



UNDERSTANDING ELECTION FRAUD BELIEFS: Interviews with People Who Think Trump Likely Won the 2020 Election

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SUMMARY

The Center for Media Engagement interviewed 56 people who believed that Donald Trump most likely won the 2020 presidential election to talk about their political outlooks, how they constructed their picture of what happened in the election, and what sources they trusted to tell them the truth.

Perceptions of widespread fraud didn't hinge on a specific piece of evidence or a report from one particular source. Often, participants relied on an accumulation of suspicions to support their conclusion, instead of outlining how the election could have been skewed in Biden's favor. The interviews made clear that there is a crisis of trust among this group, leading many to feel they had to do their own research in order to find out the truth and some to doubt whether the truth is available to them at all. Further, their identities were often more complex than zealous Trump loyalists; there was variation in how deeply held people's beliefs about election fraud were and many people reported using a range of sources to learn about politics. Better understanding people who question the 2020 presidential results will give news organizations, social media companies, and fact-checkers opportunities to address concerns about the legitimacy of future elections.

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KEY FINDINGS

- Many participants had a list of suspicions that led them to question the result of the 2020 presidential election, several of which reflected the unique circumstances in 2020.
- Participants did not indicate that they were in tightly sealed, right-wing echo chambers. Many mentioned using mainstream national news sources, watching local media, and tuning in to television broadcasts on election night.
- The majority of participants did not seem to subscribe to multiple conspiracy theories.
- Participants trusted unedited video content, personal experience, and their own research and judgment more than social media and news organizations.
- Yet many participants felt that they could not trust any news source, politician, or other entity to tell them the full truth. Some even questioned whether the truth about the election's legitimacy is attainable at all.

FULL FINDINGS

This report provides insight into the beliefs and media habits of those who question the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election results. Its purpose is not to fact-check the statements made by the people who shared their views with us; numerous other sources have done this work, such as this [review of election fraud claims from the Associated Press](#) which did not find support for the claim of widespread election fraud. However, more than [half](#) of Republican voters still believe that Donald Trump won the 2020 election. We hope these interviews can help us learn more about this group and their views in order to inform newsrooms, researchers, and technology companies. Note that we use pseudonyms throughout this report, a standard practice in this type of research.

HOW PARTICIPANTS SUPPORTED THEIR ELECTION FRAUD CLAIMS

We examined how participants justified their ideas about the election's lack of integrity and found that the unique circumstances in 2020, particularly the pandemic, increased susceptibility to fraud claims. The four most common points that people shared were concerns about the increase in mail-in ballots due to the pandemic, their feeling that Trump was under attack from the government and the media, the contrast between Biden's smaller rally sizes and record-breaking voter turnout, and the way in which some swing states shifted to Biden as votes were reported. These factors aroused a sense in participants that something about the election was fishy, a sense they held onto even in

moments of doubt about the strength of their conclusions. In this section, we elaborate on the four most common points and describe how people viewed the burden of proof for their claims.

The COVID-19 Pandemic and Changes in Voting Rules

The pandemic created an environment of uncertainty for participants particularly as some states changed election rules to accommodate safety concerns related to voting. “I don’t think I had any fears until I started hearing about the mail-in ballots and all the fraud that people were claiming was going on. Just because with COVID going on at the same time, just part of me in the back of my mind thought: is this a ploy to try to make sure that they get more votes for Biden, by using COVID as an excuse?” Mary, 33, shared. Tyrone, 65, cited COVID-19 as the primary reason for his concerns about the election: “I think it was rigged because of COVID. I think there were just too many lax things going on because of COVID, whether it was not enough staff in the polling offices, whether it was just – we’ve never really rolled out mail-in ballots like we did. Who knows who voted?”

Like Tyrone, many participants perceived the voting process as almost lawless or a free-for-all. “You have literally millions of ballots going out. They’re going out like candy. They’re going out at random. It doesn’t surprise me at all they got some counties where they had more votes than registered voters. You have an incredible opportunity for fraud and some places they actually used that opportunity,” said Elizabeth, 70. An extreme distrust of mail-in ballots in particular was common among participants. Lucy, 37, shared: “I feel like specifically the whole stay at home, don’t die from COVID, everyone should do their mail-in vote somehow opened the door for whatever malicious practice you can do, whether or not that was the idea or the intent.”

