

Perceptions of voter fraud after the 2020 U.S. presidential election

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This document provides further analysis related to “[Which Republicans are most likely to think the election was stolen? Those who dislike Democrats and don’t mind white nationalists](#),” published on January 19, 2020, in The Monkey Cage section of *The Washington Post*.

Contents

| | | |
|----------|--|----------|
| 1 | Knowledge questions | 2 |
| 2 | Confidence that respondent’s own vote was counted | 3 |
| 3 | Affective polarization | 4 |
| 4 | Perceptions of which candidate received more votes | 8 |
| 5 | Measuring the effect of group attitudes (affective polarization, ratings of white nationalists and ratings of BLM protesters) with logistic regressions | 9 |

List of Tables

| | | |
|----|---|----|
| 1 | Beliefs in vote-related conspiracies among Republican respondents | 2 |
| 2 | Beliefs in vote-related conspiracies among college-educated Republican respondents | 2 |
| 3 | Beliefs in vote-related conspiracies among Republican respondents without a college degree | 2 |
| 4 | Beliefs in vote-related conspiracies among Democratic respondents | 3 |
| 5 | Toplines for the confidence variable | 3 |
| 6 | Confidence that respondent’s own vote was counted accurately, broken down by Party ID and education level | 3 |
| 7 | Non-confidence in own vote being counted among Republicans, by ideology | 4 |
| 8 | Who recieved more votes in Nov. 2020? (Perceptions among all respondents) | 8 |
| 9 | Who recieved more votes in Nov. 2020? (Perceptions among Republican respondents) | 8 |
| 10 | Who recieved more votes in Nov. 2020? Perceptions among Republican respondents, broken down by education | 8 |
| 11 | Explaining belief in voter fraud on the basis of three types of group attitudes | 10 |
| 12 | A logit model with an interaction term | 11 |

List of Figures

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Affective polarization and non-confidence in vote counting among Republicans | 4 |
| 2 | Affective polarization and non-confidence in vote-counting (all respondents) | 5 |
| 3 | Regressing beliefs about widespread voter fraud on affective polarization among Republican respondents (loess regression) | 6 |
| 4 | Affective polarization quintiles and belief that millions of fraudulent mail and absentee ballots were cast | 7 |

Between December 16 and December 29, 2020, 2,759 respondents were interviewed by YouGov for the Center for Social Media and Politics. The sample included 962 Republicans. Throughout this analysis, we treat individuals as “Republicans” if they identified themselves as Republicans or Republican learners.

In the calculations reported below (frequencies and percentages), we apply population weights to make our calculations nationally representative of the 2018 American Community Survey 1-year sample with respect to age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region.

1 Knowledge questions

We used the following prompt:

Next you will see a series of statements about the 2020 election. We’d like to know how accurate you think each of the statements are to the best of your knowledge.

- “Millions of fraudulent mail and absentee ballots were cast.”
- “Voting machines were manipulated to add tens of thousands of votes for Joe Biden.”
- “Thousands of votes were recorded from dead people.”

The toplines for Republican respondents are below:

Table 1: Beliefs in vote-related conspiracies among Republican respondents

| Mail fraud | Percent | Manipulated machines | Percent | Votes from dead people | Percent |
|---------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| Not at all accurate | 7.6 | Not at all accurate | 8.0 | Not at all accurate | 5.8 |
| Not very accurate | 9.6 | Not very accurate | 8.5 | Not very accurate | 7.0 |
| Somewhat accurate | 25.0 | Somewhat accurate | 19.8 | Somewhat accurate | 25.1 |
| Very accurate | 53.3 | Very accurate | 57.1 | Very accurate | 57.1 |
| Not Sure | 4.5 | Not Sure | 6.7 | Not Sure | 4.9 |

