

Aaron Weinschenk* and Costas Panagopoulos

Attitudes and Perceptions about the 2020 Presidential Election and Turnout Intentions in the 2022 Midterms

<https://doi.org/10.1515/for-2022-2055>

Abstract: The 2020 presidential election was unparalleled. President Donald Trump refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power, indicated that he would not accept the election results, and alleged that there was widespread voter fraud. In addition, on January 6, 2021, Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol in an attempt to overturn his defeat. In this paper, our aim is to understand public perceptions about these topics. We are interested in the distribution of public opinion on these issues but also in whether and how perceptions of these topics are related to intentions to participate in the 2022 midterm elections. Using data from an original, nationally representative survey (n = 1350) conducted in February 2021, we find that those who support the peaceful transfer following the 2020 election are more likely to report intending to vote in 2022 than those who do not. In addition, those who approve of the January 6th attack on the Capitol are more inclined to vote in 2022 than their counterparts. These relationships hold even after controlling for key variables like previous turnout, partisanship, ideology, and demographics.

Keywords: 2020 presidential election, voter turnout, 2022 midterms

1 Introduction

The 2020 presidential election was unparalleled. In the months leading up to the election, President Donald Trump refused to commit to a peaceful transfer of power and indicated, on numerous occasions, that he would not accept the results if he lost the election.¹ Throughout the election (and afterward), Trump repeatedly

¹ See the following articles for examples: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/23/us/politics/trump-power-transfer-2020-election.html>, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/transcript-fox-news->

***Corresponding author: Aaron Weinschenk**, Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin Green Bay, Green Bay, WI, USA, E-mail: weinscha@uwgb.edu

Costas Panagopoulos, Professor of Political Science, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA, E-mail: costas@post.harvard.edu

made unsubstantiated claims about widespread voter fraud and suggested that if he did not win, it was because the election was “rigged.” Following the election, Trump encouraged his followers to attend a “Save America” rally that coincided with the electoral vote count and certification on January 6, 2021. After an inflammatory speech by Trump, supporters stormed the Capitol in what has been described by media commentators as an unprecedented insurrection and a “landmark stain on American democracy.”² Since the 2020 election, journalists, scholars, and ordinary citizens have continued to think about and monitor the long-term effects of the election and related events (see, e.g., Weinschenk, Panagopoulos, and van der Linden 2021).³

In this paper, we are interested in understanding the nature of public opinion on the four issues mentioned above related to the 2020 presidential election—the peaceful transfer of power, acceptance of the 2020 election results, claims about widespread voter fraud, and the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol. We are especially interested in the enduring effects of public perceptions on these topics. Do peoples’ perceptions about the 2020 presidential election influence their intention of participating in future elections? The question of whether the 2020 presidential election will influence voter decision making in the 2022 midterms has recently captured the attention of pundits and politicians. For example, a November 2021 *Politico* article noted that in some congressional districts “constituents are asking how members [of Congress] plan to deal with the 2020 election or to protect the next election, with some indicating they won’t vote if things aren’t sorted out.”⁴ Using data from an original, nationally representative survey (n = 1350) conducted in February 2021, we provide a descriptive look at how the American public thinks about issues and events related to the 2020 election. We then examine the relationship between public perceptions about the 2020 election and turnout intentions in the 2022 midterm elections. We find that perceptions about several issues are related to the likelihood of voting in the 2022 midterm elections. More specifically, those who support the peaceful transfer of power following the 2020 election are more likely to report intending to vote in 2022 than those who do not. In addition, we find that those who approve of the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol are more inclined to vote in the 2022 midterms than those who disapprove. Importantly, these relationships hold even after we account for

sunday-interview-with-president-trump, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/2020-election/trump-has-signaled-he-won-t-accept-election-loss-many-n1245304>, and <https://www.cnn.com/2020/09/24/politics/trump-election-warnings-leaving-office/index.html>

² <https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2021/06/us/capitol-riot-paths-to-insurrection/>

³ <https://www.npr.org/2021/12/23/1065277246/trump-big-lie-jan-6-election>

⁴ <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/11/03/gop-trump-baseless-election-fraud-claims-518603>

other key variables like previous turnout, political partisanship, ideology, and demographics. Public perceptions about the 2020 presidential election appear to have important effects on the likelihood of future electoral participation.