A smaller, yet notable, number of participants pointed to a more long-standing, but related, concern: the strength of voter ID laws. “I believe, in order for you to vote, whether you vote absentee or whether you vote on the day of the election, you should be presenting a valid ID, they should check that against the voter registrar, determine that you are exactly who you said you are, and that you are registered to vote and one man, one vote, one woman, one vote, whatever, that’s the way it should be. It’s completely susceptible to fraud. I mean, these things could be coming from anywhere,” said Ozzy, 55.

Perceptions that Trump was Under Attack

Participants’ perception that Donald Trump had been harassed by the media and government officials throughout his presidency fed their ideas about voter fraud. Interviewees felt that Trump was so reviled that actors on the left would go to extreme and illegal lengths to see that he was out of office. “The Democrats said there was no way they

were letting Donald Trump become President for another four years, no matter what. No matter what they had to do, he was not going to be President. They would not allow him,” said Jake, 49. Frank, 45, also criticized the media’s coverage of Trump. “We watched four years of just these stories that just never went away and they were trying to find reason. And, ‘Hey, he sneezed today. Let’s impeach him,’” Frank said. His perception that the media and government officials were against Trump was so influential in Frank’s belief in the illegitimacy of the 2020 election that when asked what information, if any, could potentially change his mind, he shared: “Even if they just came out with a report and Donald Trump himself came out and said, ‘You know what? I looked at everything. And yeah, I think Joe Biden legitimately won.’ Even if that were to happen, I would still say, ‘Yeah. But man, there was just so much effort to get him to ensure that he didn’t have another four years.’ It would be hard for me to just say, ‘okay, it was 100% legit.’” Although this specific view was not expressed by others with whom we spoke, it demonstrates the intensity with which some hold their beliefs about election fraud.

The feeling that Trump was unfairly represented by the media during his presidency also exacerbated some participants’ lack of trust in reputable media sources, potentially limiting the impact of their related fact-checking efforts. Sarah, 33, said: “I think the mask went off with Trump. You had media personalities saying, ‘It doesn’t matter. We don’t have to be objective because he’s Hitler. You got to stop him no matter what. It’s our job to stop him.’ So, I don’t believe anything they say.”

Interpreting Events through the Lens of Fraud

The climate described above seemed to predispose participants toward suspicion, leading people to interpret events related to the election as indicators of intentional fraud over other possible explanations. For example, when discussing why Biden’s victory didn’t make sense to them, participants characterized facts such as Biden’s smaller rally sizes as a lack of enthusiasm, rather than a reflection of support for stronger COVID-19 precautions on the left than on the right. “I guess the actual amount of votes that he got at the end of the night, there was no way. I was listening there thinking, ‘How in the hell did Joe Biden get 81 million votes and never even held a rally with more than 20 or 30 people there?’ Didn’t really speak to anybody. Didn’t go out in public. Here’s Donald Trump going to these rallies and tens of thousands of people there and all of the enthusiasm was there, but I just couldn’t figure out how in the world that happened,” Kyle, 55, said. The contrast between Biden’s rally sizes and record-breaking voter turnout stood in for hard evidence of wrongdoing for some, like Calli, 56, who said: “This man did not get 80 million votes. It’s just, there’s no way. No one goes to his rallies. It’s just, it couldn’t be more obvious that he is so completely unpopular, and there’s no way. There’s no logic behind it. Even if you didn’t have evidence, there’s no conscious logic behind it.”

Several people mentioned watching television coverage of key states shifting to Biden on election night as the first moment when they thought the election could actually be stolen. Walter, 60, said: “I think that was one of the big red flags. Things are going along and this candidate’s ahead and this one’s behind and all of a sudden it flips in a dramatic fashion. Now that could be perfectly normal, but we don’t know that as the voters, we don’t know that because nobody’s telling us how these processes work or what’s going on with it.”

