



Research Article

Fact-checking Trump’s election lies can improve confidence in U.S. elections: Experimental evidence

As the 2020 campaign unfolded, with a mix of extraordinary embellishments and outright falsehoods, President Trump’s attacks on the integrity of the U.S. electoral system grew louder and more frequent. Trump-aligned Republican candidates have since advanced similar false claims in their own campaigns in the lead-up to the 2022 midterm elections. Scholars, election officials, and even fellow Republican leaders have voiced concerns that Trump’s rhetoric represents a profound threat to the well-being of U.S. democracy. To investigate the capacity for fact-checking efforts to repair the damage incurred by election-related misinformation, in the weeks before the 2020 election, we fielded a survey experiment on a nationally representative sample to test whether exposure to fact-checks of Trump’s false claims increased participants’ confidence in the integrity of the U.S. election and affected their voting behavior. Although our pre-registered analysis offered no evidence that corrections affect voting behavior, our findings do show that exposure to these fact-checks can increase confidence in the integrity of the 2020 U.S. election. However, the effects varied significantly by partisanship, with these changes concentrated among Democrats and Independents.

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Research questions

- Will exposure to fact-checks correcting false statements by President Trump regarding the integrity of the 2020 election increase confidence in the election?
- Will the effects of exposure to fact-checks correcting false statements by President Trump regarding the integrity of the election affect self-reported intention to vote and actual turnout?
- Do the effects of exposure to fact-checks on the election-related attitudes and behavior described above vary by partisanship?

Essay summary

- In the weeks before the 2020 election, we administered a survey experiment on a nationally representative sample to evaluate the effects of multiple factual corrections of Trump’s election-

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related lies. Participants were randomly exposed to see six PolitiFact corrections of Trump's lies (treatment) or none (control). Rather than study effects on belief accuracy, we focused on election-related attitudes and behavior.

- We found that exposure to these fact-checks increased confidence in the integrity of the 2020 U.S. election. However, these effects varied significantly by partisanship, with changes concentrated among Democrats and Independents, who became more confident in elections as a result of corrections.
- Republicans became neither more nor less confident with exposure. Although the corrections did little to repair the damage these falsehoods did to Republicans' confidence in the election, these findings accord with recent work demonstrating that evidence does not generate attitudinal "backfire" effects, wherein exposure to evidence generates attitudinal effects contrary to the direction implied by the evidence (Guess & Coppock, 2020).
- We also investigated whether fact-checks affected voting behavior by matching treatment status to voter files from the 2020 election. On this outcome, our pre-registered analytic strategy finds no evidence that corrections affect voting behavior. However, investigation of the data suggests that this research question merits further investigation.
- Our results offer cautious optimism about the power of multiple factual corrections to change attitudes about issues of fundamental importance to democracy. Lies about elections can reduce confidence in elections (Berlinski et al., 2021). Correcting those lies can improve confidence in the integrity of the electoral system, at least among some subsets of voters.

Implications

Skepticism about the fairness of elections has deleterious effects on voters' democratic attitudes and behaviors. For example, doubts about the integrity of an electoral system diminish citizens' political trust and general satisfaction with their government's democratic performance (Norris, 2014; Norris, 2019). Perceptions of electoral integrity play a central role in these evaluations because elections are a core component of how voters define and understand democracy (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016), and because elections are among the more tangible and visible mechanisms available to citizens to assess the fairness and legitimacy of their political system (Norris, 2019). It is these attitudes that also influence citizens' propensity to turnout to vote (Bailard, 2012; Birch, 2010; Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997; Hooghe et al., 2011). As Birch (2010) put it: "If voters fear that polls are corrupt, they have less incentive to bother casting a vote; participating in a process in which they do not have confidence will be less attractive, and they may well perceive the outcome of the election to be a foregone conclusion" (p. 1603).

Previous scholarship has also made clear that belief in Trump's falsehoods can be effectively rebutted (Wood & Porter, 2019), even among his supporters (Porter et al., 2019). These studies showed that factual corrections of Trump's misstatements improve factual accuracy. In other words, fact-checks induce individuals to become more factually accurate. Extant research, however, has made limited progress on a related question: Can corrections affect related attitudes and behaviors?

In addition to there being less research on the effects of fact-checks on downstream attitudes, the research that does exist offers mixed conclusions. Consistent with the continued influence effect (Lewandowsky et al., 2012), some have demonstrated that corrections are not enough to overcome the negative effects of misinformation on attitudes. Thorson (2016) found that, even subsequent to correction, misinformation lingers powerfully enough to affect related attitudes. Porter et al. (2019) and Nyhan et al. (2020) observed corrections of Trump misstatements improving factual accuracy, including among Republicans and Trump supporters, without impacting attitudes toward Trump and related policies. More recently, corrections have increased factual accuracy about COVID-19 vaccines but have

not improved attitudes toward vaccines or increased willingness to receive a vaccination (Porter et al., 2022). During the 2016 election, for example, correcting Trump's false claims about crime improved factual accuracy, even among his supporters, but had no effects on support for Trump (Nyhan et al., 2019). Similarly, during his presidency, fact-checking Trump's falsehoods about climate change made people more accurate (again including his supporters), but it did not cause shifts in support for climate-related policies (Porter et al., 2019). Such findings suggest that debunking Trump's false claims may improve factual accuracy (Chan et al., 2017) without affecting related evaluations and attitudes.

In contrast to these previous studies, our experiment demonstrated that factual corrections improved election confidence even amidst a deeply contentious election, in which the incumbent president repeatedly lied about the integrity of the election. Thus, not only can corrections improve belief accuracy, but our findings demonstrate that they can also affect attitudes, even on the topic of election integrity during a heated presidential election. While these effects are not large by conventional standards, it is important to keep in mind that pre-registered experiments such as ours tend to yield smaller effects relative to studies that were not pre-registered (Schäfer & Schwarz, 2019), in part because of the analyzing, reporting, and publishing biases inherent to non-pre-registered studies. As false claims about electoral integrity continue to be voiced by Trump and his allies, our findings provide reason to be cautiously optimistic about the capacity of factually accurate information to undo some of the damage these falsehoods wreak.

However, the attitude effects are not uniform across party lines. The effect on election confidence was moderated by partisanship, with the effect concentrated among Democrats and Independents, while Republicans were unaffected. To be clear, Republicans did not respond to these fact-checks by taking their cues solely from the recitation of Trump's falsehoods, which would have further suppressed their confidence in the election. While scholars have voiced concern that factual updating does not necessarily bode well for democratic competence (Bisgaard, 2019), we find no evidence of corrections to Trump's false claims backfiring; Republicans did not become less confident in elections as a result of fact-checks.

What explains our ability to detect attitudinal effects of corrections, which prior studies have failed to do? It is possible that attitudes toward elections are unusually susceptible to fact-based interventions (Mernyk et al., 2021). It is also possible that our attitudinal effects are owed to the number of corrections we displayed to treated participants. Under this explanation, in an age of polarization, political attitudes are apt to change only if a more-than-minimal set of information is provided to a respondent. Otherwise, factual information may be insufficient to affect attitudes. This finding corresponds with other persuasion research, which shows that the quantity of messages matters (Sides et al., 2021; Spenkuch & Toniatti, 2018).

In theoretical terms, our study makes a useful contribution to our understanding of misinformation and corrections by demonstrating that, in contrast to previous studies, fact-checks can affect downstream attitudes under certain conditions. Practically, our study provides actionable insight for campaigns and organizations seeking to increase trust in American elections, particularly in electoral contexts where one or more of the candidates continue to espouse electoral falsehoods. For example, these findings suggest that targeting Independents with corrections to electoral misinformation may be particularly consequential, particularly in light of the outsized role these voters often play in electoral outcomes. However, doing so may require exposing people to multiple fact-checks about the issue.

Although Republican attitudes did not shift, it is somewhat reassuring that their attitudes also did not backfire by generating attitudinal effects contrary to the direction implied by the correction (corroborating Guess & Coppock, 2020). This means that, at the very least, their confidence in elections is not worse off for having seen the corrections; that said, we anticipate future research will test ways of moving election-related attitudes among this group specifically.

Several other questions remain. It is unclear whether, among Republicans, the tendency to believe election-related lies and/or resist factual corrections targeting election-related lies will be as strong when

those falsehoods are not coming from Trump. Perhaps most important of all, under what circumstances are these findings most likely to generalize to the outside world? The treatment we tested here is especially strong. Participants were not just exposed to six fact-checks but were compelled to spend at least 30 seconds on each one before they could move forward. Given the sparse prior evidence substantiating corrections' capacity to shift attitudes, we anticipated that a strong treatment may be necessary. We opted not to also randomize exposure to fewer or a single correction at a time, in part due to statistical power concerns. Thus, we cannot say what amount of factual information constitutes the threshold point after which fact-checks can change attitudes, nor was this the objective of the present study. We look forward to future work that disentangles this open question. Testing other sources or formats of the fact-checks are additional potential avenues for research that could generate actionable insights.

If fact-checks are expected to move mass attitudes as they do in the present paper, fact-checking organizations will have to market themselves more successfully, including but not limited to those who consume misinformation. Thus, our evidence redoubles the onus on news organizations and social media platforms to perform a more effective role in this dynamic—by more visibly, consistently, and definitively fact-checking statements that are empirically and demonstrably false—even when, and perhaps especially when, those falsehoods are espoused by prominent individuals and elected officials. Finally, our findings should also assuage fears that fact-checks of electoral lies may inadvertently provoke unexpected contrary attitudinal effects, which may have led some entities to be more hesitant or ambivalent in their fact-checking efforts than they would be otherwise.

Findings

Finding 1: Exposure to fact-checks increased confidence in the integrity of the 2020 election ($p \leq .01$).

Exposure to fact-checks increased confidence in elections by more than .026 on a 0–1 scale ($p \leq .01$). Table A1 in Appendix A presents effects of fact-checks on election confidence.² In Figure 1, we display treatment effects, with and without covariates.

² As specified in our pre-analysis plan, we evaluate the robustness of these results with ordered probit. Please see Table C1 in Appendix C.

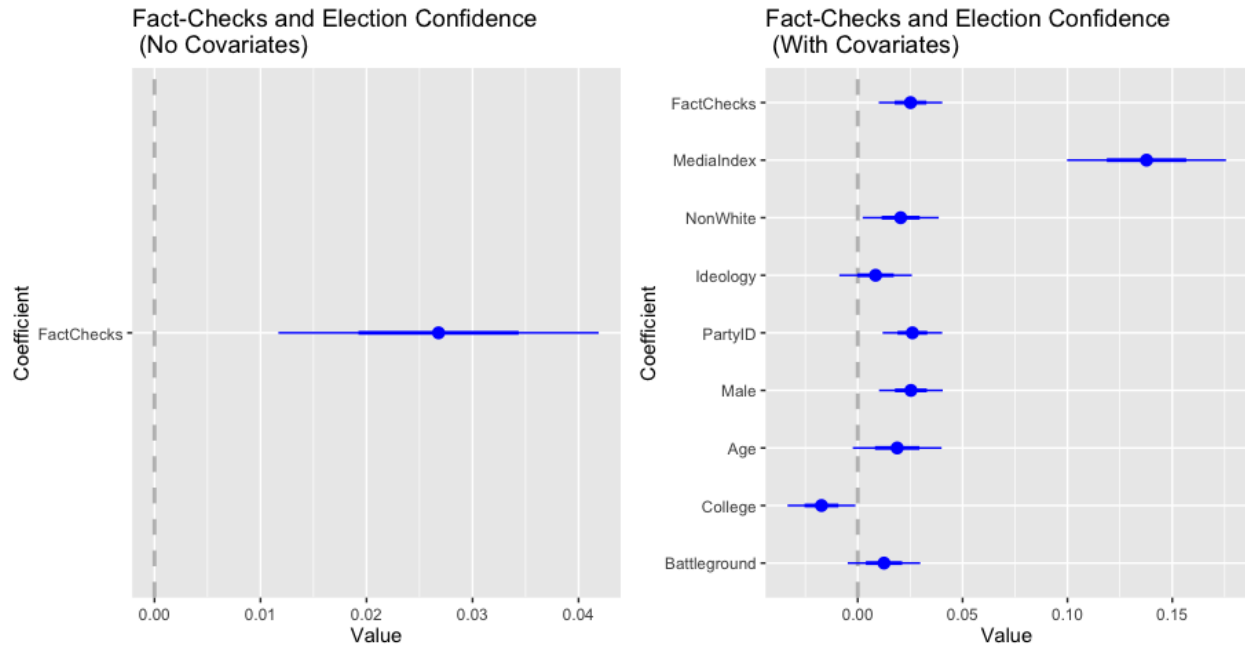


Figure 1. Exposure to fact-checks and election confidence. The left panel depicts the treatment effects of fact-checks without covariates; the right panel includes covariates. The figure corresponds to Table A1.

