

# Perceptions of Election or Voter Fraud in the 2020 Presidential Election: Nationwide Survey Results

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## 1 Executive Summary

The Monitoring the Election project at Caltech conducted a national survey of 5,051 registered voters immediately after the November 2020 presidential election. One of the important topics in our survey was the perception of election or voter fraud. In this report, we provide an initial and high-level overview of preliminary results from our national survey.

Key findings include:

- There are many registered voters nationally who said that election or voter fraud is very common (between 12% and 17% for different types of fraud) or occurs occasionally (15-17%). Ballot stealing or tempering, fraudulent casting of absentee ballots intended for another person, and non-citizen voting are perceived to be the top three types of election or voter fraud. Only about half of the voters believe each of the six types of fraud occurs infrequently or almost never.
- There are substantial perception gaps between Democratic and Republican voters with respect to election or voter fraud of various forms, and similar perception gaps between Biden and Trump voters.
- The survey reveals that male, younger, and less educated voters were more likely to believe in widespread election or voter fraud.

## 2 Perception of Election or Voter Fraud

### 2.1 Survey Details

We conducted a post-election survey, interviewing 5,051 registered voters across the United States. Our survey focused primarily on their voting experiences in the 2020 November presidential election. Details about the survey methodology are in the final section of this brief.

Here we focus on questions on perception of election or voter fraud that were included in the survey: *The following is a list of activities that are usually against the law. Please indicate how often you think these activities occur in your county:*

- People voting more than once in an election;
- People stealing or tampering with ballots that have been voted;
- People pretending to be someone else when going to vote;
- People voting who are not U.S. citizens;
- People voting an absentee ballot intended for another person;
- Officials changing the reported vote count in a way that is not a true reflection of the ballots that were actually counted.

For all of these questions on perception of election or voter fraud, respondents could indicate that it is very common, it occurs occasionally, it occurs infrequently, it almost never occurs, or say that they are not sure.

### 2.2 Perception of Fraud in the 2020 Presidential Election

The primary results are provided in summary form in Figure 1, with detailed topline in Table 1. Overall, between 12% and 17% of the voters in our post-election survey reported that they believe that some type of election or voter fraud is very common, even though there is no evidence for widespread voter fraud in this or past elections. A further 15-17% of voters believe some form of election or voter fraud occurs occasionally. Only about half of the voters believe each of the six types of fraud occurs infrequently or almost never occurs.

There are subtle differences in the perception of different types of election or voter fraud. Only 36% and 32% of the voters in our post-election survey reported that they believe that ballot stealing or tampering and fraudulent casting of absentee ballots intended for another person almost never occur, respectively, followed by non-citizen voting (38%). In comparison, between 39% and 41% of voters believe the other three forms of fraud almost never occurs. The proportions of voters believing ballot stealing or tampering and fraudulent casting of absentee ballots intended for another person to be very common or occur occasionally (34% and 33%) are also the highest among all types of election or voter fraud, again followed by non-citizen voting (32%).

Table 1: Perception of Election or Voter Fraud

	Very Common	Occasional	Infrequent	Almost Never	Not Sure
Double Voting	12	17	14	41	15
Ballot Stealing or Tampering	17	17	16	36	15
Voter Impersonation at the Polls	13	16	16	39	16
Non-citizen Voting	17	15	12	38	18
Absentee Ballot Impersonation	15	18	17	32	17
Officials Manipulating Vote Count	14	15	14	40	18

### 2.3 Perception of Fraud by Partisanship and Presidential Vote

One of the most substantial patterns seen in the data regarding opinions about election or voter fraud from this election are the drastic differences in the perception of election or voter fraud by party identification and presidential vote. These are provided in Table 2.

Starting with party identification, only between 5% and 7% of Democratic voters said they believe some type of election or voter fraud is very common, while 24%-32% of Republican voters said the same. Among independents, between 11% and 17% believe that some form of fraud is very common. Again, ballot stealing or tempering, fraudulent casting of absentee ballots intended for another person, and non-citizen voting are perceived to be the top three types of election or voter fraud among Republican voters. A stunning 30% or so of Republicans believe each of these three types of fraud is very common, with a further 24%-27% of Republican voters believing these forms of fraud occur occasionally. By contrast, only a single-digit percentage of Democrats said any type of election or voter fraud is very common, with a majority of Democrats saying fraud almost never occurs. The perception of fraud among independents lies somewhere in between.

We see similar partisan breakdowns when we look at those who reported voting for Biden or Trump. Again, at the perception of each of six types of election or voter fraud, between 56% and 68% of the Biden voters in our sample said it almost never occurs. By contrast, 10%-18% of Trump voters said election or voter fraud of these forms almost never occurs, with between 24% and 35% believing election or voter fraud is very common. Like what we see for Republican identifiers, three types of election or voter fraud stand out among Trump voters. 35% believe that non-citizen voting to be very common, 30% ballot stealing or tempering, and 30% fraudulent casting of absentee ballots intended for another person.

These substantial gaps in perceptions of fraud between Republicans and Democrats, and between Trump and Biden supporters, will require additional research.

