

Fact-Value Disagreements about Threats to Electoral Integrity: Beliefs about the Prevalence and Severity of Fraudulent, Uncounted, and Foregone Votes in the 2020 Election

Gregory A. Huber¹ John J. Cho¹ Scott E. Bokemper Alan S. Gerber¹ William Brady² Killian McLoughlin³ Molly Crockett³

¹Yale University

²Northwestern University

³Princeton University

August 31st, 2023

What Explains Partisan Conflict over Election Rules?

- ▶ Partisans may disagree about the *type* of election error

What Explains Partisan Conflict over Election Rules?

- ▶ Partisans may disagree about the *type* of election error
 - ▶ Uncounted legitimate votes: valid ballots that are not counted

What Explains Partisan Conflict over Election Rules?

- ▶ Partisans may disagree about the *type* of election error
 - ▶ Uncounted legitimate votes: valid ballots that are not counted
 - ▶ Counted fraudulent votes: votes that should not have been counted but which are

What Explains Partisan Conflict over Election Rules?

- ▶ Partisans may disagree about the *type* of election error
 - ▶ Uncounted legitimate votes: valid ballots that are not counted
 - ▶ Counted fraudulent votes: votes that should not have been counted but which are
 - ▶ Forgone votes: an eligible voter who wants to vote is not able to

What Explains Partisan Conflict over Election Rules?

- ▶ Partisans may disagree about the *type* of election error
 - ▶ Uncounted legitimate votes: valid ballots that are not counted
 - ▶ Counted fraudulent votes: votes that should not have been counted but which are
 - ▶ Forgone votes: an eligible voter who wants to vote is not able to
- ▶ Partisans can disagree about the *prevalence* and *severity* of election errors

What Explains Partisan Conflict over Election Rules?

- ▶ Partisans may disagree about the *type* of election error
 - ▶ Uncounted legitimate votes: valid ballots that are not counted
 - ▶ Counted fraudulent votes: votes that should not have been counted but which are
 - ▶ Forgone votes: an eligible voter who wants to vote is not able to
- ▶ Partisans can disagree about the *prevalence* and *severity* of election errors
 - ▶ Prevalence (facts): how frequently do these election errors occur?

What Explains Partisan Conflict over Election Rules?

- ▶ Partisans may disagree about the *type* of election error
 - ▶ Uncounted legitimate votes: valid ballots that are not counted
 - ▶ Counted fraudulent votes: votes that should not have been counted but which are
 - ▶ Forgone votes: an eligible voter who wants to vote is not able to
- ▶ Partisans can disagree about the *prevalence* and *severity* of election errors
 - ▶ Prevalence (facts): how frequently do these election errors occur?
 - ▶ Severity (value): how much should we care if these election errors happen?

Past Research

- ▶ Disagreement on what counts in the umbrella term “voter fraud” between Democrats and Republicans ([Sheagley and Udani, 2021](#))

Past Research

- ▶ Disagreement on what counts in the umbrella term “voter fraud” between Democrats and Republicans ([Sheagley and Udani, 2021](#))
- ▶ Partisans might trade-off differently between *voter suppression* and *voter fraud* ([Beaulieu, 2014](#); [Wilson and Brewer, 2013](#))

Past Research

- ▶ Disagreement on what counts in the umbrella term “voter fraud” between Democrats and Republicans ([Sheagley and Udani, 2021](#))
- ▶ Partisans might trade-off differently between *voter suppression* and *voter fraud* ([Beaulieu, 2014](#); [Wilson and Brewer, 2013](#))
- ▶ While empirically rare, fraud is perceived as common (e.g. [Ansolabehere and Persily, 2008](#))

Past Research

- ▶ Disagreement on what counts in the umbrella term “voter fraud” between Democrats and Republicans ([Sheagley and Udani, 2021](#))
- ▶ Partisans might trade-off differently between *voter suppression* and *voter fraud* ([Beaulieu, 2014](#); [Wilson and Brewer, 2013](#))
- ▶ While empirically rare, fraud is perceived as common (e.g. [Ansolabehere and Persily, 2008](#))
- ▶ Most of these studies focus solely on the *frequency* of election errors, without considering values also ([Alvarez and Hall, 2008](#))