Finding 2: Our findings revealed that partisanship matters ($p \leq .01$): the effect of fact-checks on confidence in the integrity of the election differed for Republicans compared to Democrats and Independents.

Consistent with previous work substantiating presidents' influence over the preferences of their co-partisans (Lenz, 2012), as well as Trump's out-sized influence on his own supporters' beliefs (Barber & Pope, 2019), our findings reveal a substantial moderating effect of partisanship ($p \leq .01$).³ The estimated average marginal effect of the corrections on election confidence was largest among strong Democrats ($\beta = .06, p \leq .01$) and smaller but still positive and significant among Independents ($\beta = .02, p \leq .01$). However, the effect of these corrections was negligible and non-significant among strong Republicans ($\beta = -.01, p > .1$).

To further investigate this interaction, we relied on the binning and kernel estimators offered by Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu (2019)⁴ to assess the robustness of the interaction effect. These estimators help account for the possibility that there is insufficient coverage for the moderator (in this case, partisanship), and that the linearity assumption may not hold. Figure 2 displays the results. Both approaches corroborated the initial results, and made clear that Democrats and, to a lesser extent, Independents responded to fact-checks by becoming more confident about elections.

³ Please refer to Table C2 in Appendix C for the results of this analysis. Figure C1 displays box plots of election confidence by party and condition.

⁴ Binning entails splitting the sample into similarly sized groups based on the moderating variable, and then plotting the conditional relationship for each of the groups. Kernel estimators entail estimating a series of local effects utilizing a kernel reweighting approach, which permit more flexible estimates of the marginal effect of the moderator on the dependent variable across the range of values (Hainmueller et al., 2019).

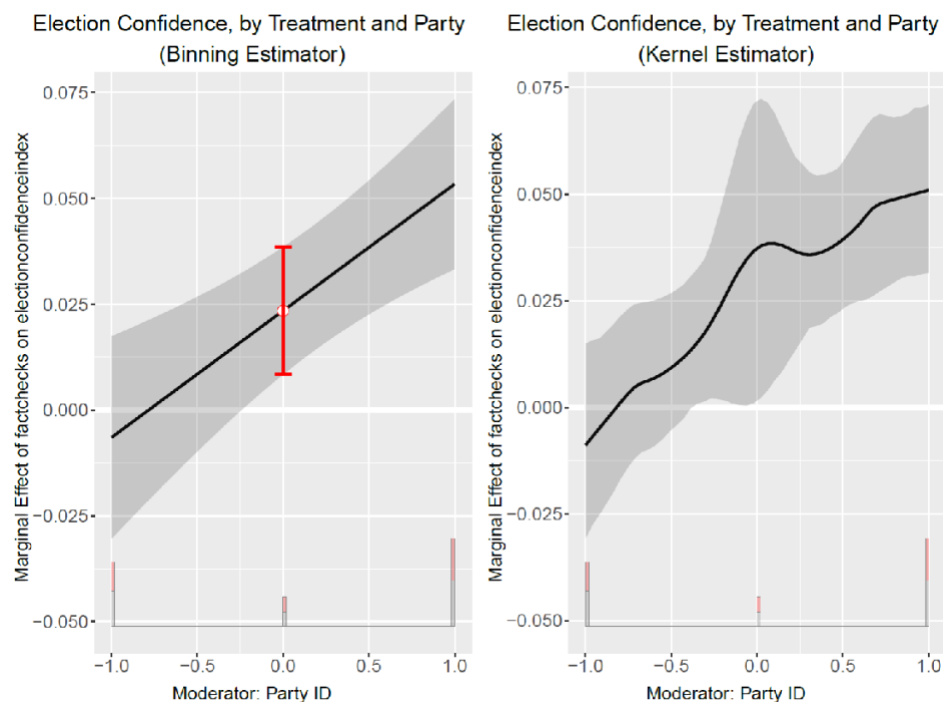


Figure 2. Election confidence and interaction of treatment and partisanship; 95% confidence intervals.

Finding 3: We found no evidence that exposure to factual corrections affected voting behavior in terms of either self-reported intention to vote or the validated vote measure.

This null finding seemingly stands in contrast to previous studies, which demonstrated the demobilizing effects of doubts about the integrity of an election (Bailard, 2012; Birch, 2010; Bratton & Van de Walle, 1997; Hooghe et al., 2011). Taking these previous studies into account, it is not that corrections, in and of themselves, would increase individuals' propensity to vote but rather that correcting election falsehoods may increase propensity to vote as a result of restoring confidence in the election.

Accordingly, our analysis investigated whether corrections could undo or counteract the potentially demobilizing effect of false claims that cast doubt on electoral integrity. Following our pre-analysis plan led us to answer the research question on the relationship between fact-checking and voting behavior with a firm negative. However, additional investigation of the data reveals vagaries to this measure that suggest that further inquiry may be prudent. Specifically, our pre-registered analytic strategy neglected to account for the presence of social desirability bias, in which some participants reported having already voted and were thus excluded from the behavioral analysis, but who were subsequently identified as non-voters by the TargetSmart data. We discuss this matter further in Appendix A in the supplementary material.

Methods

We administered the experiment in October 2020 ($n = 3,000$). The sample was collected by YouGov, a high-quality sample provider compared to its peers (Rivers, 2016).⁵ The hypothesis and research questions

⁵ Please see Table C3 for balance and descriptive statistics.

were pre-registered with the Open Science Framework.⁶ Prior to treatment assignment, all participants answered questions about their level of political interest and participation, political efficacy, political partisanship, use of news sources, and their level of interest in the 2020 election.⁷

Participants were then randomly assigned either to a control or treatment condition. We chose a pure control condition because of concerns about the arbitrariness of placebo selection procedures in many survey experiments. Recent research shows that, in some cases, placebo selection can actually affect treatment effect estimates (Porter & Velez, 2022). In the treatment condition, participants saw six fact-checks⁸ produced by PolitiFact. PolitiFact is a signatory to the Code of Principles of the International Fact-Checking Networking (IFCN), which commits them to non-partisan fact-checking (IFCN, 2022). All the fact-checks targeted false claims Trump had made that impugned the integrity of the 2020 election. The fact-checks appeared in exactly the same form as they originally appeared.⁹ To maximize realism (Aronson et al., 1998), the fact-checks were presented in their original format, with the original websites appearing in respondents' browsers. The fact-checks were imported directly from the PolitiFact website, meaning that there were no differences between the stimuli and the fact-checks on the site. Importantly, this means that the fact-checks repeated the underlying misinformation before refuting the misinformation with countervailing evidence.¹⁰

The experimental interface required participants to scroll to read the content, as they would have to do outside the experimental context. While participants were prevented from going forward for 30 seconds, they could have chosen not to read the content. However, it is worth noting that each fact-check begins with an "If Your Time is Short" blurb, which succinctly summarizes the primary facts rebutting the misinformation, followed by a longer discussion of the correction. The fact-checks were presented in random order.

After treatment, participants answered outcome questions about their confidence in the elections to test Hypothesis 1, which predicted that exposure to fact-checks correcting false statements by President Trump regarding the integrity of the election will increase confidence in the election. The confidence items were worded as follows:¹¹

Thinking about the presidential election this November 2020, how confident, if at all, are you that. . .

- All votes will be counted fairly
- All eligible voters who want to cast a vote will be able to
- Journalists will provide fair coverage of elections
- Election officials will be fair in making sure all people have an equal chance to vote
- People will not be discouraged from voting through intimidation or violence
- The election results will be protected from foreign interference¹²

⁶ Our pre-registration plan is available at <https://osf.io/9g34n>. Pre-registration plans are documents in which researchers describe their statistical analysis plans before beginning primary analysis. We posted our plan on a public repository so it could be evaluated by other researchers. The results of analyses of the additional research questions specified in our pre-registration plan, which are largely null, can be found in Appendix D.

⁷ Partisanship was measured on a seven-point scale, with possible responses ranging from "Strong Democrat" to "Strong Republican." For ease of exposition, we separate respondents into three bins: Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

⁸ We determined six fact-checks to be a reasonable balance between competing considerations. On the one hand, motivated by previous research demonstrating limited effects on downstream attitudes, our intention was to test the effects of a relatively strong dosage. However, on the other hand, we were also cognizant of the potential for attrition to create issues for the analysis.

⁹ Appendix B displays a screenshot of the top portion of fact-check webpages as they appeared to participants.

¹⁰ The corresponding URLs of all tested fact-checks can be found in Appendix B.

¹¹ Possible responses ranged from 1–4, from "Very confident" to "Not at all confident." As specified in the pre-registration, the election confidence index is calculated by averaging across these seven evaluations, and then rescaling from 0-1.

¹² The items in the election policy index scaled well together ($\alpha = .72$). Full scale reliability results for this index can be found in Table C4 in Appendix C.

To investigate our research question of whether exposure to fact-checks would affect self-reported intention to vote, participants were asked whether they intended to vote in the 2020 election or if they had already voted (and for those who intended to vote how they planned to vote). To investigate whether exposure would affect actual turnout, we relied on TargetSmart, a data firm that works with YouGov to provide validated vote data for YouGov panelists. TargetSmart can only provide turnout data on participants it successfully matches from the sample to available turnout records.¹³ Consistent with our pre-analysis plan, we coded participants whom TargetSmart successfully matched and identified as having voted as a “1,” and those that TargetSmart successfully matched and identified as not having voted or those that TargetSmart did not successfully match as a “0.” This approach precluded us from conditioning on matchability posttreatment (Montgomery et al., 2018).

One possible concern with our analysis is that our treatments caused conservative-leaning respondents to drop out (please see Table C5 in Appendix C). To estimate the sensitivity of our results to differential attrition, we acquired the complete data set of participants from YouGov, including those who dropped from the study. Then, following the advice of Gerber and Green (2012, see Chapter 7), we re-estimated the results of our first hypothesis while weighting for missingness. Specifically, we first generated indicators for missingness; we then used Logit to predict non-missingness by pre-treatment covariates and the treatment; next, we generated weights; and finally, we re-ran the analysis with the accompanying weights. Table C5 presents the results of this exercise.

Statistically and substantively, the observed effects on election confidence results remain unchanged. Nevertheless, although our results hold when accounting for differential attrition, future studies should attempt to minimize attrition. Last but not least, future research should investigate the durability, or lack thereof, of any attitudinal effects generated by corrections. Existing evidence focused on the effects of fact-checks on belief accuracy gives reason to suspect that effects will attenuate (Carey et al., 2022) but not disappear altogether (Porter & Wood, 2021).

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¹³ Any personally-identifying information was gathered and retained by TargetSmart, with the anonymized survey results data only shared with the researchers via linking codes. This means that at no point did the researchers have access to any personally-identifiable information related to the study's participants.

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Competing interests

The authors report no competing interests.

Ethics

This research was deemed exempt by the George Washington University IRB (#NCR202871).

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Data availability

All materials needed to replicate this study are available via the Harvard Dataverse:

<https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/LARV96>

Appendix A: Corrections and turnout: Further inspection and a caveat

As stated in the main document, our pre-registered analysis failed to detect a meaningful effect of the corrections on turnout, for either self-reported vote intention or the validated vote measure. (Please see Table A2 for these results.) However, our pre-registered analysis plan did not account for participants whose survey responses did not align with the behavioral data obtained from TargetSmart. As stipulated in our pre-registration plan, we excluded individuals who self-reported having already voted before participating in the experiment from the analyses of the turnout measures. The historically high levels of early voting in the 2020 election meant that we ended up excluding 677 participants from the analyses of our behavioral measures, over one-fifth of our total participants. However, comparing self-reports with the validated vote data suggests that a portion of these individuals ($n = 70$) may have falsely reported having already voted, which would not be altogether surprising given the power of social desirability bias (Belli et al., 2001; Presser & Traugott, 1992). This means that we excluded individuals from the analyses of the behavioral measures who, in theory, may have been affected by the corrections.

An additional analysis, which included individuals whose claims of already voting were contradicted by the validated vote data (i.e., they self-reported having already voting, but they were matched in the TargetSmart data as non-voters) by assigning these individuals 0's for the vote-validated measure ($n = 19$), reveals a similar moderating effect of partisanship on voter turnout as revealed by our analysis of confidence in the integrity of the election. However, this effect fails to reach statistical significance ($p = .19$). (Please see Table A3 for these results.) Nevertheless, this wrinkle suggests that questions relating to the effect of factual corrections of election misinformation on electoral behaviors merit further investigation that accounts for the propensity of some individuals to falsely report about their voting behavior.