Table 2: Beliefs in vote-related conspiracies among college-educated Republican respondents

| Mail fraud | Percent | Manipulated machines | Percent | Votes from dead people | Percent |
|---------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| Not at all accurate | 9.5 | Not at all accurate | 10.5 | Not at all accurate | 7.8 |
| Not very accurate | 15.5 | Not very accurate | 10.1 | Not very accurate | 7.7 |
| Somewhat accurate | 22.8 | Somewhat accurate | 19.8 | Somewhat accurate | 25.2 |
| Very accurate | 48.3 | Very accurate | 55.0 | Very accurate | 56.5 |
| Not Sure | 3.9 | Not Sure | 4.6 | Not Sure | 2.7 |

Table 3: Beliefs in vote-related conspiracies among Republican respondents without a college degree

| Mail fraud | Percent | Manipulated machines | Percent | Votes from dead people | Percent |
|---------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| Not at all accurate | 7.0 | Not at all accurate | 7.1 | Not at all accurate | 5.1 |
| Not very accurate | 7.5 | Not very accurate | 7.9 | Not very accurate | 6.8 |
| Somewhat accurate | 25.8 | Somewhat accurate | 19.9 | Somewhat accurate | 25.1 |
| Very accurate | 55.0 | Very accurate | 57.8 | Very accurate | 57.4 |
| Not Sure | 4.7 | Not Sure | 7.4 | Not Sure | 5.7 |

Below we show the toplines for Democrats:

Table 4: Beliefs in vote-related conspiracies among Democratic respondents

| Mail fraud | Percent | Manipulated machines | Percent | Votes from dead people | Percent |
|---------------------|---------|----------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|
| Not at all accurate | 81.5 | Not at all accurate | 84.4 | Not at all accurate | 75.7 |
| Not very accurate | 5.8 | Not very accurate | 6.2 | Not very accurate | 9.8 |
| Somewhat accurate | 5.1 | Somewhat accurate | 2.7 | Somewhat accurate | 5.7 |
| Very accurate | 2.5 | Very accurate | 2.3 | Very accurate | 2.9 |
| Not Sure | 5.0 | Not Sure | 4.5 | Not Sure | 5.9 |

2 Confidence that respondent's own vote was counted

The distribution of responses to the following prompt are shown in Table 5:

Thinking about vote counting in the Presidential Election, how confident are you that votes of the people and groups listed below were counted accurately and fairly as those people intended? - Your Own Vote

Table 5: Toplines for the confidence variable

| Response | Weighted N | Percent |
|----------------------|------------|---------|
| Not at all confident | 258.81 | 9.38 |
| Not too confident | 222.53 | 8.07 |
| Somewhat confident | 561.84 | 20.36 |
| Very confident | 1522.18 | 55.17 |
| Don't Know | 193.63 | 7.02 |

Below we break down the responses to the same question by party ID and education (Table 6). Next, we also split responses from all Republican respondents by ideology (Table 7).

Table 6: Confidence that respondent's own vote was counted accurately, broken down by Party ID and education level

| | Not at all confident | Not too confident | Somewhat confident | Very confident | Don't Know |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|--------------------|----------------|------------|
| All | | | | | |
| Democrat | 2.4 | 2.2 | 11.3 | 76.9 | 7.2 |
| Republican | 14.4 | 13.8 | 31.1 | 35.2 | 5.5 |
| Independent | 12.5 | 9.1 | 21.5 | 50.2 | 6.7 |
| Non-college graduates only | | | | | |
| Democrat | 3.3 | 2.9 | 14.7 | 68.8 | 10.2 |
| Republican | 17.5 | 13.8 | 32.7 | 29.7 | 6.3 |
| Independent | 15.2 | 9.7 | 21.5 | 46.6 | 7.0 |
| 4-year+ degree holders | | | | | |
| Democrat | 0.8 | 0.9 | 4.7 | 92.2 | 1.3 |
| Republican | 5.4 | 13.6 | 26.3 | 51.3 | 3.3 |
| Independent | 6.6 | 7.8 | 21.3 | 58.4 | 6.0 |