Past Research

- ▶ Disagreement on what counts in the umbrella term “voter fraud” between Democrats and Republicans ([Sheagley and Udani, 2021](#))
- ▶ Partisans might trade-off differently between *voter suppression* and *voter fraud* ([Beaulieu, 2014](#); [Wilson and Brewer, 2013](#))
- ▶ While empirically rare, fraud is perceived as common (e.g. [Ansolabehere and Persily, 2008](#))
- ▶ Most of these studies focus solely on the *frequency* of election errors, without considering values also ([Alvarez and Hall, 2008](#))
- ▶ We still don't know which explains rancor over election rules or how people would trade-off given a chance to choose

Research Design

- ▶ Cross-sectional surveys before, during, and after the 2020 Election

Research Design

- ▶ Cross-sectional surveys before, during, and after the 2020 Election
 - ▶ Pre-Election Survey: October 29th to November 2nd, 2020

Research Design

- ▶ Cross-sectional surveys before, during, and after the 2020 Election
 - ▶ Pre-Election Survey: October 29th to November 2nd, 2020
 - ▶ During-Election Survey: November 5th to November 13th, 2020

Research Design

- ▶ Cross-sectional surveys before, during, and after the 2020 Election
 - ▶ Pre-Election Survey: October 29th to November 2nd, 2020
 - ▶ During-Election Survey: November 5th to November 13th, 2020
 - ▶ Post-Election Survey: January 15th to January 20th, 2021

Research Design

- ▶ Cross-sectional surveys before, during, and after the 2020 Election
 - ▶ Pre-Election Survey: October 29th to November 2nd, 2020
 - ▶ During-Election Survey: November 5th to November 13th, 2020
 - ▶ Post-Election Survey: January 15th to January 20th, 2021
- ▶ Three studies about election errors show similar results

Research Design

- ▶ Cross-sectional surveys before, during, and after the 2020 Election
 - ▶ Pre-Election Survey: October 29th to November 2nd, 2020
 - ▶ During-Election Survey: November 5th to November 13th, 2020
 - ▶ Post-Election Survey: January 15th to January 20th, 2021
- ▶ Three studies about election errors show similar results
 - ▶ Study 1: Measures beliefs about the frequency and severity of three types of election errors (fraudulent, uncounted, and foregone votes)

Research Design

- ▶ Cross-sectional surveys before, during, and after the 2020 Election
 - ▶ Pre-Election Survey: October 29th to November 2nd, 2020
 - ▶ During-Election Survey: November 5th to November 13th, 2020
 - ▶ Post-Election Survey: January 15th to January 20th, 2021
- ▶ Three studies about election errors show similar results
 - ▶ Study 1: Measures beliefs about the frequency and severity of three types of election errors (fraudulent, uncounted, and foregone votes)
 - ▶ Study 2: Measures reactions to concrete vignettes describing instance of election error

Research Design

- ▶ Cross-sectional surveys before, during, and after the 2020 Election
 - ▶ Pre-Election Survey: October 29th to November 2nd, 2020
 - ▶ During-Election Survey: November 5th to November 13th, 2020
 - ▶ Post-Election Survey: January 15th to January 20th, 2021
- ▶ Three studies about election errors show similar results
 - ▶ Study 1: Measures beliefs about the frequency and severity of three types of election errors (fraudulent, uncounted, and foregone votes)
 - ▶ Study 2: Measures reactions to concrete vignettes describing instance of election error
 - ▶ Study 3: Forced choice conjoint ex-ante election rules trading off among the three election errors

Finding #1 – Pre-Election Partisan Gaps in Perception of the Frequency and Severity of Errors

- ▶ Both a fact and a value divide pre-election for election errors

Finding #1 – Pre-Election Partisan Gaps in Perception of the Frequency and Severity of Errors