Table A1. Effects on election confidence (OLS).

Variables	Election Confidence	Election Confidence
	Index	Index
Fact-Checks	0.0268*** (0.00757)	0.0252*** (0.00758)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.0173** (0.00804)
Age		0.0188* (0.0106)
Male		0.0254*** (0.00758)
Party ID		0.0261*** (0.00778)
Ideology		0.00852 (0.00964)
Nonwhite		0.0205** (0.00959)
Media Index		0.138*** (0.0204)
Battleground		0.0125 (0.00883)
Constant	0.520*** (0.00510)	0.418*** (0.0139)
Observations	2,993	2,736
R-squared	0.004	0.047

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.

Table A2. Effects on voting and intention to vote.

Variables	Verified Voter	Intention to Vote
Fact-Checks	0.00889 (0.0194)	0.0158 (0.0109)
4 Year Degree and Above	0.0454** (0.0204)	0.0579*** (0.0105)
Age	0.336*** (0.0273)	0.106*** (0.0155)
Male	-0.00899 (0.0195)	0.00824 (0.0110)
Party ID	0.0387** (0.0188)	-0.00353 (0.0102)
Ideology	-0.0241 (0.0229)	0.0143 (0.0135)
Nonwhite	-0.0682*** (0.0240)	-0.0230 (0.0141)
Media Index	0.107** (0.0498)	0.237*** (0.0295)
Battleground States	-0.00698 (0.0222)	-0.00749 (0.0124)
Constant	0.458*** (0.0359)	0.674*** (0.0236)
Observations	2,095	2,095
R-squared	0.091	0.088

*Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. This analysis excludes those who self-reported having voted prior to participating in the experiment. Verified voter column presents results for those who TargetSmart successfully matched from the sample to available turnout records, intention to vote column is based on responses to post treatment question asking respondents how likely they were to vote in the November election. *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.*

Table A3. Turnout by partisanship: Accounting for individuals who falsely reported voting early.

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Fact-Checks	0.00591 (0.0200)	0.00859 (0.0194)
Party ID	-0.0193 (0.0180)	0.0223 (0.0222)
Fact-Checks x Party ID	0.0338 (0.0259)	0.0226 (0.0248)
4-Year Degree and Above		0.0477** (0.0205)
Age		0.338*** (0.0273)
Male		-0.0106 (0.0195)
Ideology		-0.0229 (0.0230)
Nonwhite		-0.0641*** (0.0240)
Media Index		0.106** (0.0498)
Battleground States		-0.00503 (0.0223)
Constant	0.663*** (0.0137)	0.451*** (0.0358)
Observations	2,245	2,111
R-Squared	0.001	0.090

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.

Appendix B: URLs, screenshots, and text of PolitiFact corrections¹⁴

List of fact-checks:

- Fact-check 1: Donald Trump says Joe Biden can only win by a 'rigged election.' That's wrong in several ways (<https://www.PolitiFact.com/factchecks/2020/aug/24/donald-trump/donald-trump-says-joe-biden-can-only-win-rigged-el/>)
- Fact-check 2: Donald Trump draws false distinction between absentee, mail-in voting (<https://www.PolitiFact.com/factchecks/2020/jul/31/donald-trump/donald-trump-draws-false-distinction-between-absen/>)
- Fact-check 3: Donald Trump's dubious claim that 'thousands' are conspiring on mail-ballot fraud (<https://www.PolitiFact.com/factchecks/2020/apr/09/donald-trump/donald-trumps-dubious-claim-thousands-are-conspiri/>)
- Fact-check 4: Trump's baseless claim about 'tremendous cheating' in 2016 (<https://www.PolitiFact.com/factchecks/2020/sep/11/donald-trump/trumps-baseless-claim-about-tremendous-cheating-20/>)
- Fact-check 5: Trump falsely claims Michigan illegally sent ballots to all voters (<https://www.PolitiFact.com/factchecks/2020/may/20/donald-trump/trump-falsely-claims-michigan-sent-ballots-all-vot/>)
- Fact-check 6: No, California Is Not Sending Mail-In Ballots "To Anyone In The State," As Trump Falsely Claimed ([http://\(https://www.PolitiFact.com/factchecks/2020/may/26/donald-trump/no-california-not-sending-mail-ballots-anyone-stat/\)](http://(https://www.PolitiFact.com/factchecks/2020/may/26/donald-trump/no-california-not-sending-mail-ballots-anyone-stat/)))

¹⁴ Screenshots capture the top portion of the webpage. More text is available by scrolling below, which participants were required to do before moving to the next webpage.

The screenshot shows a Politifact article. At the top, the Politifact logo is displayed. Below it, a profile picture of Donald Trump is shown next to his name. The text indicates he made the statement on August 20, 2020, in Scranton, Pa. The quote is: "So this is just a way they're trying to steal the election, and everybody knows that. Because the only way they're going to win is by a rigged election." To the right of the quote is a graphic that says "PANTS ON FIRE!" with a lit match and the words "POLITIFACT" and "TRUTH-O-METER". Below the quote are navigation tabs for "NATIONAL", "ELECTIONS", and "DONALD TRUMP". A large photo of Donald Trump speaking at a podium is shown. Below the photo is a caption: "President Donald Trump speaks during a campaign rally at Marriott Building Products on Aug. 20, 2020, in Old Forge, Pa. (AP)". To the left of the main text are two author bios: "By Louis Jacobson August 24, 2020" and "By Amy Sherman August 24, 2020". The main headline reads: "Donald Trump says Joe Biden can only win by a 'rigged election.' That's wrong in several ways". Below this is a section titled "IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT" containing two bullet points: "Elections are administered in thousands of local areas nationwide, each with safeguards, making any attempt to 'rig' a national election highly improbable." and "Trump also is wrong to declare the only way he could lose is if the outcome is rigged. He is an incumbent facing significant political challenges, most notably the coronavirus pandemic." At the bottom of this section is a link: "See the sources for this fact-check".

Figure B1. Screenshot of fact-check 1.

Text of fact-check 1

Donald Trump stated on August 20, 2020 in comments in Scranton, Pa.: "So this is just a way they're trying to steal the election, and everybody knows that. Because the only way they're going to win is by a rigged election."

Donald Trump says Joe Biden can only win by a 'rigged election.' That's wrong in several ways

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

Elections are administered in thousands of local areas nationwide, each with safeguards, making any attempt to "rig" a national election highly improbable.

Trump also is wrong to declare the only way he could lose is if the outcome is rigged. He is an incumbent facing significant political challenges, most notably the coronavirus pandemic.

President Donald Trump has repeatedly accused the Democrats of using voting by mail as a way to "rig" the election.

Speaking in Scranton, Pa., hours before his rival Joe Biden formally accepted his nomination at the Democratic National Convention, Trump revived many of his attacks on mail-in voting.

At one point, Trump said, "So this is just a way they're trying to steal the election and everybody knows that. Because the only way they're going to win is by a rigged election," he said.

When we reached out to the White House, they pointed to mainstream media outlets that have reported that mail delays and late ballots were a problem in some primaries. Trump himself has often pointed to New York as an example.

But these do not constitute evidence that Democrats, or anyone, are rigging the outcome.

There are several other reasons that he could lose. For one, he faces the same challenges that any incumbent would face when running amid a pandemic that has killed more than 174,000 Americans and left millions unemployed. Here, we'll look at more realistic scenarios that undermine Trump's claim.

Elections are administered locally, posing a challenge to national rigging. A big reason to doubt Trump's assertion about a rigged presidential election is that the U.S. has a decentralized election system that is largely administered by county or city election officials.

States set laws about policies such as early voting hours or voter ID, but it's local election officials who handle the day-to-day tasks of administering elections such as registering voters, sending ballots to voters' homes, checking in voters at local precincts, and overseeing the machines at early voting and election day sites.

There are more than 3,000 counties and 10,000 local jurisdictions spread across 50 states and D.C., said Paul Gronke, director of the Early Voting Information Center at Reed College. Each county produces its own ballots, and even within counties there can be various ballot versions with unique lists of federal, state and local offices, depending upon where a voter lives. Any attempt to rig a national election would pose multiple hurdles.

Bar-coded envelopes for these ballots are "just the first set of hurdles in trying to 'rig' an election," Gronke said.

The next hurdle would be to fake each individual signature so well that it fools verification systems, and that voters don't notice that someone else has cast their ballot before they did. Data scientists also track the returns closely and have sometimes been able to spot anomalies.

A third complication for prospective election riggers is to figure out where to target their rigging efforts. In order to build a sufficient margin in the electoral college, they would have to guess in advance which states could tip the election.

All of this would have to be done in a coordinated but secret way, with hundreds of people willing to risk felonies for the same goal.

While mailed ballots pose a slightly higher risk of voter fraud than voting in person, fraud remains statistically rare. In the five states that have previously used all-mail elections, there have been very low rates of fraud, said Rick Hasen, an election law expert at the University of California-Irvine. And most of the time, voting fraud cases tend to be one-off events in local elections, not conspiracies capable of swinging a national election.

White House spokesperson Sarah Matthews pointed to media reports showing problems in the primaries associated with the massive increase in voting by mail amid the pandemic, including late ballots.

But administrative problems have occurred not just with the voting by mail that Trump often derides but also with long lines at in-person precincts, and these have often been in jurisdictions that tend to vote Democratic.

Using the term election rigging "connotes some kind of fraud attempt to sabotage the casting of ballots," said Wendy Weiser, an elections expert at New York University's liberal Brennan Center. "Administrative snafus are a completely different thing."

Aside from a rigged election, what could explain Trump losing in November? Fundamentally, the possibility of a Trump loss could stem from political realities, not vote-rigging.

"It will not take a rigged election for Trump to lose, just the ordinary workings of electoral accountability in a democracy," said Alan Abramowitz, an Emory University political scientist. As of now, at least, Trump looks like an underdog for reelection, based on past history.

"When an incumbent president is running for a second term, the election is always largely a referendum on the president's record during his first term," said Kyle Kondik, managing editor of Sabato's Crystal Ball at the University of Virginia Center for Politics.

Gallup has taken approval surveys for every president since World War II. Currently, Trump's job approval of 42% is in the danger zone for an elected incumbent seeking a second term.

Six presidents since World War II have been reelected. In descending order of their Gallup approval rating, they were Dwight Eisenhower (68%), Bill Clinton (57%), Richard Nixon (56%), Ronald Reagan (54%), George W. Bush (51%), and Barack Obama (45%).

The two presidents who had the lowest approval ratings did not win reelection: George H.W. Bush (35%) and Jimmy Carter (32%).

Trump's 42% puts him right in the middle of those two groups. Trump's approval rating shows Trump's level of public support has been relatively stable over time, despite the ebb and flow of positive and negative news events. At the same time, strengthened partisan polarization will likely make it hard for Trump to win the votes of people in the disapproving camp.

"Partisan polarization has drastically reduced the ability of incumbent office-holders at all levels to appeal to voters across party lines," Kondik said. "And unlike previous incumbents, Trump has made little effort to expand his base of support during his time in office."

Often, presidents are judged heavily on the state of the economy on their watch. For much of Trump's term, unemployment was low, boosting his prospects of a second term. However, 2020 has been a bad year, rocked by coronavirus, economic problems, and a sharp focus on systemic societal problems, like racial inequities in policing.

That's why some analysts like Abramowitz believe the public's approval or disapproval of Trump's handling of the coronavirus could be an important metric in determining his electoral prospects in November. And that trend line has not looked good for the president.

The RealClearPolitics polling average of the public's approval of Trump in handling the coronavirus shows that as of Aug. 21, fewer than 40% of respondents approved of Trump's handling of the coronavirus, while more than 58% disapproved.

FiveThirtyEight's weighted average of national polls had Biden up by 8.6 percentage points nationally on Aug. 21. Perhaps equally important, Biden's lead has been stable since he clinched the nomination and the pandemic hit. Trump has never come closer than four points during that period, and that was back in early April.

In the states most likely to be decisive, Biden has also put together notable leads: 7.4 points in Michigan, 6.1 points in Pennsylvania, 6.8 points in Wisconsin, 5.4 points in Florida and 3.6 points in Arizona. Biden would need only the first three to reverse the 2016 result and achieve a Democratic victory.

But Trump is not destined to lose, because intervening events could upset the status quo. The polls could be off; problems with the voting process during a pandemic could keep some voters' ballots uncounted; and news events favorable to Trump or unfavorable to Biden could occur.