Table 7: Non-confidence in own vote being counted among Republicans, by ideology

| Ideology | Confident | Not confident | MOE | Number of respondents |
|-------------------|-----------|---------------|-----|-----------------------|
| Very liberal | 100.0 | 0.0 | NA | 4 |
| Liberal | 100.0 | 0.0 | NA | 7 |
| Moderate | 75.5 | 24.5 | 8.0 | 195 |
| Conservative | 69.5 | 30.5 | 5.9 | 416 |
| Very conservative | 64.4 | 35.6 | 7.2 | 297 |
| Not sure | 100.0 | 0.0 | NA | 4 |

3 Affective polarization

We calculated the thermometer rating difference (i.e. ratings of the Republican Party minus ratings of the Democratic Party), and ranked all respondents by how they feel about the Republican Party relative to how they feel about the Democratic Party. Then we generated 5 quintiles of the difference between party ratings.

The proportion of respondents who are suspicious of the vote-counting process is reported for each quintile below (Figure 1).

Note that below we code a respondent as not confident if they chose any of the following options when answering whether they were confident that their own vote was counted fairly and accurately:

- “Not too confident”
- “Not at all confident”

(We exclude respondents who answered “don’t know”.)

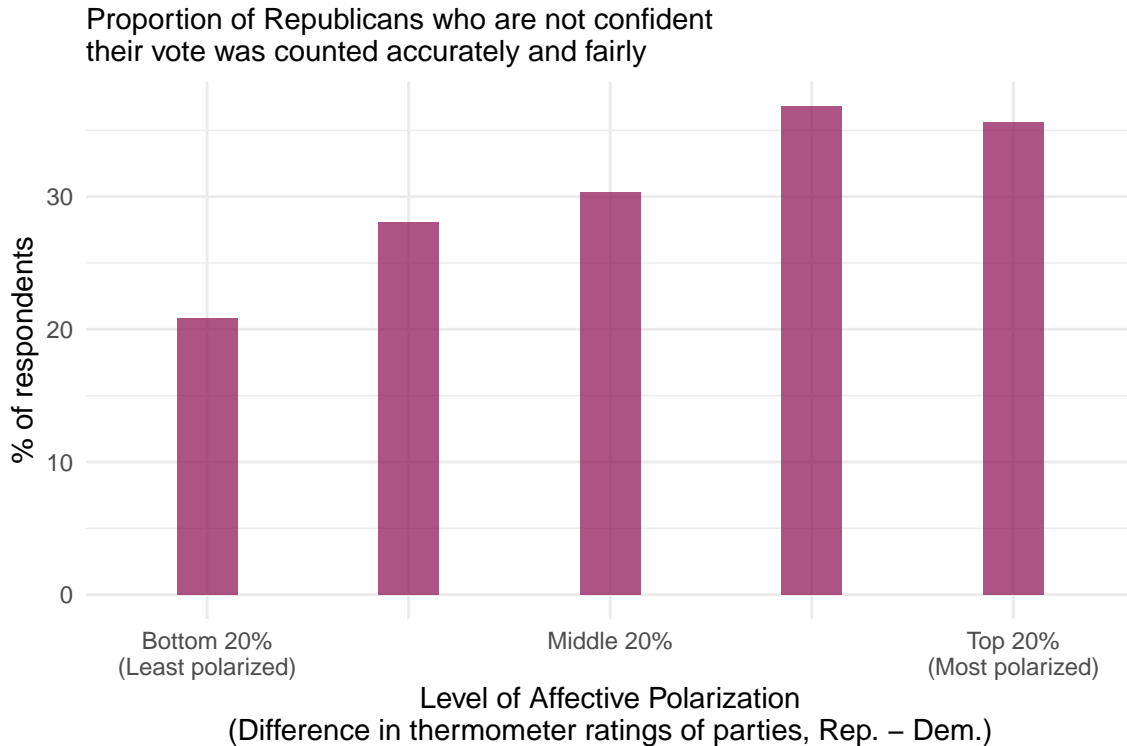


Figure 1: Affective polarization and non-confidence in vote counting among Republicans

In Figure 2, we report the proportion of respondents who have doubts that their own vote was counted, plotted against the ratings difference between the Republican and Democratic Party. Because the set of respondents now includes Democrats and Independents, negative values of the independent variable are contained in the bottom three quintiles.

