will eliminate private insurance	Younger	36 (12.9%)	80 (28.8%)	115 (41.4%)	47 (16.9%)
	Older	82 (28.7%)	68 (23.8%)	86 (30.1%)	50 (17.5%)

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

Narratives	Age group	Definitely not	Probably not	Probably yes	Definitely yes
Hunter Biden laptop connects to child porn	Younger Older	68 (24.5%) 122 (42.7%)	85 (30.6%) 73 (25.5%)	75 (27.0%) 65 (22.7%)	50 (18.0%) 26 (9.1%)
Amy Coney Barrett inspired "The Handmaid's Tale"	Younger Older	58 (20.9%) 114 (39.9%)	75 (27.0%) 98 (34.3%)	97 (34.9%) 54 (18.9%)	48 (17.3%) 20 (7.0%)
Joe Biden is cognitively compromised	Younger Older	47 (16.9%) 105 (36.7%)	67 (24.1%) 65 (22.7%)	97 (34.9%) 77 (26.9%)	67 (24.1%) 39 (13.6%)
Mail-in ballots cause fraud	Younger Older	45 (16.2%) 53 (18.5%)	58 (20.9%) 59 (20.6%)	101 (36.3%) 105 (36.7%)	74 (26.6%) 69 (24.1%)
Biden/Harris will eliminate private insurance	Younger Older	45 (16.2%) 73 (25.5%)	70 (25.2%) 73 (25.5%)	104 (37.4%) 87 (30.4%)	59 (21.2%) 53 (18.5%)

Demographics

"What is your year of birth?"

Age (Aggregated by decade)	Counts
18-29	96 (17.0%)
30-39	136 (24.1%)
40-49	96 (17.0%)
50-59	82 (14.5%)
60-69	97 (17.2%)
70+	57 (10.1%)
Total	564

"What is your gender?"

Gender	Counts
Male	290 (51.4%)
Female	272 (48.2%)
Prefer not to answer/Other	2 (0.4%)
Total	564

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

Party Identification 1	Counts
Democrat	231 (41.0%)
Republican	177 (31.4%)
Independent	127 (22.5%)
No preference/Don't know	24 (4.2%)
Other	5 (0.9%)
Total	564

"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	52 (9.2%)
Republican Party	27 (4.8%)
Neither	71 (12.6%)
Don't know	6 (1.1%)
Total	156

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

Race/ethnicity	Counts
White	343 (60.8%)
Black or African American	72 (12.8%)
Hispanic or Latino/a	63 (11.2%)
Multi-racial	45 (8.0%)
Asian	29 (5.1%)
American Indian or Alaska Native	6 (1.1%)
Other	6 (1.1%)
Total	564

"What is the highest level of education you have completed?"

Education Level	Counts
Less than high school degree	15 (2.7%)
High school graduate (high school diploma or equivalent including GED)	148 (26.2%)
Some college but no degree	166 (29.4%)
Associate degree in college (2-year)	43 (7.6%)
Bachelor's degree in college (4-year)	112 (19.9%)
Master's degree	56 (9.9%)
Professional degree	10 (1.8%)
Doctoral degree	14 (2.5%)
Total	564

Methodology

This is the fifth 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 27 October to 2 November 2020. The sample size was 564 (margin of error ≈ 4%). Forty seven percent of participants were female. The average age was 46.5 (SD = 16.6), with a range of 18 to 85. The sample was 60.8% white, 12.7% Black, and 11.7% Latina/Latino.