But Trump said it was impossible for him to lose unless the election were rigged. That's simply not the case.

Our ruling

Trump said, "So this is just a way they're trying to steal the election, and everybody knows that. Because the only way they're going to win is by a rigged election."

An actual conspiracy to rig the results of a national election would require hundreds or thousands of people working together to commit felonies across many critical jurisdictions. Experts do not consider this feasible, nor do we.

Meanwhile, Trump is an incumbent facing several ongoing challenges: a major pandemic, high unemployment, civic unrest and future uncertainty. Those are significant political hurdles that would be challenging for any president.

We rate this claim Pants on Fire.

POLITIFACT
The Poynter Institute

Donald Trump
stated on July 30, 2020 in a press conference:

Absentee voting is different from mail-in voting and has more protections against fraud.

FALSE
POLITIFACT TRUTH-O-METER™

ELECTIONS DONALD TRUMP

In this May 28, 2020, file photo a voter casts her mail-in ballot at in a drop box in West Chester, Pa., prior to the primary election. (AP)

Donald Trump draws false distinction between absentee, mail-in voting

By Louis Jacobson
July 31, 2020

By Chris Nichols
July 31, 2020

By Amy Sherman
July 31, 2020

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

- There is no objective difference between absentee voting and voting by mail.
- All mail ballots, regardless of how they are requested, are treated the same once they're cast. They all require verification before being counted.

[See the sources for this fact-check](#)

Figure B2. Screenshot of fact-check 2.

Text of fact-check 2

Donald Trump stated on July 30, 2020, in a press conference: Absentee voting is different from mail-in voting and has more protections against fraud.

Donald Trump draws false distinction between absentee, mail-in voting

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

There is no objective difference between absentee voting and voting by mail. All mail ballots, regardless of how they are requested, are treated the same once they're cast. They all require verification before being counted.

As many states prepare for increased mail voting due to the coronavirus pandemic, President Donald Trump has repeatedly raised concerns about the voting process. He's falsely suggested that there's a difference between traditional absentee voting and states' expanded mail voting, especially when it comes to verifying and securing votes.

At a July 30 press briefing, Trump was asked about a tweet earlier that day in which he floated delaying the Nov. 3 election. That idea was quickly shot down by numerous Republican leaders as well as Democrats.

At the briefing, Trump repeated his objections to voting by mail. "Absentee is different. Absentee, you have to work. You have to send in for applications. You have to go through a whole procedure," Trump said.

He went on to distinguish between his right to have a ballot delivered to him and the rights of the general public to cast votes via mail.

"For instance, I'm an absentee voter because I can't be in Florida, because I'm in Washington," Trump said. "I'm at the White House, so I'll be an absentee voter. We have a lot of absentee voters, and it works. We're in favor of absentee, but it's much different than millions of people in California. They're going to send out tens of millions of voting forms. Well, where are they going to go? You read where postmen are in big trouble now. You read where city councils are in big trouble now. Voter fraud all over the ballot."

Trump has made this point numerous times this summer.

June 25: "Like, I'm in White House, and I have to vote in Florida, et cetera, et cetera. You're an absentee; that's okay. But people go through a process for that. But the mail-in ballots, they mail them to anybody. And they send them out by the millions. I think I read over 30 million ballots are going to be sent out in California."

July 10: "Absentee Ballots are fine because you have to go through a precise process to get your voting privilege. Not so with Mail-Ins."

July 15: "So absentee ballot: Great. Mail-in ballot: Absolutely no good. It makes no sense. A governor sends out millions of ballots all over the place; they don't know where they're going." We have debunked Trump's falsehoods about voter fraud and election rigging, including for mail-in ballots. Proven cases of non-citizens casting ballots are rare.

For this fact-check, we will explain why absentee and mail-in ballots are the same thing, and that, whatever term you use, the verification process is the same.

"There's really no distinction," said Darren Hutchinson, a law professor at the University of Florida and an elections expert. "So, it's basically a falsehood that's been repeated over and over and over again." Voting in a pandemic The coronavirus pandemic has raised concerns about voters' safety as they wait in crowded polling places on Election Day — some may choose not to show up at all. Because of this, some states have encouraged the use of mail voting. (Five states had already run virtually all-mail elections: Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington.)

In California, Gov. Gavin Newsom signed a law requiring counties to send all active registered voters a mail-in ballot about a month before the Nov. 3 election, joining the all-mail election states plus Vermont and Washington D.C. Other states are allowing voters to request those ballots, either online or by mail. In the states that allow broad use of mail ballots, there is no distinction in how a voter requests "absentee" ballots and other types of mail ballots. Trump may not like the policy of sending out ballots to all registered voters, but it is wrong to suggest that ballots cast that way are different from absentee ballots or that they aren't subject to the same scrutiny.

Part of the linguistic confusion may be generational: Many states have phased out the use of the term "absentee," including California and Florida.

In 2016, for instance, the Florida Legislature unanimously voted to change the phrase "absentee" to "vote-by-mail," in order to ease confusion among voters who mistakenly believed that they had to be

away from home to request a ballot by mail. Some election advocates now use the term “vote at home,” because ballots in some states can be dropped off in person at designated lockboxes rather than mailed. So when Trump says he’s an absentee voter in Florida because he’s “at the White House,” that’s not accurate. It doesn’t matter where he is; Trump, like any other registered Florida voter, can cast a ballot without going to an in-person site.

No differential treatment Regardless of the terminology, elections experts say there is no difference between how “absentee” and “mail-in ballots” are treated.

In 34 states and Washington, D.C., voters can use “no excuse” absentee voting, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Under no-excuse absentee voting, the voter does not need to attest that they will be out of the jurisdiction on Election Day, or that they cannot get to the polls because of an illness or disability.

There is no special process that absentee out-of-town voters go through that other mail-in voters do not, Hutchinson said. The verification process actually begins well before any ballot is sent out. It starts with voter registration, a process which requires officials to determine if someone is eligible. Election offices also periodically update their registration lists, including removing inactive voters or those who have died. Many states are members of the Electronic Registration Information Center, which sends each member state reports showing voters who have moved within their state or out of state, have died or duplicate registrations.

Once a completed ballot is received by election officials, the identity of every voter is confirmed. In California, for instance, county elections officials check every vote-by-mail ballot to see whether the voter has already cast a ballot elsewhere. All ballot envelopes have unique barcodes, and local jurisdictions use specific paper types and watermarks for their ballots. Officials then compare the voter’s signature against the signature on the voter’s registration record. “Fundamentally, it’s the same thing,” said Amber McReynolds, Denver’s former director of elections and chief executive officer of the National Vote at Home Institute. “Ballots are handled exactly the same regardless of whether or not it’s an absentee ballot or a vote-by-mail ballot.” States typically allow voters an opportunity to correct mistaken information they’ve filled in on their ballot, or if officials see too much of a discrepancy between the signature on file and the signature on the ballot. When voters are notified of any problems with their information on the envelope, they are able to fix the problem in time to have their ballot counted.

Procedures to help voters track their ballots also helps with the verification process. For example voters in Palm Beach County, where Trump is a registered voter at Mar-A-Lago, can use the county website to track when the ballot was mailed to the voter and when it was received by the elections office. In Denver, voters can sign up to get information via text about their ballot, including when it was approved to be counted.

White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said July 31 the increase of mail ballots is the problem this cycle. “Mass mail-out ballots are going to be more at risk of fraud,” she said, citing multiple news reports about delays in tabulating results or rejection of mail ballots, including those that arrived after the deadline.

There have been delays in counting mail-in ballots, including in New York, and other problems including voters who said their requested ballots never arrived. All of those problems raise concerns about how some states that are unaccustomed to widespread voting by mail will gear up for the Nov. 3 election. However, that doesn’t mean that there is any difference in verifying these votes.

Our ruling.

Trump said, “Absentee is different (from mail-in ballots). Absentee, you have to work. You have to send in for applications. You have to go through a whole procedure.”

There is no distinction between absentee voting and voting by mail. All mail ballots, regardless of how they are requested, are treated the same once they're cast, and they require verification before being counted.

We rate this claim False.

The screenshot shows a Politifact article. At the top is the Politifact logo with the tagline 'The Poynter Institute'. Below it is a profile picture of Donald Trump and the text 'Donald Trump stated on April 7, 2020 in a press briefing:'. The main claim is: 'With voting by mail, "you get thousands and thousands of people sitting in somebody's living room, signing ballots all over the place."' To the right of the claim is a 'FALSE' rating from the 'POLITIFACT TRUTH-O-METER'. Below the claim are tags for 'ELECTIONS', 'VOTER ID LAWS', and 'DONALD TRUMP'. A photograph shows Kim Westbrook Strach speaking at a hearing. Below the photo is a caption: 'Kim Westbrook Strach, left, executive director of the Bipartisan State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement, during hearings on 9th Congressional District voting irregularities, on Feb. 19, 2019. (News & Observer via AP Pool)'. The article title is 'Donald Trump's dubious claim that 'thousands' are conspiring on mail-ballot fraud' by Louis Jacobson, dated April 9, 2020. A section titled 'IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT' contains two bullet points: 'Voting specialists say there's no evidence of "thousands and thousands" of people collaborating on fraudulent voting schemes, and Trump didn't provide any evidence to back up his assertion.' and 'In general, credible studies have found that voter fraud is rare.'

Figure B3. Screenshot of fact-check 3.

Text of fact-check 3

Donald Trump stated on April 7, 2020, in a press briefing: With voting by mail, “you get thousands and thousands of people sitting in somebody’s living room, signing ballots all over the place.”

Donald Trump’s dubious claim that ‘thousands’ are conspiring on mail-ballot fraud

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

Voting specialists say there’s no evidence of “thousands and thousands” of people collaborating on fraudulent voting schemes, and Trump didn’t provide any evidence to back up his assertion.

In general, credible studies have found that voter fraud is rare, whether through in-person voting or voting by mail.

Rare doesn't mean nonexistent, however, and there's evidence that mail ballots pose a slightly higher risk of voter fraud than voting in person.

See the sources for this fact-check The daily White House briefings about coronavirus sometimes veer into adjacent topics, and since Wisconsin voted on April 7, one of those topics has been voting by mail. Despite late pleas by Wisconsin's Democratic Gov. Tony Evers to make the election mail balloting only, the state's Republican Legislature, backed by a Republican-majority state Supreme Court, opposed Evers' plan. In person voting was held amid social distancing, though with significantly fewer polling places.

At briefings on April 7 and 8, President Donald Trump was asked about an expanded role for mail balloting at a time of a global pandemic. He responded by criticizing mail balloting as illegitimate and subject to widespread fraud (even though he had recently voted by mail for a Florida election).

On April 7, Trump said, "Now, mail ballots — they cheat. Okay? People cheat. Mail ballots are a very dangerous thing for this country, because they're cheaters. They go and collect them. They're fraudulent in many cases."

When pressed, Trump went on to call mail-in voting "horrible" and "corrupt" and alleged that "you get thousands and thousands of people sitting in somebody's living room, signing ballots all over the place." At the following day's briefing, a reporter asked Trump for evidence to support the "thousands and thousands" characterization.

Trump responded, "I think there's a lot of evidence, but we'll provide you with some, okay?" (The White House did not provide PolitiFact with additional evidence.)

Trump did cite a lawsuit by the conservative group Judicial Watch against the state of California, saying that "a million people should not have been voting" in the state. However, PolitiFact California previously rated a similar assertion by the president Pants on Fire, because the legal settlement in question required Los Angeles County to begin removing inactive voter registrations; it said nothing about voter fraud or people illegally voting.

In recent years, Trump has repeatedly claimed the existence of massive voter fraud and election rigging, which we've debunked again and again and again and again and again and again and again.

In his most recent comments, we found no support for the notion that "you get thousands and thousands of people sitting in somebody's living room, signing ballots all over the place."

We did find that mail balloting does pose a potentially higher risk for fraud than in-person voting does. However, experts said the reality is much more nuanced than Trump let on.

"I can't imagine any living room with thousands of people in it," said Rick Hasen, a University of California-Irvine law professor who specializes in election law. But even to the extent he's saying that vote-by-mail efforts are rife with fraud, "that is false," Hasen said.

"There are more cases of absentee ballot fraud than other kinds of election crimes," he said. "But the risk is relatively low, and the benefits, especially during the time of a pandemic, are quite great."

A lack of evidence of voter fraud Voting and election specialists said there's no evidence that "thousands and thousands" of Americans are collaborating on mail-ballot fraud, whether they're sitting in one living room or not.