It appears that election night visuals were particularly powerful in cueing some people’s suspicions. “I feel like I can just see this vividly in my mind. Like when people re-posted things showing just the spike and the graphs and showing how maybe Pennsylvania just shot up,” Sally, 26, said. Candace, 62, similarly shared: “You see the graph, the line, it’s a line graph, they go up, Trump’s ahead, Biden’s staying whatever, 50,000 votes below him. Steady, steady, steady, steady, steady all the way up, and then three o’clock in the morning when they stopped counting right after they started again, I can’t remember how many hours it was, they – Oh, there’s a big jump in the Biden numbers. And now all of a sudden, the graph, it just went up on the Biden line. So all of a sudden, the Biden numbers, ‘Oh my God, Biden’s ahead 15,000 now.’ In that one moment.” Participants already nervous about perceived animosity toward Trump and about COVID-19’s impact on the election interpreted this shift as evidence of fraudulent votes for Biden. As [FiveThirtyEight](#) explains, unprecedented factors in the 2020 election, such as the number of people who voted early or by mail “made it tricky to follow the vote in real time. The candidate who led a given state on Tuesday night wasn’t always the one who eventually won it, leading many real-time observers to conclude the presidential race was closer than it actually was.”

Mail-in voting during the pandemic, perceived disdain for Trump, Biden’s rally sizes, and some states flipping for Biden were the most commonly cited points people shared to support their beliefs about election fraud. While concerns about mail-in voting could relate to the mechanisms behind election fraud, the others do not directly speak to how the election could have been illegally tilted in Biden’s favor. Biden’s rally sizes, for example, could arouse doubts about his popularity, but they leave the execution of widespread election fraud unexplained.

The Burden of Proof

No single piece of evidence appeared to be a smoking gun for participants. Instead, interviewees built a collage of evidence, where the number of suspicious instances they could recall was key to their thinking even when they questioned the validity of some of the information. As Meadow, 62, described: “It’s just not passing the smell test. Now, if you just had one thing, maybe, but if you start adding all this stuff up, and I’m sorry, it just does not look good.” This was also reflected in the fact that, when explaining their thoughts

about the legitimacy of the 2020 election, many interviewees expressed a rapid-fire list of concerns. The participants' beliefs are in contrast to fact-checking efforts that found [no evidence of widespread fraud](#) and that reached conclusions in direct conflict with some of the statements included below.



“It just seems like there were so many things with this election. Thousands of ballots found in the garbage or ballots being burned or poll workers not being able to enter polling stations for whatever reason, those kind of things. And listen, I mean, if there were a hundred stories, which there was probably more, it just seemed like to me that anytime something like that came out about the election in regard to it being rigged or being fraudulent, they always had an answer for something and they always had an answer for it. And I think to myself, what’s the probability of say, and I know I’m just using a number, what’s the probability of a hundred instances of voter fraud, or a rigged election in any way? A hundred instances and you’re telling me that every single one checked out? You have an explanation for every single one? I find that very, very hard to believe.” – Paris, 49.



“It just seemed like there was just tons of examples of just irregularities that took place and just unlike any other election I’ve seen. There just seemed to be a lot of examples that you can point to where it’s just like, ‘Wow, yeah. That doesn’t seem right. That’s odd.’ Everything from the water main break that happened in Atlanta to the counting stopping in Pennsylvania and then they restarted it, and all of a sudden they picked up enough to win. And then also it seemed like there were a lot of people that were willing to come forward and give sworn affidavits, ‘Hey, trucks were coming in and I’d never seen this before and going out.’ And I mean, it just seemed like there were a lot of people that were willing to come forward and report some of the irregularities that they saw.” – Frank, 45.

Some people defended certain points they used as evidence of election fraud as well-researched, but other points were described as anecdotal, merely odd, or even questionable in their strength or authenticity. Even so, participants used the latter types of points as building blocks in a broader narrative about widespread election fraud. “I would say even before the election, to be honest just with hearing about all the mail-in ballots that were coming in and hearing stories of dead people voting and like I said, I don’t know if it’s all true or not but, hearing, having that stuff resonate with me, kind of raised my doubts even before the election,” said John, 36. While also acknowledging uncertainty, Abigail, 37, seemed to use her desire for election processes to be simple as evidence of fraud: “There’s nothing scientific or any facts about this, just if it takes three days to count up electronic votes you probably did it wrong because it doesn’t feel like it should be that difficult to add up votes, you know? To me, it just kind of seems like maybe [Trump] might have won.” As an example of how participants let anecdotes from their personal experience guide their thoughts about the election, Karmyn, 23, noted that her family received a mail-in ballot for her grandfather who had recently passed away: “The only reason I truly, truly, truly believed that [fraud] was happening is because I physically saw it and not because like I read anything or anything like that.”