- ▶ Both a fact and a value divide pre-election for election errors
 - ▶ Beliefs about frequency and severity for uncouncted votes are the same for both parties

Finding #1 – Pre-Election Partisan Gaps in Perception of the Frequency and Severity of Errors

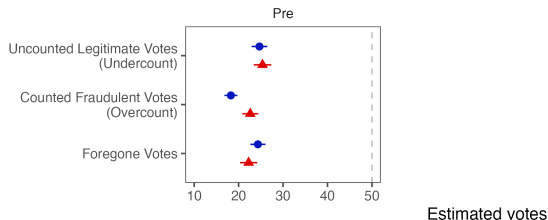
- ▶ Both a fact and a value divide pre-election for election errors
 - ▶ Beliefs about frequency and severity for uncouncted votes are the same for both parties
 - ▶ Democrats (compared to Republicans) believe foregone votes to happen more frequently and to be more important

Finding #1 – Pre-Election Partisan Gaps in Perception of the Frequency and Severity of Errors

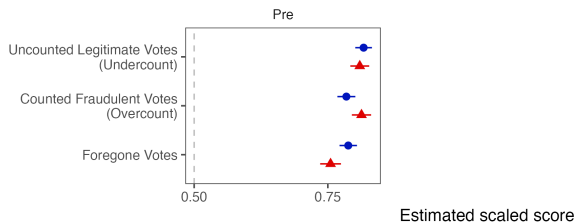
- ▶ Both a fact and a value divide pre-election for election errors
 - ▶ Beliefs about frequency and severity for uncounted votes are the same for both parties
 - ▶ Democrats (compared to Republicans) believe foregone votes to happen more frequently and to be more important
 - ▶ Republicans (compared to Democrats) believe fraudulent votes to happen more frequently and to be more important

Estimates of Frequency and Severity of Election Error, S1

Facts



Values



Finding #2 – Certain Beliefs Diverge After the Election

- ▶ After the election, both parties' beliefs about the frequency of election errors go down

Finding #2 – Certain Beliefs Diverge After the Election

- ▶ After the election, both parties' beliefs about the frequency of election errors go down
 - ▶ The sole exception is Republicans and fraudulent votes

Finding #2 – Certain Beliefs Diverge After the Election

- ▶ After the election, both parties' beliefs about the frequency of election errors go down
 - ▶ The sole exception is Republicans and fraudulent votes
- ▶ However, Republicans react more negatively to all election errors

Finding #2 – Certain Beliefs Diverge After the Election

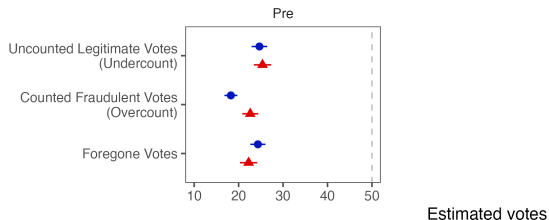
- ▶ After the election, both parties' beliefs about the frequency of election errors go down
 - ▶ The sole exception is Republicans and fraudulent votes
- ▶ However, Republicans react more negatively to all election errors
 - ▶ Democrats' reactions mainly stay the same (except for uncounted votes)

Finding #2 – Certain Beliefs Diverge After the Election

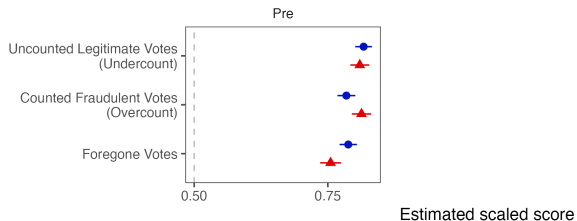
- ▶ After the election, both parties' beliefs about the frequency of election errors go down
 - ▶ The sole exception is Republicans and fraudulent votes
- ▶ However, Republicans react more negatively to all election errors
 - ▶ Democrats' reactions mainly stay the same (except for uncounted votes)
- ▶ Fraudulent votes are the only area for which beliefs about both prevalence and severity increase