"There is no evidence that any candidate or group has executed a mail ballot fraud scheme of this magnitude in modern elections," said Michael P. McDonald, a University of Florida political scientist. "In this day of social media, it is nearly impossible to keep anything secret, much less a scheme involving thousands of people."

If this was happening, McDonald said, voters would wonder where their ballots were. "They would show up to vote and be told by election officials that they had already voted," he said. "Election officials would see patterns in where mail ballots were being sent, the addresses they were being returned from,

and the signatures on the ballot return envelope. If a mail ballot fraud scheme happened on the alleged scale, someone, somewhere, would notice.”

More broadly, repeated efforts to uncover widespread voter fraud have produced little.

Trump's Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, a panel to investigate voter fraud, was shuttered before it found significant patterns of fraud.

News21, a national investigative reporting project funded by the Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, found just 56 cases of noncitizens voting between 2000 and 2011.

In 2012, Florida Gov. Rick Scott's administration tried to crack down on noncitizens voting by comparing driver's license data against voter rolls. The Florida Department of State created a list of 182,000 potential noncitizens that had voted. That number was whittled down to 2,700, then to about 200 before the purge was stopped amid criticism that the data was flawed given the number of false positives — including a Brooklyn-born World War II vet. Ultimately, only 85 people were removed from the voter rolls.

The five states that hold all-mail elections (Colorado, Hawaii, Oregon, Utah, and Washington) have reported little fraud. “There's just very little evidence that there is more than a handful of fraudulent (vote-by-mail) cases across the country in a given election cycle,” Judd Choate, the director of elections in the Colorado Department of State, told the New York Times.

Richard Winger, the editor of Ballot Access News and a frequent election volunteer in San Francisco, said ballot security measures in his state offer protections.

“We have a list of all the registered voters in our precinct,” Winger said. “The list indicates which voters have received a ballot in the postal mail. In every election, voters wander in and want to vote there, but we say, ‘It says here you already got a mail ballot.’ And they say, ‘Oh, yes, it's at home’ or, ‘I never received a ballot’ or, ‘Oh, I lost it.’ And we explain that every ballot must be accounted for. They can vote provisionally at the polls, but the vote will only be counted once it is clear their original ballot didn't get submitted for counting.”

Steve Schale, a longtime Democratic consultant in Florida, said his state has improved its mail-ballot procedures in recent years.

“I think the controls that are in place today really limit the opportunities for fraud,” Schale said. “Back in the day, there was more ability for operatives to actually put their hands on ballots, such as collecting them and turning them in. Operatives on both sides will always push up to the legal line when it comes to all aspects of campaigns, but again, the laws now are so clear that one has to go out of their way to break the law.”

Verified examples of mail-ballot fraud Rare doesn't mean nonexistent. And experts agree that mail balloting does provide a greater potential for ballot fraud than in-person voting does.

“It's definitely easier to have fraud with absentee voting than in-person voting, and some cases of it have had a big impact,” said Rob Richie, president of FairVote, a voting-access advocacy group.

A congressional election was overturned in North Carolina in 2018 after evidence surfaced that the Republican candidate benefited from an effort to collect absentee ballots from voters. In South Florida alone, the Miami Herald cited examples of ballot fraud in Hialeah (1994, 2011, and 2012), Homestead (2014), and Miami and Miami-Dade County (1998, 2008, 2013).

“All this must be kept in perspective, and there are ways states seek to counter it, but it's not outlandish to say fraud is more likely with absentee voting than in-person voting,” Richie said. Lonna Atkeson, University of New Mexico political scientist, told NPR that “where there is fraud in the system, it really seems to be in mail balloting. There's some, there's not a lot. I think there's a little bit.”

Other drawbacks with voting by mail While voting by mail might be necessary in an extended battle with coronavirus, voting experts acknowledge that it's not a perfect solution.

There could be an increase in voter errors made at home since election officials won't be standing nearby to help. This means more ballots could be rejected and not counted.

Voter education will be needed for people who are unaccustomed to absentee voting. Voters will need reminders to sign their ballots, and elections officials will need to increase public outreach to dispel myths about absentee ballots, such as the one that those ballots aren't counted unless an election is close.

Some groups have less convenient access to mail than others do, such as residents of Native American reservations. Mail voting also poses challenges for voters who move frequently, or who have language or literacy issues. And some disabled voters, including those who are blind, cannot effectively cast mail ballots without assistance.

Voting at home could lead to coercion by abusive spouses or other relatives.

Our ruling

Trump said that with voting by mail, "you get thousands and thousands of people sitting in somebody's living room, signing ballots all over the place."

Voting fraud in general is considered to be rare, although voting experts agree that the risks are greater for mail balloting than for in-person voting. Still, Trump didn't produce any evidence for the "thousands and thousands" claim, and voting experts said his assertion doesn't square with what is known about the actual cases of voting fraud in the recent past.

We rate the statement False.

The screenshot shows a Politifact article. At the top, it identifies the source as Donald Trump, stating he made the claim on September 1, 2020, in a television interview. The headline is "There was tremendous cheating in New York". Below the headline are navigation tabs for "ELECTIONS", "NEW YORK", and "DONALD TRUMP". To the right is a "PANTS ON FIRE!" badge. A video player shows President Trump on Fox News with the caption "PRESIDENT TRUMP GOES ONE-ON-ONE WITH LAURA". Below the video is a caption: "President Donald Trump speaks during an interview with Laura Ingraham on Fox News on Sept. 1, 2020. (Screenshot from YouTube)".

The fact-check section is titled "Trump's baseless claim about 'tremendous cheating' in 2016" and is by Jill Terrier Ramos, dated September 11, 2020. It includes a sub-section "IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT" with the following bullet points:

- Problems with elections, such as purged voter rolls or investigators who were able to obtain ballots fraudulently, have been documented in New York state in the past, though not in the election Trump was talking about.
- The White House nor the Trump campaign offered any evidence for this claim.
- There is no evidence of cheating in the 2016 general election in New York.

A link "See the sources for this fact-check" is provided at the bottom of the fact-check section.

Figure B4. Screenshot of fact-check 4.

Text of fact-check 4

Donald Trump stated on September 1, 2020, in a television interview: "There was tremendous cheating in New York"

Trump's baseless claim about 'tremendous cheating' in 2016

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

Problems with elections, such as purged voter rolls or investigators who were able to obtain ballots fraudulently, have been documented in New York state in the past, though not in the election Trump was talking about.

The White House nor the Trump campaign offered any evidence for this claim. There is no evidence of cheating in the 2016 general election in New York.

In a recent Fox News interview, host Laura Ingraham asked President Donald Trump what he would tell Republicans and conservatives in Democratic-leaning states about whether they should vote in

November and talked about whether a higher popular vote total would send a message of support for Trump.

Trump interjected with a theory of his own.

"I think I did win the popular vote in a true sense," he said. "I think there was tremendous cheating in California, there was tremendous cheating in New York and other places."

Though he won the electoral college, Trump lost the popular vote nationwide, winning 62.99 million votes to former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 65.85 million votes.

In New York, Clinton won 4.56 million votes, while Trump won 2.82 million votes.

We were curious about his claim of "tremendous cheating in New York" in the last presidential election. We reached out to the White House and the Trump campaign to get details of what Trump was talking about, but we did not receive a response.

Primary problems Though we can't know for sure, New York has had some voting irregularities that Trump could have had in mind when he said that.

In 2017, the New York City Board of Elections admitted to improperly removing voters from the rolls ahead of the 2016 Democratic primary. The admission followed a lawsuit, in which the city board was accused of violating federal and state election laws. According to a report from the New York City Campaign Finance Board, 126,000 voters were improperly removed before the primary, but were restored in time to vote in the general election. The report did not note anything that could be considered "tremendous cheating" in the general election.

A spokesman for the state Board of Elections said that Trump may have been referring to a recent story in the New York Post. Two days before Trump's interview with Ingraham, the Post published an interview with an unnamed Democratic operative who described the ways that mail-in votes can be manipulated. The story did not refer specifically to any actions taken in New York in the 2016 general election. The operative, who worked in New Jersey and mentored operatives in other states, including New York, said that tactics to manipulate an election result, such as knocking on voters' doors and asking residents to hand over their filled-out ballots so the operative can tamper with it later, have been used "for decades." The spokesman for the Board of Elections, John Conklin, said he could not confirm or deny any criminal activity by a political operative.

Conklin also directed us to a report by the New York City Department of Investigation, which found that in 2013 investigators impersonated voters who were ineligible or deceased and were handed a ballot 61 of 63 times.

"There was nothing of note in the 2016 election to indicate there was any election tampering or cheating or whatever you want to call it," said Sarah Goff, deputy director of Common Cause New York, an organization that closely watches elections and was the lead plaintiff in the lawsuit against the city elections board in the 2016 primary.

Our ruling

There were documented problems with eligible voters being improperly purged from the New York City Board of Elections' voting lists during the 2016 primary.

But in the interview, Trump talked about how he won the popular vote "in a true sense," and made claims about "tremendous cheating" in New York and California. The popular vote he is talking about refers to the general election, not the primary. There is no evidence of cheating in the 2016 general election.

Trump made a ridiculous claim.

We rate his statement Pants on Fire.



Donald Trump

stated on May 20, 2020 in a tweet:

“Rogue” Michigan official sent absentee ballots to 7.7 million people “illegally and without authorization” ahead of the primaries and general election.



ELECTIONS STATES DONALD TRUMP



President Donald Trump speaks with reporters as he departs the White House, Friday, May 1, 2020, in Washington. Trump was en route to Camp David, Md. (AP)



By Amy Sherman
May 20, 2020

Trump falsely claims Michigan illegally sent ballots to all voters

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

- Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson announced May 19 that all registered voters in Michigan will be sent an application to vote by mail in the August and November elections – not a ballot.
- About 1.3 million of Michigan's 7.7 million registered voters are already signed up to receive absentee ballot applications automatically. Additionally, some jurisdictions are mailing applications to all local registered voters.
- Nationwide, many elections officials have said they will mail

Figure B5. Screenshot of fact-check 5.

Text of fact-check 5

Donald Trump stated on May 20, 2020, in a tweet: “Rogue” Michigan official sent absentee ballots to 7.7 million people “illegally and without authorization” ahead of the primaries and general election.

Trump falsely claims Michigan illegally sent ballots to all voters

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson announced May 19 that all registered voters in Michigan will be sent an application to vote by mail in the August and November elections — not a ballot.

About 1.3 million of Michigan’s 7.7 million registered voters are already signed up to receive absentee ballot applications automatically. Additionally, some jurisdictions are mailing applications to all local registered voters.

Nationwide, many elections officials have said they will mail applications for an absentee ballot to reduce crowds at the polls amid the pandemic.

President Donald Trump’s crusade against voting by mail has put him at odds with the truth again.

This time, he took aim at Michigan's latest effort to expand access to absentee ballots. "Breaking: Michigan sends absentee ballots to 7.7 million people ahead of Primaries and the General Election," Trump tweeted May 20. "This was done illegally and without authorization by a rogue Secretary of State. I will ask to hold up funding to Michigan if they want to go down this Voter Fraud path!" Trump is wrong. Michigan's Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson announced May 19 that her office was mailing all registered voters an application to vote by mail in the August and November elections, not a ballot.

People who complete, sign and return the application would receive a ballot about six weeks before the election.

The action follows a constitutional amendment to expand access to absentee ballots, which Michiganders supported overwhelmingly in a 2018 ballot issue.

We emailed the White House and the Trump campaign to ask for the basis of his claim and did not get a reply. Trump deleted his tweet about Michigan on the same day and then wrote a new tweet with mostly the same wording, referring to "absentee ballot applications" but still alleging an illegal action by Benson.

Trump won Michigan narrowly in 2016 and has criticized efforts to expand voting by mail this year, falsely linking it to ballot fraud and arguing that it disfavors Republicans.

Benson, a Democrat elected in 2018, responded to Trump on Twitter and in a written statement. "Hi I also have a name, it's Jocelyn Benson. And we sent applications, not ballots. Just like my GOP colleagues in Iowa, Georgia, Nebraska and West Virginia," Benson tweeted.

All four of those states indeed sent voters applications to receive absentee ballots for their primaries. Amid the pandemic, some state governments have already changed laws and policies to expand the option of voting by mail.

At the local level, some elections officials in heavily Democratic and Republican counties around the country are mailing voters information on how to apply for an absentee ballot. Election officials say voting by mail can help reduce crowds at the polls and enforce social distancing to reduce the spread of COVID-19.