Many interviewees acknowledged that they did not have definitive proof for their belief in election fraud; it was the accumulation of questions that they found most important. “So it’s really tough to say, oh yeah the election was stolen. For me, it raises a lot of eyebrows for the factors I just mentioned about the media and obviously the elite machine. There’s questions in my mind that say well could the election have been stolen? Yeah, I think it could have been. Do I have out and out proof or knowledge of it? No. But there’s just certain things that kind of point to the results being dubious,” said Trevor, 47. Lou, 36, felt like he didn’t have access to the resources he would need to prove his suspicions: “The big burden is proof. Right. So, I don’t have proof. And in the light conversations I have had with people, it almost seems like a sort of ‘proving God’ burden that they place on you. It’s like, ‘well, if there is interference in the election, show me.’ Like, well, that’s silly. You know, I don’t have that sort of connections. But anyway, yes, I believe that there was [election fraud]. And it’s just a feeling I get. It’s just an idea, you know. I don’t have any backup or anything like that or any, ‘well, look at this article.’”

Cynicism About the Ability to Reach Conclusions

Several participants believed that we will never know what truly happened in the 2020 election, allowing some to think that conclusions about whether the election was stolen are a matter of personal belief rather than a matter of fact. Laura, 43, shared: “I personally don’t think that Biden truly won the election. But again, I don’t think it will ever be released to the general public what actually happened. There’s too much mystery and questions. And if you

start an investigation and then you go to raid a building and the building is bombed or set on fire or something happens and you can't get the evidence. It's just too many coincidences and too many little snafus that just create this seed of doubt in your head." Abigail, 37, said, "I could be wrong about my thoughts on it, it just seems like logically it don't add up that Biden won. Again, that's based on what I feel, media, and whenever he had his rallies, and Biden had his rallies, and just seeing – It took so long for them to find out who won, but that's just my opinion. I don't know that I could convince other people that that's right, you know?" Several participants described their conclusions about the election using similar terms as Abigail, indicating that their belief was based on logic, common sense, intuition, or a general, but reliable, sense that something wasn't right, even if they acknowledged the absence of definitive proof. "I just think there's something there that's not right. I can't put my finger on it. There's no way I can prove it. I just have all these thoughts on it. I just don't think that we can ever count on having an honest voting system from this point," said Isabella, 56.

POLITICAL ATTITUDES AND MEDIA HABITS OF PEOPLE WHO BELIEVE TRUMP WON IN 2020

In order to understand how people developed their beliefs about election fraud, we asked participants more general questions about their political identities, how they gathered information about politics, and who they trusted to tell them the truth.

Conspiratorial Mindset Uncommon

The majority of participants, with a few notable exceptions, did not seem to hold an overarching conspiratorial worldview, or a tendency to subscribe to multiple conspiracy theories or to believe that malevolent groups are working in the shadows to control most events.¹ While participants expressed distrust toward experts' consensus on the election's integrity, their distrust didn't seem to extend to official explanations for other significant political moments. Some participants explicitly differentiated themselves from people who believe online misinformation or conspiracies. Talking about her mother-in-law's following of QAnon, Michelle, 32, explained: "She's the one that believes that there's two Bidens and one of them is a fake one and one's a real one. And I don't really, I don't really align. I don't think any of that, really. I think she just likes to read stuff and I mean, whenever entertains her, sure, but I don't really believe any of it. I do believe that there are some issues and flaws with the way things were handled with the election, but I'm not going off the deep end." Cayla, 48, discussed how she felt like a moderate compared to her unvaccinated co-workers, whose beliefs about the election and whose news diets she described as more extreme than her own: "Anything that they would share, I would take with a huge grain of salt because they were not even getting their news from TV or legitimate news outlets. I mean, it was more like the YouTubers and the bloggers and you know, that kind of thing."

Not Isolated in Echo Chambers

Some participants unsurprisingly preferred to consume information primarily from right-leaning outlets. As Sabrina, 45, explained: “I feel like not all but some Democrats, especially politicians, lie to the people and they don’t tell them the whole truth. I feel like if it’s a Republican-owned – not saying some Republicans don’t lie, but they’re more apt to show the truth than the Democrat station.” However, many of the people we spoke with who believed Trump most likely won the 2020 election did not indicate that they exclusively consumed content from right-wing corners of the internet or media ecosystem.