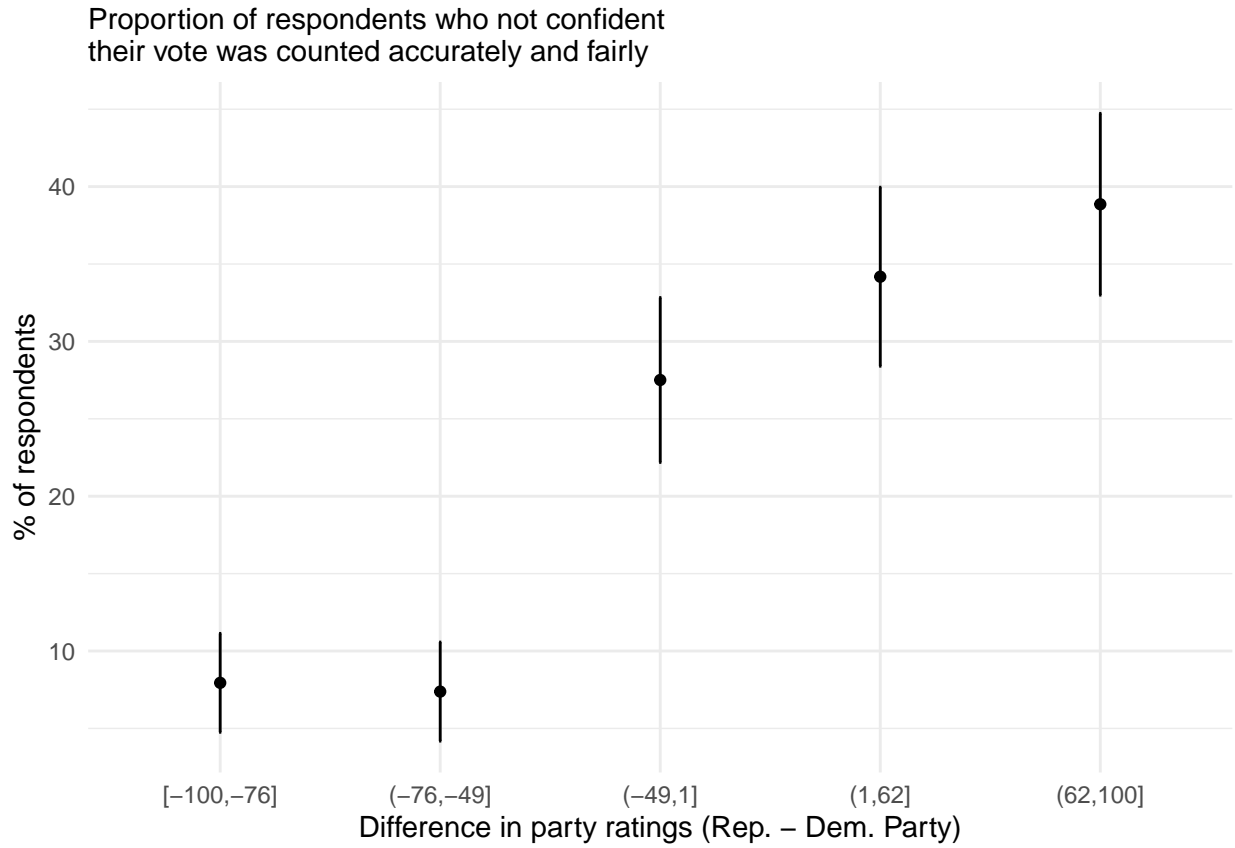


Figure 2: Affective polarization and non-confidence in vote-counting (all respondents)

Below we further examine the knowledge question about fraudulent mail-in ballots: in Figure 3 we show the relationship between the belief that a statement about widespread fraud was accurate and disliking the Democratic Party relative to the Republican Party. In the following exhibit (Figure 4), we dichotomize the outcome variable, coding a respondent as believing there was voter fraud if they selected “very accurate” in response to the same prompt. And we again relate those beliefs in fraud to the respondents’ level of polarization.