Table 2: Perception of Fraud: Party and Presidential Vote

<i>Double Voting</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
It is very common	5	11	24	3	24
It occurs occasionally	9	19	26	6	29
It occurs infrequently	13	15	14	13	15
It almost never occurs	60	41	18	68	15
I'm not sure	13	14	18	11	16
<i>Ballot Stealing or Tampering</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
It is very common	7	17	29	5	30
It occurs occasionally	9	17	26	7	28
It occurs infrequently	17	16	15	17	15
It almost never occurs	52	36	16	60	14
I'm not sure	15	15	14	12	14
<i>Voter Impersonation at the Polls</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
It is very common	5	11	24	3	24
It occurs occasionally	9	16	25	6	29
It occurs infrequently	12	17	18	12	18
It almost never occurs	59	39	16	67	13
I'm not sure	15	17	16	12	15
<i>Non-citizen Voting</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
It is very common	5	16	32	3	35
It occurs occasionally	7	15	24	5	25
It occurs infrequently	12	13	13	12	11
It almost never occurs	60	38	13	66	12
I'm not sure	16	19	18	14	16
<i>Absentee Ballot Impersonation</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
It is very common	5	13	29	3	30
It occurs occasionally	10	20	27	8	30
It occurs infrequently	17	20	14	18	14
It almost never occurs	51	30	12	56	10
I'm not sure	16	18	18	15	16
<i>Officials Manipulating Vote Count</i>	Dem.	Ind.	Rep.	Biden	Trump
It is very common	5	13	24	4	24
It occurs occasionally	8	15	23	7	25
It occurs infrequently	11	16	14	11	15
It almost never occurs	59	37	20	64	18
I'm not sure	17	19	19	15	18

## 2.4 Perception of Fraud by Selected Demographics

We provide additional breakdowns of perception of these six types of election or voter fraud by self-reported gender (Table 3), age (Table 4), educational attainment (Table 5), and race and ethnicity (Table 6). Important results from those analyses are:

- Compared to male voters, female voters are more likely to believe that fraud almost never occurs and less likely to believe that election or voter fraud is very common or occurs occasionally. A higher proportion of female voters said they were not sure.
- Compared to younger voters, older voters are more likely to believe that election or voter fraud almost never occurs. For example, between 37% and 50% of voters older than 65 believe fraud of various forms almost never occurs, while only 24%-34% of voters younger than 29 hold the same belief.
- Voters with higher educational attainment are more likely to believe that election or voter fraud almost never occurs and less likely to believe that fraud is very common or occurs occasionally. For example, between 37% and 47% of voters with a college degree and between 44% and 53% of voters with a postgraduate degree believe fraud of various forms almost never occurs, while only 24%-32% of voters with high school education or less hold similar beliefs.
- Between 28% and 35% of black voters said they were not sure about the prevalence of election or voter fraud, much higher than for other racial or ethnic groups, making a comparison across different racial and ethnic groups difficult.

Table 3: Perception of Fraud: Gender

<i>Double Voting</i>	Male	Female
It is very common	14	11
It occurs occasionally	20	15
It occurs infrequently	15	13
It almost never occurs	38	43
I'm not sure	12	18
<i>Ballot Stealing or Tampering</i>	Male	Female
It is very common	18	16
It occurs occasionally	18	16
It occurs infrequently	17	15
It almost never occurs	36	36
I'm not sure	12	17
<i>Voter Impersonation at the Polls</i>	Male	Female
It is very common	15	11
It occurs occasionally	19	14
It occurs infrequently	16	15
It almost never occurs	38	41
I'm not sure	13	19
<i>Non-citizen Voting</i>	Male	Female
It is very common	21	13
It occurs occasionally	16	13
It occurs infrequently	13	12
It almost never occurs	36	40
I'm not sure	13	22
<i>Absentee Ballot Impersonation</i>	Male	Female
It is very common	18	13
It occurs occasionally	20	17
It occurs infrequently	17	17
It almost never occurs	31	33
I'm not sure	14	20
<i>Officials Manipulating Vote Count</i>	Male	Female
It is very common	16	11
It occurs occasionally	16	14
It occurs infrequently	14	13
It almost never occurs	39	40
I'm not sure	15	21

Table 4: Perception of Fraud: Age

<i>Double Voting</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
It is very common	12	13	13	11
It occurs occasionally	21	19	17	15
It occurs infrequently	16	15	13	14
It almost never occurs	33	38	42	47
I'm not sure	19	15	14	13
<i>Ballot Stealing or Tampering</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
It is very common	19	18	18	12
It occurs occasionally	19	17	16	17
It occurs infrequently	21	18	14	13
It almost never occurs	25	30	38	44
I'm not sure	16	16	13	14
<i>Voter Impersonation at the Polls</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
It is very common	14	13	13	12
It occurs occasionally	16	15	18	15
It occurs infrequently	20	16	14	14
It almost never occurs	32	39	40	45
I'm not sure	18	17	16	14
<i>Non-citizen Voting</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
It is very common	13	14	20	17
It occurs occasionally	14	15	14	16
It occurs infrequently	19	12	10	12
It almost never occurs	34	40	38	41
I'm not sure	20	19	17	15
<i>Absentee Ballot Impersonation</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
It is very common	14	15	16	14
It occurs occasionally	22	19	17	18
It occurs infrequently	21	20	16	14
It almost never occurs	24	28	34	37
I'm not sure	19	18	17	16
<i>Officials Manipulating Vote Count</i>	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+
It is very common	15	16	13	10
It occurs occasionally	18	16	15	12
It occurs infrequently	18	18	12	10
It almost never occurs	29	34	41	50
I'm not sure	20	16	19	18