Many participants used sources from across the ideological spectrum to inform their beliefs about politics and the 2020 election. “I will read FOX. I will read CNN. I will read CNBC. I will read Washington Post. I will read, you know, New York Times and I’ll do all of that. And then I will deduce from there what really happened,” Lucy, 37, said. Cayla, 48, turned to mainstream news as a source for fact-checking: “If I read something and I’m skeptical about it – cause you know, bless my friends’ hearts, they’ll share anything on social media – I’ll go straight to a national website, probably USA Today or CNN and verify and try to confirm independently.”

Around a fourth of participants cited their local news outlets as places they go to to learn about politics. A few people indicated that they received information from their local news stations that made them question the integrity of the 2020 election. Sue, 58, said: “I don’t believe anything that’s posted on social media, but I have faith in our local news stations that they would not be running stuff that isn’t true. I’m sure it could happen. But in our local news, they had Detroit on there and it showed the actual voting place with the windows boarded up and it showed people on camera bringing votes in. It’s hard not to believe that it’s not true.”

Participants were divided on the role social media played in shaping their beliefs about election fraud. Like Sue, some of the interviewees named social media companies as untrustworthy sources and were either unwilling to use the platforms or to believe information they received on them. Others cited content they had seen online to support their election fraud claims, most commonly content from Facebook and YouTube.

Several people told us that they found visual content, especially unedited video or live videos from lay people, more trustworthy than the mainstream media. “[Lauren Boebert] posts a lot of videos and goes to a lot of rallies and that sort of thing, trying to get attention that way. So we get some of our stuff from her because she videos things live. So you can kind of tell what’s going on that way, versus getting it from a media source that you don’t know if it’s true or not later on,” Brooke, 26, explained. Mary, 33, acknowledged the potential for videos to be misleading, but still found them compelling: “I do know that there are cases where video, it can be tampered with and you can film something to sway it in your favor

and opinion. So I definitely know there are options where that can happen. So it's not that it's more objective necessarily, but I guess like that particular video for me was, it seemed believable because it was just an everyday person more, just kind of secondhand filming, a huge mass of people walking into a building. I feel like that's something that you can't easily fabricate or try to bias in your favor."

Few expressed strong trust in any source. In fact, participants' willingness to seek out a variety of sources appeared to be driven by the fact that they felt no organization would tell them the truth. "I'm never really thrilled with CNN, but I allow myself to get information from them because I think, listen, everyone's not going to be 100 percent truthful and I want to be well-informed. I want to be as informed as I can be," Paris, 49, said. Laura, 43, reported visiting multiple news sites before coming to a conclusion, which was a common practice among participants: "I think you have to take bits and pieces from all different sources and try to piece them together and make them understandable in your own mind. You have to take away your own thoughts after putting the pieces together because I don't think that there's one source out there that is 100% truth-based."

Doing Research for Oneself

In the absence of a trusted source, many participants think of themselves as investigators or researchers who are capable of figuring out the truth or something close to it. Some people, like Laura, defined their research process as utilizing search engines and reading multiple sources. Others took on quasi-journalistic roles in their research process by visiting primary sources, such as government websites and databases. Jacob, 40, submitted a Freedom of Information Act request in an attempt to verify his suspicions about the election. When we asked Jackson, 29, what evidence, if any, could change his beliefs about election fraud, he said his exploration of voter data from government websites had solidified his viewpoint: "I looked up a few people who were reported on Twitter as being dead or having changed legal residency months and months before. So, I can't be convinced because I know it's the case and I know that mail-in ballots can't be trusted."

For participants like Jackson, their research process and their identity as someone who takes everything with a grain of salt, or who takes no politician, person, or news source at their word, afforded them more confidence in their beliefs about the election. For example, Luke, 56, said: "A lot of my real job is searching for information and bringing it together. I don't want to sound arrogant here, but I'm decent at knowing what sources to bring together for that sort of thing and to look at preponderance of the evidence and things like that." For others, this identity had almost the opposite effect, where complex topics felt unapproachable or even unknowable. As Michelle, 32, explained: "Sometimes I feel like you're going to get lies no matter what's out there. And so it's just better just to almost

remain naive to the situation. Like, it's better just not knowing at all at this point because we don't really know who to believe." Similarly, Jo, 27, shared: "As this conversation is going on and on, I'm telling myself in my head, 'You don't know what's reliable and what's not.' So, it's hard to believe right from wrong. So, I don't know. I guess I don't know where I would find the right answer."

LOOKING FORWARD

Many of the people we spoke to consume content from national mainstream media and local news stations, leaving an opportunity for news organizations and fact-checkers to provide accurate and compelling information in future election coverage.