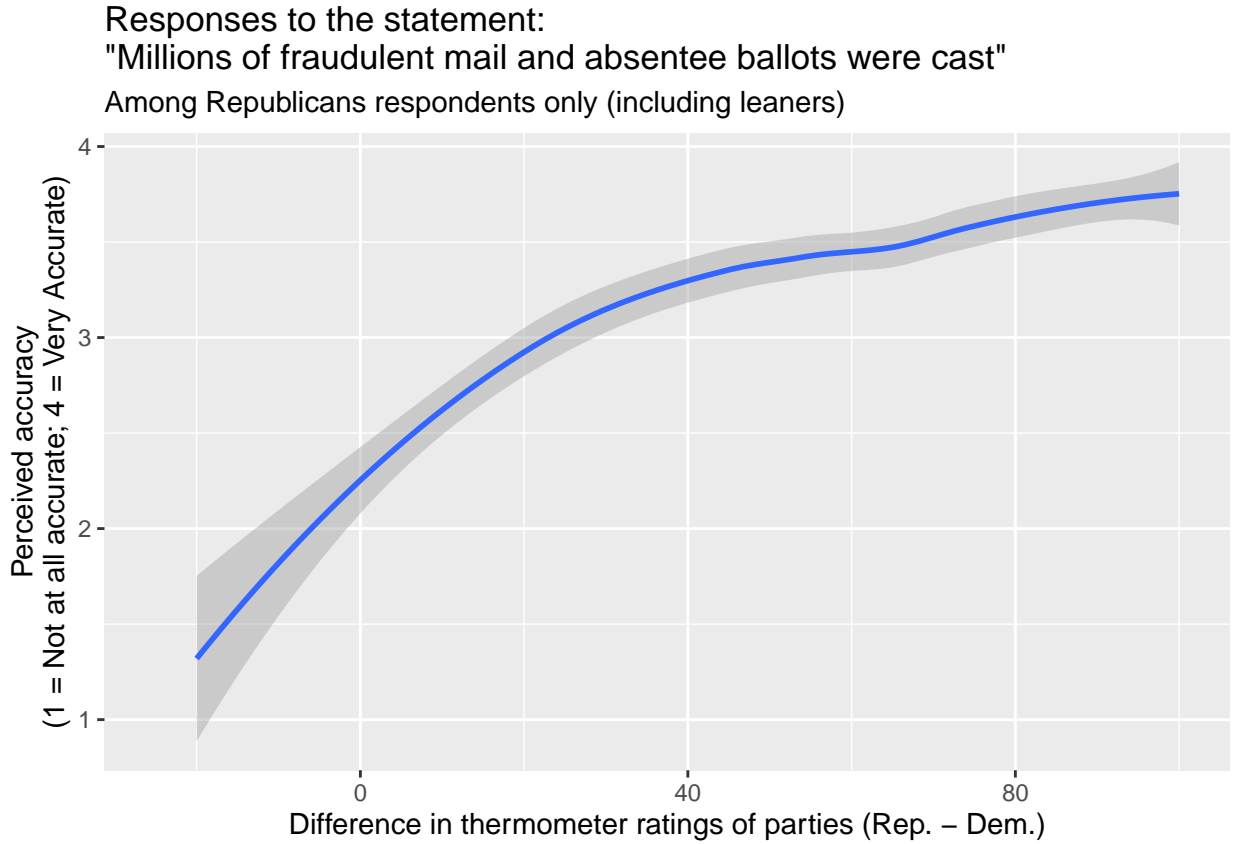


Figure 3: Regressing beliefs about widespread voter fraud on affective polarization among Republican respondents (loess regression)