Estimates of Frequency and Severity of Election Error, S1

Facts

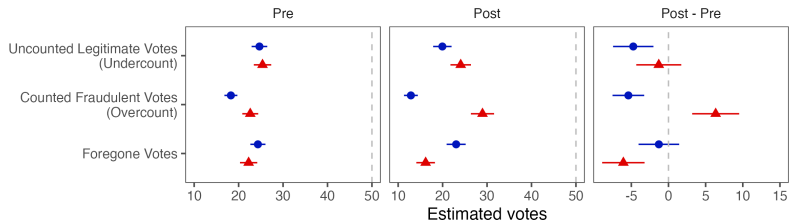


Values

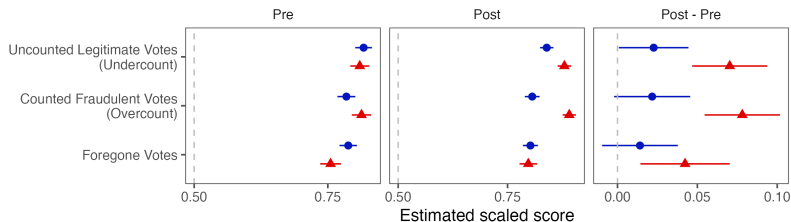


Estimates of Frequency and Severity of Election Error, S1

Facts



Values



Finding #3 – Reactions to Scenarios and Election Rules Follow the Same Patterns

- ▶ Study 2 (election error vignettes) yields the same patterns

Finding #3 – Reactions to Scenarios and Election Rules Follow the Same Patterns

- ▶ Study 2 (election error vignettes) yields the same patterns
 - ▶ Republicans are angrier about uncounted and fraudulent votes compared to foregone votes

Finding #3 – Reactions to Scenarios and Election Rules Follow the Same Patterns

- ▶ Study 2 (election error vignettes) yields the same patterns
 - ▶ Republicans are angrier about uncounted and fraudulent votes compared to foregone votes
 - ▶ They become angrier about fraudulent votes after the election

Finding #3 – Reactions to Scenarios and Election Rules

Follow the Same Patterns

- ▶ Study 2 (election error vignettes) yields the same patterns
 - ▶ Republicans are angrier about uncounted and fraudulent votes compared to foregone votes
 - ▶ They become angrier about fraudulent votes after the election
- ▶ Study 3 (choosing election rules) finds no partisan differences about uncounted and fraudulent votes

Finding #3 – Reactions to Scenarios and Election Rules

Follow the Same Patterns

- ▶ Study 2 (election error vignettes) yields the same patterns
 - ▶ Republicans are angrier about uncounted and fraudulent votes compared to foregone votes
 - ▶ They become angrier about fraudulent votes after the election
- ▶ Study 3 (choosing election rules) finds no partisan differences about uncounted and fraudulent votes
 - ▶ But Democrats care more about foregone votes than do Republicans

Effect of Different Types of Election Errors on Choice, S3

	Study 3A	Study 3B
Constant	0.389*** (0.022)	0.412*** (0.011)
Undercount Gap	-0.056*** (0.006)	-0.121*** (0.007)
Overcount Gap	-0.048*** (0.006)	-0.098*** (0.006)
Foregone Gap	0.011*** (0.001)	
Republican	-0.065** (0.021)	-0.051*** (0.011)
Undercount Gap × Republican	0.003 (0.009)	0.009 (0.009)
Overcount Gap × Republican	0.013 (0.010)	-0.008 (0.009)
Foregone Gap × Republican	-0.006** (0.002)	

Effect of Different Types of Election Errors on Choice, S3

	Study 3A	Study 3B
Constant	0.389*** (0.022)	0.412*** (0.011)
Undercount Gap	-0.056*** (0.006)	-0.121*** (0.007)
Overcount Gap	-0.048*** (0.006)	-0.098*** (0.006)
Foregone Gap	0.011*** (0.001)	
Republican	-0.065** (0.021)	-0.051*** (0.011)
Undercount Gap × Republican	0.003 (0.009)	0.009 (0.009)
Overcount Gap × Republican	0.013 (0.010)	-0.008 (0.009)
Foregone Gap × Republican	-0.006** (0.002)	