Michigan voters backed changes in 2018 A recent amendment to Michigan's state constitution guarantees all registered voters the option to vote by absentee ballot for any reason. Michigan voters backed the amendment overwhelmingly in a 2018 ballot issue, along with several other measures to expand voter participation.

That means all voters have the right to vote by mail, "so it is within the Secretary's authority, as the chief elections administrator in the state, to mail applications," Benson's spokeswoman, Tracy Wimmer, told PolitiFact.

Various entities, including both major parties and advocacy organizations, routinely send absentee-ballot applications in Michigan.

Nothing in state law prohibits the secretary of state from mailing out absentee-ballot applications, said Sharon Dolente, a voting rights strategist for the ACLU of Michigan.

"The Secretary of State in Michigan has broad responsibilities for managing elections and it fits within her authority," she said.

Election officials in Michigan have faced legal challenges to their authority to mail out absentee ballot applications automatically. But Benson's office said those cases involved actions by local clerks, not the secretary of state, who is the state's chief election officer. And those challenges were decided more than a decade before the constitutional amendment guaranteeing access to an absentee ballot.

The absentee ballot voter application allows voters to check a box to receive absentee ballots for all future elections and has spaces for voters to provide their addresses for receiving the August and November election ballots.

Of Michigan's 7.7 million registered voters, about 1.3 million are on a "permanent absentee voter" list, which means their local election clerk automatically mails them applications ahead of every election, Benson wrote in her May 19 press release.

It will cost the state about \$4.5 million to mail out the applications to every voter, and the state is paying for that through the federal CARES Act.

In the May 5 local elections in Michigan, the majority of voters cast ballots by mail.

It's unclear what authority Trump thinks he has to "hold up funding to Michigan." The CARES Act and 2020 Help America Vote Act funds made clear federal money could be used to handle increased voting by mail, said Myrna Perez, director of voting rights and elections at the Brennan Center at New York University School of Law.

Our ruling

Trump tweeted that Michigan's "rogue" secretary of state sent absentee ballots to 7.7 million people "illegally and without authorization" ahead of the primaries and the general election.

Trump is wrong. The day before his tweet, the Michigan secretary of state announced that she was sending an application for absentee ballots to registered voters, not an actual ballot.

The state constitution guarantees registered voters access to an absentee ballot.

We rate this statement Pants on Fire.



Donald Trump

stated on May 26, 2020 in a tweet:

**California Gov. Gavin Newsom
“is sending Ballots to millions of
people, anyone living in the
state, no matter who they are or
how they got there, will get one”
and the election is “Rigged.”**



ELECTIONS CALIFORNIA DONALD TRUMP



President Donald Trump speaks with reporters after meeting with Senate Republicans on Capitol Hill in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)



By Chris Nichols
May 26, 2020

No, California Is Not Sending Mail-In Ballots “To Anyone In The State,” As Trump Falsely Claimed

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

- Gov. Gavin Newsom’s plan calls for sending mail-in ballots only to active registered voters in California. not to “anyone.”

Figure B6. Screenshot of fact-check 6.

Text of fact-check 6

Donald Trump stated on May 26, 2020 in a tweet:

California Gov. Gavin Newsom “is sending Ballots to millions of people, anyone living in the state, no matter who they are or how they got there, will get one” and the election is “Rigged.” No, California Is Not Sending Mail-In Ballots “To Anyone In The State,” As Trump Falsely Claimed

IF YOUR TIME IS SHORT

Gov. Gavin Newsom’s plan calls for sending mail-in ballots only to active registered voters in California, not to “anyone.” Several GOP groups filed a lawsuit to halt the governor’s plan.

Trump’s claim that voting by mail leads to fraud is misleading. Election experts have found it is exceedingly rare. See the sources for this fact-check President Trump claimed on Twitter Tuesday, without evidence, that California Gov. Gavin Newsom is sending millions of ballots to “anyone living in the state, no matter who they are,” while adding “This will be a Rigged Election. No way!”

In the same Twitter thread, Trump repeated his allegation that voting by mail “is substantially fraudulent,” a claim election experts have said is overblown.

Here’s Trump’s full statement:

”There is NO WAY (ZERO!) that Mail-In Ballots will be anything less than substantially fraudulent. Mail boxes will be robbed, ballots will be forged even illegally printed out fraudulently signed. The Governor of California is sending Ballots to millions of people, anyone.....

....living in the state, no matter who they are or how they got there, will get one. That will be followed up with professionals telling all of these people, many of whom have never even thought of voting before, how, and for whom, to vote. This will be a Rigged Election. No way!” Trump repeated his claim during a news conference Tuesday afternoon, saying “anybody that walks in California is going to get a ballot.”

Trump’s attacks come two days after the California Republican Party, along with national GOP groups, filed a federal lawsuit against Newsom, a Democrat, to halt his plan to send mail-in ballots to Californians ahead of the November election.

Newsom earlier this month ordered all counties to send out mail-in ballots, citing health concerns amid COVID-19. Contrary to Trump’s claim, no ballots have yet been sent out.

We zeroed in on Trump’s claim that “anyone living in the state, no matter who they are” would receive these ballots. We set out on a fact check.

Our research

A review of Newsom’s executive order shows only registered voters would receive vote-by-mail ballots, not “anyone living in the state,” as Trump claimed.

“Each county elections officials shall transmit vote-by-mail ballots for the November 3, 2020 General Election to all voters who are, as of the last day on which vote-by-mail ballots may be transmitted to voters in connection with that election, registered to vote in that election. As set forth in this paragraph, every Californian who is eligible to vote in the November 3, 2020 General Election shall receive a vote-by-mail ballot.”

The Secretary of State’s website outlines criteria for registering to vote in California. You must be:

A United States citizen and a resident of California, 18 years old or older on Election Day,

Not currently in state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony Not currently found mentally incompetent to vote by a court

This criteria reinforces the fact that not just “anyone” would receive a ballot.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for evidence supporting Trump’s statement. Newsom rejected the president’s assertion that voting by mail leads to fraud when asked about it during a press conference on Tuesday. The governor also cited several studies that have examined the practice and found an extremely low rate of fraud, including a 5-year effort by the Bush administration that turned up virtually no evidence of any organized effort to skew federal elections.

“I don’t think it deserves to be politicized. This is a health issue,” Newsom added.

A spokesperson for Secretary of State Alex Padilla, who is also a Democrat, also disputed the president’s assertion.

“Only active registered voters will be mailed a ballot ahead of the November 3, 2020 General Election.

The President’s tweet is completely false,” the spokesperson wrote in an email.

Voters are considered “inactive” if they do not vote in two consecutive federal general elections or if their county receives a returned residency confirmation without a forwarding address within the same county, according to the Secretary of State’s website.

Trump’s claim led Twitter, for the first time on Tuesday, to place a fact-checking warning on the president’s tweet. A spokesperson for Twitter told NPR the tweet contains “misleading information about the voting process, specifically mail-in ballots.” Padilla has pushed back against Trump’s past claims about vote-by-mail.

On Twitter on Sunday, Padilla responded to the GOP lawsuit this way: “Expanding vote-by-mail during a pandemic is not a partisan issue — it’s a moral imperative to protect voting rights and public safety. Vote-by-mail has been used safely and effectively in red, blue, and purple states for years. This lawsuit is just another part of Trump’s political smear campaign against voting by mail. We will not let this virus be exploited for voter suppression.”

Some Republicans have cited issues of voter roll maintenance as evidence of fraud. President Trump, for example, has falsely cited a January 2019 settlement California reached with the conservative group Judicial Watch as evidence. On “Meet the Press” last year, Trump alleged the settlement shows California “admitted” there were “a million” illegal votes in the 2016 presidential election. We rated that claim Pants On Fire.

In reality, the agreement Trump cited required Los Angeles County election officials to remove inactive registrations from voter rolls to comply with federal law. The 20-page settlement document, however, notes all parties agreed there was no admission of liability or wrongdoing by the state or county. It makes no mention of voter fraud or illegal voting.

During the 2016 campaign, Trump distorted the findings in a 2012 Pew study to allege widespread voter fraud was taking place. The national study found 24 million voter registrations were “no longer valid or significantly inaccurate.” More than 1.8 million dead people were listed as voters, the report said, and 2.75 million people were registered to vote in more than one state.

Trump has used that study to allege “dead people” are voting. But an analysis of the study by FactCheck.org shows “The report did not allege the 1.8 million deceased people actually voted. Rather, Pew said that it is evidence of the need to upgrade voter registration systems.”

Our rating

President Trump claimed California Gov. Gavin Newsom “is sending millions of ballots to anyone living in the state, no matter who they are,” while adding “This will be a Rigged Election. No way!”

In reality, Newsom ordered counties to send mail-in ballots only to registered voters in California, hardly to “anyone living in the state.”

To register to vote in California, residents must be 18, U.S. citizens, not in state or federal prison or on parole for the conviction of a felony, and not declared mentally incompetent to vote by a court.

When combined with the misleading allegation that mail-in voting leads to fraud (something election experts say is exceedingly rare), and Trump’s assertion that California’s election will be “Rigged,” the president’s overall claim is reckless, unsubstantiated and wrong.

We rate it Pants On Fire!

Appendix C: Additional tables referenced in main document

Table C1. Ordered probit results for effects of fact-checks on election confidence.

Variables	Election Confidence Index	Election Confidence Index
Fact-Checks	0.129*** (0.0367)	0.125*** (0.0385)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.0937** (0.0411)
Age		0.0910* (0.0538)
Male		0.131*** (0.0386)
Party ID		0.127*** (0.0362)
Ideology		0.0388 (0.0440)
Nonwhite		0.110** (0.0462)
Media Index		0.705*** (0.0967)
Battleground		0.0643 (0.0440)
Observations	2,993	2,736

Note: *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.

Table C2. Confidence in elections by partisanship (OLS).

Variables	Model 1	Model 2
Fact-Checks	0.0235*** (0.00768)	0.0212*** (0.00765)
Party ID	0.0128** (0.00555)	0.00765 (0.00712)
Fact-Checks x Party ID	0.0299*** (0.00824)	0.0317*** (0.00821)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.0173** (0.00801)
Age		0.0205* (0.0105)
Male		0.0265*** (0.00757)
Ideology		0.00792 (0.00939)
Nonwhite		0.0207** (0.00960)
Media Index		0.138*** (0.0204)
Battleground States		0.0120 (0.00879)
Constant	0.521*** (0.00518)	0.418*** (0.0139)
Observations	2,891	2,736
R-squared	0.023	0.053

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.

Table C3. Descriptive statistics and balance.

Variable	Control (1)		Treatment (2)		T-test
	N	Mean/SE	N	Mean/SE	Difference (1)-(2)
Education	1,596	0.324 (0.012)	1,404	0.335 (0.013)	-0.012
Age	1,596	0.512 (0.009)	1,404	0.505 (0.010)	0.008
Gender	1,596	0.474 (0.013)	1,404	0.457 (0.013)	0.016
Party ID	1,548	0.088 (0.019)	1,349	0.126 (0.020)	-0.037
Ideology	1,492	-0.004 (0.016)	1,292	0.037 (0.017)	-0.041*
Nonwhite	1,596	0.248 (0.011)	1,404	.265 (0.012)	-0.017
Media Index	1,593	0.570 (0.005)	1,400	0.572 (0.006)	-0.002
State of Residence	1,596	0.253 (0.011)	1,404	0.259 (0.012)	-0.006

Note: The value displayed for the t-tests are the differences in mean across the groups, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.

Table C4. Scale reliability for election confidence.

Item	Obs	Item-Test Correlation	Item-Rest Correlation	Avg. Iter-item Correlation	α
Election Free and Accurate	2,996	.66	.51	.34	.75
Votes Counted Fairly	2,999	.77	.65	.30	.72
Able to Cast votes	2,999	.64	.48	.34	.76
Fair Coverage	2,999	.55	.37	.37	.78
Officials Fair	2,998	.77	.66	.30	.72
Voters Not Intimidated	2,998	.62	.46	.35	.76
No Foreign Interference	2,999	.58	.41	.36	.77
Test Scale				.34	.78

Table C5. Effects on election confidence accounting for attrition (OLS).

Variables	Election Confidence Index
Fact-Checks	0.0249*** (0.00761)
4 Year Degree and Above	-0.00855 (0.00816)
Age	0.0303*** (0.0105)
Male	0.0264*** (0.00767)
Party ID	0.0322*** (0.00711)
Ideology	0.00856 (0.00870)
Nonwhite	0.0193** (0.00907)
Battleground States	0.0127 (0.00870)
Constant	0.489*** (0.00979)
Observations	2,743
R-squared	0.030

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .10$.