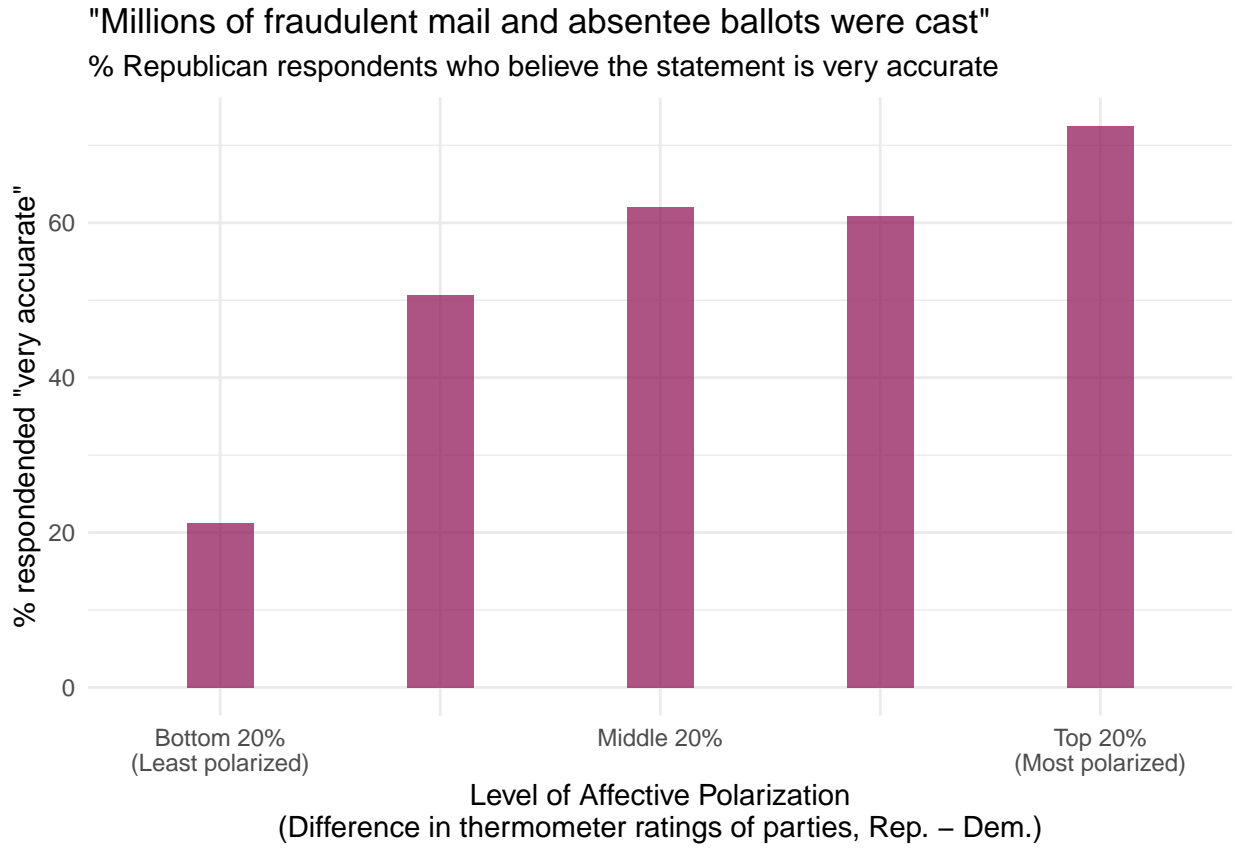


Figure 4: Affective polarization quintiles and belief that millions of fraudulent mail and absentee ballots were cast

4 Perceptions of which candidate received more votes

Below we show differences between the full sample and Republican respondents in belief that Donald Trump received more votes (Tables 8 and 9), and then show for Republicans the difference in perceptions between those with and without a college degree (Table 10).