Table 5: Perception of Fraud: Education

<i>Double Voting</i>	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Postgrad
It is very common	15	11	11	10
It occurs occasionally	17	21	15	12
It occurs infrequently	13	14	15	15
It almost never occurs	32	41	47	53
I'm not sure	22	13	11	9
<i>Ballot Stealing or Tampering</i>	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Postgrad
It is very common	22	16	14	12
It occurs occasionally	19	18	15	12
It occurs infrequently	12	17	19	17
It almost never occurs	26	36	41	48
I'm not sure	20	13	12	11
<i>Voter Impersonation at the Polls</i>	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Postgrad
It is very common	16	13	10	10
It occurs occasionally	18	16	17	11
It occurs infrequently	15	16	17	15
It almost never occurs	29	40	45	52
I'm not sure	22	15	12	11
<i>Non-citizen Voting</i>	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Postgrad
It is very common	18	17	16	15
It occurs occasionally	16	16	15	9
It occurs infrequently	12	12	13	12
It almost never occurs	30	37	44	51
I'm not sure	24	17	12	13
<i>Absentee Ballot Impersonation</i>	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Postgrad
It is very common	17	15	13	12
It occurs occasionally	21	18	19	12
It occurs infrequently	15	18	19	18
It almost never occurs	24	32	37	44
I'm not sure	23	17	12	14
<i>Officials Manipulating Vote Count</i>	HS or less	Some college	College grad	Postgrad
It is very common	18	13	11	9
It occurs occasionally	17	15	14	12
It occurs infrequently	13	15	14	13
It almost never occurs	28	41	45	53
I'm not sure	25	16	15	13



Table 6: Perception of Fraud: Race and Ethnicity

<i>Double Voting</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
It is very common	12	8	15	16
It occurs occasionally	18	17	17	13
It occurs infrequently	14	10	15	20
It almost never occurs	43	37	36	39
I'm not sure	13	28	17	11
<i>Ballot Stealing or Tampering</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
It is very common	17	15	19	19
It occurs occasionally	17	16	18	13
It occurs infrequently	16	11	15	24
It almost never occurs	38	30	30	33
I'm not sure	12	29	18	11
<i>Voter Impersonation at the Polls</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
It is very common	13	10	12	15
It occurs occasionally	17	14	16	15
It occurs infrequently	16	10	17	17
It almost never occurs	40	36	35	41
I'm not sure	13	30	20	12
<i>Non-citizen Voting</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
It is very common	18	12	15	18
It occurs occasionally	16	10	14	17
It occurs infrequently	12	11	12	13
It almost never occurs	40	32	38	38
I'm not sure	15	34	21	15
<i>Absentee Ballot Impersonation</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
It is very common	16	11	15	17
It occurs occasionally	19	13	19	18
It occurs infrequently	17	14	18	21
It almost never occurs	33	28	29	30
I'm not sure	15	34	19	14
<i>Officials Manipulating Vote Count</i>	White	Black	Hispanic	Other
It is very common	13	14	16	16
It occurs occasionally	16	12	16	13
It occurs infrequently	14	9	15	19
It almost never occurs	42	30	33	38
I'm not sure	15	35	20	14

### **3 Survey Methodology**

The survey questionnaire was developed by our research group at Caltech, based on similar surveys of voter experiences that we have conducted since 2006. The survey methodology was reviewed by the California Institute of Technology's Institutional Review Board. This survey was fielded online by YouGov from November 4-10, 2020, using respondents from their opt-in panel and an external partner. The survey's population is U.S. registered voters. The sample contains responses from 5,051 subjects and is weighted based on gender, age, race, education, U.S. Census region, state of residence, and 2020 presidential vote or non-vote. These weights range from 0.1 to 5.973, with a mean of one and a standard deviation of 1. The survey margin of error, adjusted for weighting, is  $\pm 2\%$ . We will continue to release reports with similar results from this survey in the coming days and weeks.

### **About the Monitoring the Election Project**

The Monitoring the Election project was founded in 2018, with financial support from the John Randolph Haynes and Dora Haynes Foundation. The initial phase of the project in 2018 was a pilot study that implemented various election auditing, forensic, and monitoring methodologies, focusing on Orange County (CA). The project expanded scope in 2020, covering Southern California (with a focus on Orange and Los Angeles Counties), as well as providing forensic analysis statewide. Details about the project can be found at <https://monitoringtheelection.us>.