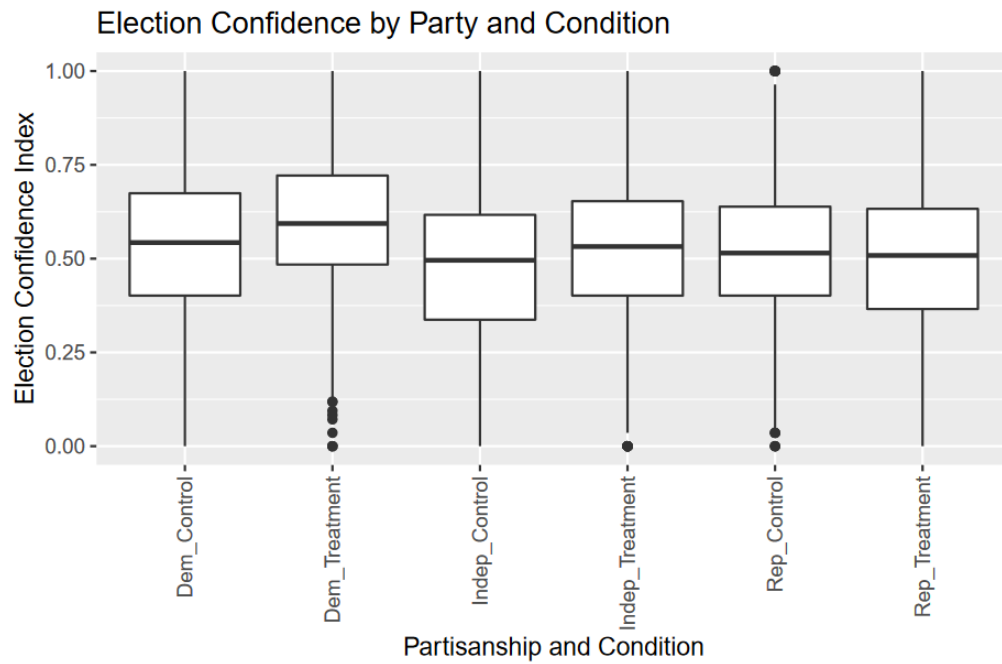


Figure C1. Boxplot of election confidence by party and condition.

Appendix D: Additional analyses from pre-registration plan

We also pre-registered research questions related to the effect of exposure to fact-checks correcting false statements by President Trump regarding the integrity of the election on views on election policy and intended vote choice. In addition, we specified analyses looking at whether any effects vary by party identification, political engagement measured by media habits, participation and interest, and by political efficacy. The results from the analyses for these additional research questions, which as noted in the text are largely null, are provided below.¹⁵

Will the effects of exposure to fact-checks correcting false statements by President Trump regarding the integrity of the election affect views on election policy?

Table D1. Effects on policy views (OLS).

Variables	Election Policy Index	Election Policy Index
Fact-Checks	-0.0246** (0.0112)	-0.0394*** (0.00847)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0110 (0.00895)
Age		-0.0539*** (0.0114)
Male		-0.0388*** (0.00857)
Party ID		0.153*** (0.00784)
Ideology		0.187*** (0.00938)
Nonwhite		0.00557 (0.0108)
Media Index		0.0943*** (0.0215)
Battleground States		0.0149 (0.0101)
Constant	0.640*** (0.00770)	0.614*** (0.0152)
Observations	2,997	2,740
R-squared	0.002	0.501

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

¹⁵ We pre-registered research questions on demand for fact-checks which depended on obtaining click-through data from YouGov. We did not receive this data and therefore cannot answer these questions.

Will the effects of exposure to fact-checks correcting false statements by President Trump regarding the integrity of the election affect intended vote choice?

Table D2. Vote preference: Trump.

Variables	Trump Vote (Logit)	Trump Vote (Logit)	Trump Vote (OLS)	Trump Vote (OLS)
Fact-Checks	-0.121 (0.0844)	0.193 (0.143)	-0.0294 (0.0205)	0.0206 (0.0141)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.114 (0.152)		-0.00514 (0.0151)
Age		0.485** (0.202)		-0.0641*** (0.0198)
Male		0.0939 (0.142)		0.0121 (0.0142)
Party ID		-2.818*** (0.148)		-0.407*** (0.0131)
Ideology		-1.364*** (0.168)		-0.143*** (0.0161)
Nonwhite		-0.441*** (0.165)		0.0579*** (0.0167)
Media Index		0.280 (0.344)		0.0344 (0.0347)
Battleground States		0.122 (0.161)		0.00867 (0.0163)
Constant	-0.281*** (0.0577) (0.0577)	-0.993*** (0.243) (0.243)	0.430*** (0.0141) (0.0141)	0.389*** (0.0248) (0.0248)
Observations	2,322	2,094	2,322	2,094
R-squared			0.001	0.584

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D3. Vote preference: Biden.

Variables	Biden Vote (Logit)	Biden Vote (Logit)	Biden Vote (OLS)	Biden Vote (OLS)
Fact-Checks	0.148* (0.0839)	-0.144 (0.147)	0.0364* (0.0206)	-0.0115 (0.0139)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.305* (0.156)		0.0223 (0.0148)
Age		0.574*** (0.210)		0.0499** (0.0194)
Male		0.124 (0.148)		-0.00310 (0.148)
Party ID		3.007*** (0.155)		-0.418*** (0.0128)
Ideology		1.565*** (0.173)		0.148*** (0.0158)
Nonwhite		0.301* (0.162)		0.0356** (0.0164)
Media Index		1.303*** (0.361)		0.152*** (0.0340)
Battleground States		-0.156 (0.167)		-0.0156 (0.0159)
Constant	0.341*** (0.0579)	-1.654*** (0.262)	0.416*** (0.0141)	0.333*** (0.0243)
Observations	2,322	2,094	2,322	2,094
R-squared			0.001	0.602

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Will the effects of exposure to fact-checks vary by political engagement, as measured by media habits, past political participation and political interest?

Table D4. Election confidence and media consumption (OLS).

Variables	Election Confidence Index	Election Confidence Index
Fact-Checks	-0.0197 0.0234)	-0.0399* (0.0240)
Media Index	0.131*** (0.0263)	0.0866*** (0.0274)
Fact-Checks x Media Index	0.0800** (0.0379)	0.111*** (0.0387)
4-Year Degree and Above		-0.0168** (0.00802)
Age		0.0188* (0.0105)
Male		0.0262*** (0.00757)
Ideology		0.00864 (0.00965)
Nonwhite		0.0202** (0.00958)
Party ID		0.0263*** (0.00778)
Battleground States		0.0121 (0.00883)
Constant	0.445*** (0.0161)	0.448*** (0.0175)
Observations	2,986	2,736
R-squared	0.036	0.050

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D5. Vote intention and media consumption (OLS).

Variables	Intention to Vote	Intention to vote
Fact-Checks	-0.0218 (0.0422)	0.0194 (0.0403)
Media Index	0.405*** (0.0430)	0.240*** (0.0402)
Fact-Checks x Media Index	0.0589 (0.0619)	-0.00631 (0.0580)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0578*** (0.0105)
Age		0.106*** (0.0155)
Male		0.00819 (0.0111)
Ideology		0.0143 (0.0135)
Nonwhite		-0.0230 (0.0141)
Party ID		-0.00352 (0.0102)
Battleground States		-0.00748 (0.0124)
Constant	0.613*** (0.0290)	0.673*** (0.0292)
Observations	2,319	2,095
R-squared	0.094	0.088

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D6. Election policy and media consumption (OLS).

Variables	Election Policy Index	Election Policy Index
Fact-Checks	-0.0321 (0.0306)	-0.0597** (0.0264)
Media Index	0.148*** (0.0343)	0.0783*** (0.0285)
Fact-Checks x Media Index	0.0129 (0.0501)	0.0347 (0.0415)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0111 (0.00895)
Age		-0.0539*** (0.0114)
Male		-0.0386*** (0.00856)
Ideology		0.187*** (0.00938)
Nonwhite		0.00550 (0.0108)
Party ID		0.153*** (0.00783)
Battleground States		0.0148 (0.0101)
Constant	0.555*** (0.0208)	0.623*** (0.0191)
Observations	2,990	2,740
R-squared	0.013	0.501

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D7. Trump support and media consumption (OLS).

Variables	Will Vote for Trump	Will Vote for Trump
Fact-Checks	-0.0722 (0.0577)	-0.0163 (0.0421)
Media Index	0.0344 (0.0656)	0.00522 (0.0468)
Fact-Checks x Media Index	0.0739 (0.0951)	0.0631 (0.0678)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.00490 (0.0151)
Age		0.0638*** (0.0198)
Male		0.0126 (0.0142)
Ideology		-0.143*** (0.0161)
Nonwhite		-0.0577*** (0.0167)
Party ID		-0.407*** (0.0131)
Battleground States		0.00862 (0.0163)
Constant	0.411*** (0.0397)	0.406*** (0.0306)
Observations	2,318	2,094
R-squared	0.002	0.584

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D8. Biden support and media consumption (OLS).

Variables	Will Vote for Biden	Will Vote for Biden
Fact-Checks	0.0594 (0.0574)	0.0320 (0.0413)
Media Index	0.337*** (0.0653)	0.187*** (0.0459)
Fact-Checks x Media Index	-0.0399 (0.0947)	-0.0744 (0.0665)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0220 (0.0148)
Age		0.0503*** (0.0194)
Male		0.00372 (0.0139)
Ideology		0.148*** (0.0158)
Nonwhite		0.0354** (0.0164)
Party ID		0.419*** (0.0128)
Battleground States		-0.0156 (0.0159)
Constant	0.224*** (0.0395)	0.313*** (0.0300)
Observations	2,318	2,094
R-squared	0.021	0.602

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D9. Voting behavior and media consumption (OLS).

Variables	Voted	Voted
Fact-Checks	-0.0504 (0.0552)	-0.0297 (0.0590)
Media Index	0.393*** (0.0637)	0.136** (0.0661)
Fact-Checks x Media Index	0.0897 (0.0916)	0.0522 (0.0936)
4 Year Degree and Above Age		0.101*** (0.0213)
Age		0.520*** (0.0266)
Male		0.0306 (0.0198)
Ideology		-0.0147 (0.0225)
Nonwhite Party ID		-0.0747*** (0.0238)
Party ID		0.0341* (0.0181)
Battleground States		-0.000388 (0.0226)
Constant	0.292*** (0.0384)	0.173*** (0.0436)
Observations	2,319	2,095
R-squared	0.036	0.183

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D10. Election confidence and political interest (OLS).

Variables	Election Confidence Index	Election Confidence Index
Fact-Checks	-0.00948 (0.0251)	-0.0471* (0.0268)
Political Interest	0.0484** (0.0206)	-0.0528** (0.0234)
Fact-Checks x Political Interest	0.0499 (0.0311)	0.0933*** (0.0325)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.0185** (0.00811)
Age		0.0210* (0.0108)
Male		0.0280*** (0.00765)
Party ID		0.0275*** (0.00786)
Ideology		0.00818 (0.00975)
Nonwhite		0.0184* (0.00975)
Media Index		0.144*** (0.0223)
Battleground States		0.0118 (0.00888)
Constant	0.485*** (0.0165)	0.453*** (0.0195)
Observations	2,872	2,693
R-squared	0.015	0.051

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D11. Election confidence and political participation (OLS).

Variables	Election Confidence Index	Election Confidence Index
Fact-Checks	0.0170 (0.0147)	0.0122 (0.0153)
Political Participation	0.00254 (0.00287)	-0.0112*** (0.00306)
Fact-Checks x Political Participation	0.00348 (0.00435)	0.00484 (0.00440)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.0119 (0.00814)
Age		0.0224** (0.0106)
Male		0.0275*** (0.00757)
Party ID		0.0272*** (0.00776)
Ideology		0.0131 (0.00966)
Nonwhite		0.0180* (0.00967)
Media Index		0.156*** (0.0208)
Battleground States		0.0119 (0.00884)
Constant	0.514*** (0.00959)	0.434*** (0.0153)
Observations	2,989	2,735
R-squared	0.006	0.052

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D12. *Vote intention and political interest (OLS).*

Variables	Intention to Vote	Intention to Vote
Fact-Checks	-0.0381 0.0451)	-0.0291 (0.0499)
Political Interest	0.521*** (0.0349)	0.383*** (0.0392)
Fact-Checks x Political Interest	0.0594 (0.0513)	0.0502 (0.0563)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0337*** (0.00981)
Age		0.0658*** (0.0148)
Male		-0.0179* (0.0102)
Ideology		0.00506 (0.0126)
Nonwhite		-0.000373 (0.0132)
Party ID		-0.00372 (0.00970)
Media Index		0.0210 (0.0275)
Battleground States		0.00127 (0.0118)
Constant	0.477*** (0.0303)	0.548*** (0.0336)
Observations	2,216	2,058
R-squared	0.257	0.193

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D13. Vote intention and political participation (OLS).