We used the following question on the survey: *President Trump has alleged that there was fraud in the 2020 presidential election. Who do you think more people really voted for?*

Table 8: Who recieved more votes in Nov. 2020? (Perceptions among all respondents)

| Response | Weighted N | Percent |
|-----------------|------------|---------|
| Joe Biden | 1553.61 | 56.31 |
| President Trump | 962.07 | 34.87 |
| Not Sure | 243.31 | 8.82 |

Table 9: Who recieved more votes in Nov. 2020? (Perceptions among Republican respondents)

| Response | Weighted N | Percent |
|-----------------|------------|---------|
| Joe Biden | 152.20 | 14.54 |
| President Trump | 797.32 | 76.18 |
| Not Sure | 97.13 | 9.28 |

Table 10: Who recieved more votes in Nov. 2020? Perceptions among Republican respondents, broken down by education

| Education | Joe Biden | President Trump | Not Sure | Weighted N | N |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|----------|------------|-----|
| People without a college degree | 12.78 | 78.1 | 9.12 | 775.24 | 666 |
| 4-year+ degree holders | 19.57 | 70.7 | 9.73 | 271.41 | 296 |

5 Measuring the effect of group attitudes (affective polarization, ratings of white nationalists and ratings of BLM protesters) with logistic regressions

In addition to affective polarization, ratings of BLM protesters and white nationalists are also correlated with a strong belief in voter fraud.

Below we examine if these relationships hold once we condition on demographic characteristics of respondents and their (self-reported) ideology.

We also investigate whether attitudes toward BLM and white nationalists are essentially capturing animosity toward Democrats, or whether they have an independent effect on what people believe.

That is, we want to know whether the following three variables are robust in explaining our outcome (belief in widespread voter fraud):

- Difference between Republican and Democratic Party ratings
- (Positive) ratings of white nationalists
- (Negative) assessments of BLM protesters

In all models below, the binary outcome variable is coded as 1 if a respondent selected “very accurate” in response to a statement that “millions of fraudulent mail and absentee ballots were cast”.

We estimate a set of logit regressions, conditioning on:

- Age
- Gender
- Race
- Education
- Ideology

Table 11 shows estimates for five different sets of explanatory variables, and the final column shows the full specification estimated for all respondents, whereas the preceding five specifications are estimated for Republicans only.

Model 4 in Table 11 shows that evaluations of two salient groups – BLM protesters and white nationalists – are significant predictors of belief in voter fraud after conditioning on the difference in respondents’ evaluations of the major parties.

Finally, in Table 12 an interaction term is included for ratings of white nationalists and BLM protesters as one additional robustness check.

Making Sense of Effect Magnitudes: Calculating First Differences

On the basis of the model displayed in Table 12, we perform the following calculations:

1. Set every Republican counterfactually to BLM-coldness at its 75th percentile and also WN-warm (75th percentile). Assume everyone held this level of racial attitudes, and compute these counterfactual probabilities. Calculate the mean of the probabilities, and call them M1.
2. Set every Republican counterfactually to a low level BLM-coldness (at its 25th percentile) and also to cold ratings of white nationalists (25th percentile). Assume that respondents held group attitudes according to these hypothetical thermometer ratings and compute counterfactual probabilities of believing in widespread fraud. Calculate the mean of these predictions, and call this number M2.

We find that $M1 - M2 = 29.1\%$. This means that a counterfactual simultaneous movement from the 25th percentile to the 75th percentile on these group attitudes towards BLM protesters and White Nationalists is associated with a 29.1 percentage point increase in the probability that a respondent believed there was widespread voter fraud.