- Mail-in ballots [aren't going away](#), as many states are keeping in place changes they made during the pandemic. Since mail-in ballots were of particular concern to participants, journalists should consider devoting more time to explaining how mail-in ballots are sent out and counted in the lead-up to the election. This could help to address participants' concerns about a lawless, free-for-all voting system.
- Given that several interviewees raised concerns about graphs used by news media to display candidate vote counts, newsrooms and researchers should carefully reflect on what types of election night visuals are used and how they might influence perceptions of election legitimacy.
- Participants were paying attention to what happened in states other than their own. Since election fraud claims benefit from confusion about the laws in different states, it may help to outline differences in rules across states. This would be especially helpful coming from social media companies' voter information sections and larger, national news organizations that have the reporter base to dedicate to such an endeavor.
- A small, but notable, number of participants expressed a desire to track their own ballots, which is possible in many states. These resources could be shared by news organizations, fact-checkers, and social media companies.
- Some participants mentioned their local news stations as sources for their beliefs about election fraud. It's entirely possible that some participants could have misattributed where they heard this information. With that being said, local news reports on mishandlings or mistakes in area elections should give any available context about whether an incident is isolated or not, as people use such incidents as supporting points for their picture of more widespread election fraud.

Our interviews make it clear that people are invested in the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election, as many described taking steps to do their own research. This

report reveals how some people go about the process of investigating their election fraud concerns, describes how people reach conclusions about the likelihood of election fraud, and provides a starting point for strategies to promote high-quality political information. It's clear that the identities of people who question whether the 2020 election was legitimate cannot be boiled down to only ardent Trump supporters or extreme right-wing loyalists. Far from a monolithic group, they reflect different shades of belief: some participants were adamant about the validity of their claims, others expressed uncertainty about their conclusions, and many consumed a diverse set of sources.

In the end, it is important to recognize that people of all political stripes are susceptible to making leaps in logic, under-weighting alternative explanations, and extrapolating from anecdotal evidence. It's also possible for intense research efforts to lead people astray. Although we cannot avoid these outcomes in all settings, we can choose a few areas to be especially diligent. We argue that few could be more important than the integrity of our elections. Even if it presents a challenge in a contentious political climate, it is vital for all of us to remember an adage from scientist Carl Sagan: "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence."

METHODOLOGY

Thanks to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and Democracy Fund for funding this report and the Center for Media Engagement. The majority of our participants were recruited through a survey on CloudResearch, a platform that pulls respondents from Amazon's Mechanical Turk, a crowdsourcing platform where people can sign up to participate in small tasks for payment. We fielded a survey asking people to share their feelings about the integrity of the 2020 election as well as their demographic characteristics. Participants were invited for an interview if they responded "Probably Trump" or "Definitely Trump" to the question "Who do you think won the 2020 election - that is, who received the most votes cast by eligible voters in enough states to win the election?" Participants were unaware of the criteria for being selected for an interview when they answered the survey.

We also utilized snowball sampling, where we invited participants to connect us with other people they knew who believed the 2020 election was illegitimate. We also reached out to people in our own personal networks. Between August 18 and November 24, 2021, we conducted a total of 56 interviews. Forty-five participants were recruited through the initial survey on CloudResearch, eight were referred to us by CloudResearch participants, and three were network connections. Participants chose or were assigned a pseudonym. Thirty-three participants were women and 23 were men. Participants ranged in age from 23 to 74 years old, with an average age of 48. Thirty resided in a state in the South, 10 lived in the

West, 9 lived in the Midwest, 6 lived in the Northeast, and 1 did not disclose their state.²

The interviews, on average around 50 minutes in length, were conducted over a video call or by telephone and were recorded. The recordings were transcribed, and researchers read through the transcriptions to find commonalities in what people were saying. The researchers did this independently, then met to discuss their observations and refine the conclusions. An iterative process of transcript review and discussion resulted in the observations contained herein, drawing from qualitative research practices.³

ENDNOTES

¹ For a review of academic research and different terms related to conspiracy theories, see Douglas, K. M., Uscinski, J. E., Sutton, R. M., Cichocka, A., Nefes, T., Ang, C. S., & Deravi, F. (2019). Understanding conspiracy theories. *Political Psychology, 40*, 3-35.

² States were grouped into geographic regions following the [US Census Bureau's guidelines](#).

³ Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology, 13*(1), 3-21.