Effect of Different Types of Election Errors on Choice, S3

	Study 3A	Study 3B
Constant	0.389*** (0.022)	0.412*** (0.011)
Undercount Gap	-0.056*** (0.006)	-0.121*** (0.007)
Overcount Gap	-0.048*** (0.006)	-0.098*** (0.006)
Foregone Gap	0.011*** (0.001)	
Republican	-0.065** (0.021)	-0.051*** (0.011)
Undercount Gap × Republican	0.003 (0.009)	0.009 (0.009)
Overcount Gap × Republican	0.013 (0.010)	-0.008 (0.009)
Foregone Gap × Republican	-0.006** (0.002)	

Conclusion

- ▶ There is some agreement about the prevalence, but not *severity*, of election errors between Democrats and Republicans

Conclusion

- ▶ There is some agreement about the prevalence, but not *severity*, of election errors between Democrats and Republicans
 - ▶ Fact-checking alone won't be able to solve, because of the value differences between partisans

Conclusion

- ▶ There is some agreement about the prevalence, but not *severity*, of election errors between Democrats and Republicans
 - ▶ Fact-checking alone won't be able to solve, because of the value differences between partisans
- ▶ Not all is lost. Partisans similarly want to minimize fraudulent and undercounted votes when choosing election rules (except for foregone votes for Democrats)

Conclusion

- ▶ There is some agreement about the prevalence, but not *severity*, of election errors between Democrats and Republicans
 - ▶ Fact-checking alone won't be able to solve, because of the value differences between partisans
- ▶ Not all is lost. Partisans similarly want to minimize fraudulent and undercounted votes when choosing election rules (except for foregone votes for Democrats)
 - ▶ For example – the debate over voter ID

Conclusion

- ▶ There is some agreement about the prevalence, but not *severity*, of election errors between Democrats and Republicans
 - ▶ Fact-checking alone won't be able to solve, because of the value differences between partisans
- ▶ Not all is lost. Partisans similarly want to minimize fraudulent and undercounted votes when choosing election rules (except for foregone votes for Democrats)
 - ▶ For example – the debate over voter ID
 - ▶ Republicans are concerned about the prevalence *and* severity of fraudulent votes

Conclusion

- ▶ There is some agreement about the prevalence, but not *severity*, of election errors between Democrats and Republicans
 - ▶ Fact-checking alone won't be able to solve, because of the value differences between partisans
- ▶ Not all is lost. Partisans similarly want to minimize fraudulent and undercounted votes when choosing election rules (except for foregone votes for Democrats)
 - ▶ For example – the debate over voter ID
 - ▶ Republicans are concerned about the prevalence *and* severity of fraudulent votes
 - ▶ But Democrats also prioritize election rules that increase turnout

Thank you!

Email: john.cho@yale.edu

References

- Alvarez, R. M. and Hall, T. E. (2008). Measuring Perceptions of Election Threats: Survey Data from Voters and Elites. In Alvarez, R. M., Hall, T. E., and Hyde, S. D., editors, *Election Fraud: Detecting and Deterring Electoral Manipulation*, pages 71–88. Brookings Institution Press, Washington, D.C.
- Ansolabehere, S. and Persily, N. (2008). Vote Fraud in the Eye of the Beholder: The Role of Public Opinion in the Challenge to Voter Identification Requirements. *Harvard Law Review*, 121(7):1737–1774.
- Beaulieu, E. (2014). From voter ID to party ID: How political parties affect perceptions of election fraud in the U.S. *Electoral Studies*, 35:24–32.
- Sheagley, G. and Udani, A. (2021). Multiple meanings? The link between partisanship and definitions of voter fraud. *Electoral Studies*, 69:102244.
- Wilson, D. C. and Brewer, P. R. (2013). The Foundations of Public Opinion on Voter ID Laws. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 77(4):962–984.