Table 11: Explaining belief in voter fraud on the basis of three types of group attitudes

| | DV: Strong belief millions of fraudulent ballots were cast | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| | Republicans (1) | Republicans (2) | Republicans (3) | Republicans (4) | Republicans (5) | All (6) |
| GOP - Dem. thermometer ratings | 0.026*** (0.003) | | | 0.022*** (0.003) | | 0.021*** (0.002) |
| Ratings of White nationalists | | 0.013*** (0.003) | | 0.015*** (0.003) | 0.016*** (0.003) | 0.017*** (0.002) |
| Ratings of BLM protestors | | | -0.035*** (0.004) | -0.033*** (0.004) | -0.038*** (0.004) | -0.029*** (0.003) |
| Age | 0.003 (0.005) | 0.010* (0.005) | 0.006 (0.005) | 0.003 (0.005) | 0.007 (0.005) | 0.004 (0.004) |
| Women | -0.022 (0.145) | 0.066 (0.138) | 0.283* (0.144) | 0.132 (0.154) | 0.245 (0.147) | 0.008 (0.129) |
| White voters | 0.177 (0.227) | 0.329 (0.219) | 0.066 (0.229) | 0.151 (0.243) | 0.177 (0.235) | -0.307 (0.175) |
| College graduates | -0.372* (0.156) | -0.339* (0.151) | -0.450** (0.154) | -0.336* (0.164) | -0.355* (0.159) | -0.302* (0.139) |
| Conservative | 0.173 (0.188) | 0.513** (0.174) | 0.290 (0.184) | -0.012 (0.200) | 0.236 (0.188) | 0.314* (0.159) |
| Very conservative | 0.726*** (0.209) | 1.304*** (0.191) | 0.939*** (0.201) | 0.436* (0.221) | 0.858*** (0.205) | 0.799*** (0.184) |
| Constant | -1.877*** (0.373) | -1.671*** (0.358) | -0.226 (0.372) | -1.559*** (0.420) | -0.791* (0.390) | -1.411*** (0.315) |
| PRE | 0.32 | 0.21 | 0.3 | 0.39 | 0.33 | 0.45 |
| Observations | 961 | 962 | 962 | 961 | 962 | 2,758 |

Note:

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001
PRE = Proportionate reduction of error.

Table 12: A logit model with an interaction term

| DV: Strong belief millions of fraudulent ballots were cast | |
|--|-------------------------------|
| GOP - Dem. thermometer ratings | 0.022*** (0.003) |
| (Warm) Ratings of White nationalists (0-100) | 0.026 (0.014) |
| (Cold) Ratings of BLM protestors (0-100) | 0.038*** (0.008) |
| Age | 0.003 (0.005) |
| Women | 0.129 (0.154) |
| White voters | 0.163 (0.243) |
| College grad | -0.332* (0.165) |
| Conservative | -0.011 (0.200) |
| Very conservative | 0.431 (0.221) |
| Ratings of WN * Cold ratings of BLM | -0.0001 (0.0001) |
| Constant | -5.303*** (0.803) |
| Proportionate reduction of error | 0.39 |
| Observations | 961 |
| <i>Note:</i> | *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001 |

Question Wording

Ratings for salient social groups were elicited with the following prompt:

Now we'd like to know what you think of people from different groups. Please rate each of the following groups on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 means you feel cold towards that group, and 100 means you feel warm towards that group. And a score of 50 would mean you are indifferent.

- Black Lives Matter Protestors
- White Nationalists

We only use the ratings above for the analysis. Other groups included on the list were: Democrats, Republicans, Undocumented Immigrants, Labor Unions, Police, and Blacks.

On a separate screen, respondents were also asked:

Please rate each of the following parties using a 100-point feeling scale. Ratings between 50 and 100 mean that you feel favorable and warm toward the party. Ratings between 0 and 50 mean that you don't feel favorable toward the party and that you don't care too much for that party. You would rate the party 50 if you don't feel particularly warm or cold toward the party.

- The Democratic Party
- The Republican Party