Variables	Intention to Vote	Intention to Vote
Fact-Checks	0.0093 0.0263)	0.0309 (0.0277)
Political Participation	0.0934*** (0.00545)	0.0693*** (0.00555)
Fact-Checks x Political Participation	-0.00467 (0.00753)	-0.00911 (0.00768)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0161 0.00992)
Age		0.0731*** (0.0146)
Male		-0.00750 (0.0101)
Ideology		-0.00797 (0.0129)
Nonwhite		-0.00996 (0.0129)
Party ID		-0.00865 (0.00982)
Media Index		0.106*** (0.0259)
Battleground States		0.00465 (0.0116)
Constant	0.621*** (0.0182)	0.604*** (0.0253)
Observations	2,320	2,094
R-squared	0.259	0.228

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D14. Election policy and political interest (OLS).

Variables	Election Policy Index	Election Policy Index
Fact-Checks	-0.0352 (0.0293)	-0.0941*** (0.0298)
Political Interest	0.0631** (0.0275)	-0.0751*** (0.0271)
Fact-Checks x Political Interest	0.0139 (0.0404)	0.0704* (0.0361)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0112 (0.00911)
Age		-0.0526*** (0.0116)
Male		-0.0350*** (0.00876)
Ideology		0.186*** (0.00953)
Nonwhite		0.00334 (0.0111)
Party ID		0.157*** (0.00800)
Media Index		0.115*** (0.0239)
Battleground States		0.0134 (0.0102)
Constant	0.595*** (0.0196)	0.658*** (0.0222)
Observations	2,876	2,697
R-squared	0.005	0.505

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D15. Election policy and political participation (OLS).

Variables	Election Policy Index	Election Policy Index
Fact-Checks	-0.0157 (0.0177)	-0.0299* (0.0168)
Political Participation	0.0336*** (0.00394)	0.00331 (0.00344)
Fact-Checks x Political Participation	-0.00403 (0.00609)	-0.00343 (0.00477)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0100 (0.00921)
Age		0.0544*** (0.0114)
Male		-0.0395*** (0.00861)
Ideology		0.186*** (0.00958)
Nonwhite		0.00588 (0.0109)
Party ID		0.153*** (0.00785)
Media Index		.0907*** (0.0221)
Battleground States		0.0147 (0.0101)
Constant	0.551*** (0.0117)	0.608*** (0.0167)
Observations	2,994	2,739
R-squared	0.035	0.501

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D16. *Trump support and political interest (OLS).*

	Will Vote for Trump	Will Vote for Trump
Fact-Checks	-0.0284 (0.0619)	0.0514 (0.0463)
Political Interest	0.171*** (0.0536)	0.162*** (0.0428)
Fact-Checks x Political Interest	-0.00454 (0.0790)	-0.0427 (0.0577)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.0160 (0.0153)
Age		0.0468** (0.0201)
Male		0.00099 (0.0144)
Ideology		-0.149*** (0.0162)
Nonwhite		0.0511*** (0.0170)
Party ID		-0.406*** (0.0132)
Media Index		-0.0421 (0.0389)
Battleground States		0.0144 (0.0163)
Constant	0.319*** (0.0414)	0.329*** (0.0341)
Observations	2,215	2,057
R-squared	0.009	0.589

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D17. Trump support and political participation (OLS).

Variables	Will Vote for Trump
Fact-Checks	0.0300 (0.0266)
Political Participation	0.0181*** (0.00621)
Fact-Checks x Political Participation	-0.00419 (0.00855)
4 Year Degree and Above	-0.0160 (0.0154)
Age	0.0549*** (0.0199)
Male	0.00856 (0.0142)
Ideology	-0.149*** (0.0161)
Nonwhite	-0.0553*** (0.0168)
Party ID	-0.408*** (0.0131)
Media Index	0.00134 (0.0359)
Battleground States	0.0125 (0.0163)
Constant	0.370*** (0.0268)
Observations	2,093
R-squared	0.587

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D18. Biden support and political interest (OLS).

Variables	Will Vote for Biden	Will Vote for Biden
Fact-Checks	0.0440 (0.0618)	-0.0380 (0.0455)
Political Interest	0.256*** (0.0535)	0.106** (0.0420)
Fact-Checks x Political Interest	-0.00996 (0.0788)	0.0330 (0.0567)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0143 (0.0151)
Age		0.0349* (0.0198)
Male		-0.00869 (0.0142)
Ideology		0.147*** (0.0159)
Nonwhite		0.0423** (0.0167)
Party ID		0.415*** (0.0130)
Media Index		0.0965** (0.0382)
Battleground States		-0.0152 (0.0160)
Constant	0.237*** (0.0413)	0.297*** (0.0335)
Observations	2,215	2,057
R-squared	0.020	0.604

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D19. Biden support and political participation (OLS).

Variables	Will Vote for Biden
Fact-Checks	-0.000657 (0.0261)
Political Participation	0.0161*** (0.00609)
Fact-Checks x Political Participation	-0.00464 (0.00839)
4 Year Degree and Above	0.0129 (0.0151)
Age	0.0420** (0.0196)
Male	-0.00621 (0.0139)
Ideology	0.143*** (0.0158)
Nonwhite	0.0377** (0.0165)
Party ID	0.418*** (0.0128)
Media Index	0.124*** (0.0352)
Battleground States	-0.0125 (0.0160)
Constant	0.315*** (0.0263)
Observations	2,093
R-squared	0.603

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D20. Voting behavior and political interest (OLS).

Variable	Voted	Voted
Fact-Checks	0.00215 (0.0546)	0.0222 (0.0647)
Political Interest	0.554*** (0.0476)	0.318*** (0.0610)
Fact-Checks x Political Interest	-0.0198 (0.0704)	-0.0395 (0.0804)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0843*** (0.0216)
Age		0.490*** (0.0273)
Male		0.00557 (0.0202)
Ideology		-0.0175 (0.0225)
Nonwhite		-0.0598** (0.0242)
Party ID		0.0265 (0.0182)
Media Index		0.0130 (0.0550)
Battleground States		0.00200 (0.0226)
Constant	0.130*** (0.0365)	0.0397 (0.0475)
Observations	2,216	2,058
R-Squared	0.084	0.196

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D21. Voting behavior and political participation (OLS).

Variables	Voted	Voted
Fact-Checks	0.00992 (0.0325)	0.0313 (0.0372)
Political Participation	0.0944*** (0.00807)	0.0608*** (0.00896)
Fact-Checks x Political Participation	-0.00863 (0.0114)	-0.0142 (0.0121)
4 Year Degree and Above Age		0.0657*** (0.0215)
Age		0.492*** (0.0269)
Male		0.0170 (0.0196)
Ideology		-0.0337 (0.0223)
Nonwhite		-0.0653*** (0.0235)
Party ID		0.0304* (0.0179)
Media Index		0.0503 (0.0498)
Battleground States		0.0100 (0.0224)
Constant	0.291*** (0.0221)	0.0948*** (0.0363)
Observations	2,320	2,094
R-squared	0.095	0.209

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Will the effects of exposure to fact-checks vary by political efficacy?

Table D22. Election confidence and political efficacy (OLS).

Variables	Election Confidence	
	Index	Index
Fact-Checks	0.0360*** (0.0139)	0.0365** (0.0142)
Political Efficacy	0.203*** (0.0135)	0.184*** (0.0142)
Fact-Checks x Political Efficacy	-0.0158 (0.0203)	-0.0185 (0.0207)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.0210*** (0.00775)
Age		0.00772 (0.0100)
Male Party ID		0.0233*** (0.00723)
Party ID		0.0236*** (0.00721)
Ideology		0.0102 (0.00898)
Nonwhite		0.0159* (0.00905)
Media Index		0.0610*** (0.0196)
Battleground States		0.00992 (0.00841)
Constant	0.406*** (0.00911)	0.367*** (0.0145)
Observations	2,987	2,731
R-squared	0.123	0.136

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D23. Intention to vote and political efficacy (OLS).

Variables	Intention to Vote	Intention to Vote
Fact-Checks	0.0331 (0.0280)	0.0507* (0.0263)
Political Efficacy	0.271*** (0.0256)	0.162*** (0.0248)
Fact-Checks x Political Efficacy	-0.0368 (0.0363)	-0.0603* (0.0339)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0539*** (0.0103)
Age		0.0986*** (0.0153)
Male		0.00481 (0.0108)
Ideology		0.0151 (0.0132)
Nonwhite		-0.0261* (0.0138)
Party ID		-0.00254 (0.0101)
Media Index		0.179*** (0.0298)
Battleground States		-0.010 (0.0122)
Constant	0.694*** (0.0196)	0.624*** (0.0267)
Observations	2,321	2,093
R-squared	0.095	0.121

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D24. Election policy and political efficacy (OLS).

Variables	Election Policy Index	Election Policy Index
Fact-Checks	-0.0556*** (0.0200)	-0.0424** (0.0169)
Political Efficacy	0.0292 (0.0203)	0.0245 (0.0170)
Fact-Checks x Political Efficacy	0.0557* (0.0295)	0.00567 (0.0241)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0100 (0.00898)
Age		-0.0560*** (0.0114)
Male		-0.0393*** (0.00858)
Ideology		0.187*** (0.00942)
Nonwhite		0.00472 (0.0108)
Party ID		0.153*** (0.00786)
Media Index		0.0835*** (0.0221)
Battleground States		0.0140 (0.0101)
Constant	0.624*** (0.0136)	0.608*** (0.0171)
Observations	2,991	2,735
R-squared	0.007	0.502

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D25. Trump support and political efficacy (OLS).

Variables	Will Vote for Trump	Will Vote for Trump
Fact-Checks	0.00594 (0.0367)	0.000382 (0.0264)
Political Efficacy	0.110*** (0.0382)	0.000580 (0.0273)
Fact-Checks x Political Efficacy	-0.0628 (0.0557)	0.0360 (0.0392)
4 Year Degree and Above		-0.00606 (0.0152)
Age		0.0632*** (0.0199)
Male		0.0122 (0.0142)
Ideology		-0.143*** (0.0161)
Nonwhite		-0.0583*** (0.0168)
Party ID		-0.407*** (0.0131)
Media Index		0.0271 (0.0359)
Battleground States		0.00852 (0.0163)
Constant	0.370*** (0.0252)	0.394*** (0.0273)
Observations	2,320	2,092
R-squared	0.005	0.584

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D26. Biden support and political efficacy (OLS).

Variables	Will Vote for Biden	Will Vote for Biden
Fact-Checks	-0.00724 (0.0366)	0.00319 (0.0257)
Political Efficacy	0.129*** (0.0381)	0.114*** (0.0266)
Fact-Checks x Political Efficacy	0.0807 (0.0556)	-0.0238 (0.0381)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0185 (0.0148)
Age		0.0436** (0.0193)
Male		-0.00588 (0.0138)
Ideology		0.148*** (0.0157)
Nonwhite		0.0326** (0.0163)
Party ID		0.420*** (0.0128)
Media Index		0.108*** (0.0349)
Battleground States		-0.0180 (0.0158)
Constant	0.345*** (0.0252)	0.300*** (0.0265)
Observations	2,320	2,092
R-squared	0.018	0.607

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.

Table D27. Voting behavior and political efficacy (OLS).

Variables	Voted	Voted
Fact-Checks	0.00404 (0.0366)	-0.00477 (0.0379)
Political Efficacy	0.195*** (0.0381)	0.0582 (0.0387)
Fact-Checks x Political Efficacy	-0.00357 (0.0555)	0.0121 (0.0553)
4 Year Degree and Above		0.0979*** (0.0213)
Age		0.517*** (0.0267)
Male		0.0296 (0.0198)
Ideology		-0.0149 (0.0225)
Nonwhite		-0.0772*** (0.0237)
Party ID		0.0352* (0.0182)
Media Index		0.131*** (0.0501)
Battleground States		-0.00044 (0.0226)
Constant	0.408*** (0.0252)	0.147*** (0.0384)
Observations	2,321	2,093
R-squared	0.020	0.185

Note: Standard errors in parentheses, *** $p < .01$, ** $p < .05$, * $p < .1$.