2 Perceptions about Elections and Voter Turnout

Previous research has shown that perceptions of different dimensions of elections can exert important effects on voter turnout. Alvarez, Hall, and Llewellyn (2008), for instance, find that voters who are confident that their ballot was counted as intended are more likely to vote than those who are not. Birch (2010) finds that perceptions of electoral integrity are positively associated with the propensity to vote. She notes that “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” (Birch 2010, 1603). Interestingly, research by Stewart, Ansolabehere, and Persily (2016) looks specifically at the link between perceptions of voter fraud and turnout. They note that there are competing hypotheses about the link between perceptions of fraud and turnout. On one hand, there is the idea that if people do not believe that an election will be fair, they may not participate. On the other hand, there is the idea that “...the potential effect of a vote even under conditions of great fraud will still give the voter at least some chance to influence the outcome of an election. Staying home ensures that the voter has no effect” (Stewart, Ansolabehere, and Persily 2016, 1752). Thus, fear of voter fraud might mobilize voters as a way of trying to counteract it. Using survey data from 2015, Stewart et al. find no evidence that beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud influence turnout or turnout intentions. Despite these null results, we are interested in examining the association between perceptions about voter fraud and turnout intentions in the context of more recent data. Given the widespread attention to voter fraud by the Trump campaign and the accompanying media coverage (Brown and Cormack 2021; Enders et al. 2021), it is possible that this issue has become more relevant to voter decision making than in the past. A recent study by Berlinski et al. (2021), which used a survey experiment conducted following the 2018 midterm elections, found that exposure to unsubstantiated claims of voter fraud undermined confidence in elections. They did not examine the effects on participation but suggested that “Future research could also test the effects of allegations [of voter fraud] ... on turnout or participation intentions” (Berlinski et al. 2021, 13). We note that some political observers have already speculated about the possible impact of allegations of voter fraud on turnout in 2022. For instance, a recent *Morning Consult* article pointed out that “Donald Trump sparked

new alarm among Republican officials when he said the party base ‘will not be voting’ in next year’s midterm elections unless the GOP addresses its fears about voting fraud in the 2020 presidential election, but a new ... poll suggests the former president’s insistence on elevating the issue is resonating with a highly motivated segment of the Republican electorate.”⁵

Scholars have also examined the role of support for political values and norms in shaping patterns of electoral participation. Research generally shows that support for democratic values and norms is associated with greater civic engagement (Chang 2017; Dalton 2008). Thus, one might expect that those who support norms related to the 2020 election—the peaceful transfer of power and acceptance of the results of the 2020 election—will be the most enthusiastic about voting in upcoming elections. We note, though, that an alternative possibility is that people who disagree with these norms will be more inclined to participate than their counterparts. In short, those who believe that Biden’s victory was not legitimate and that a peaceful transfer of power is not important might think that participating in upcoming elections is a valuable way to support the Republican party and further Trump’s agenda. A December 2021 *CNN* article, drawing on recent polling data, noted that “voters who think Trump won are the most enthusiastic to vote in 2022.”⁶ Put simply, anger and frustration over the 2020 election may serve to motivate those who disagree with the outcome.

We are also interested in the relationship between attitudes about the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol and turnout intentions. To our knowledge, few, if any, studies have examined the relationship between attitudes about this event and future intentions to participate in the political process. One possibility is that the events on January 6th will be viewed as an “unforgivable assault on the democratic processes and principles of our government”⁷ and that this will motivate those who disapprove of the event to participate. It is worth noting that the events of January 6th have sparked the creation of groups related to voter education and registration. For instance, the January 6 Project aims to “take back the day and use it to strengthen democracy.”⁸ In preparation for the 2022 elections, they are focusing on registering new voters, voter mobilization, and educating people on the importance of voting. An alternative possibility is that those who approve the events of January 6th will be mobilized to participate in future elections more so than those who disapprove. Media reports have noted that since the

⁵ <https://morningconsult.com/2021/10/27/republican-midterm-enthusiasm/>

⁶ <https://www.cnn.com/2021/12/10/politics/republicans-fraud-turnout-analysis/index.html>

⁷ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2021/12/10/january-6-congress-line/>

⁸ <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/nc/triangle-sandhills/politics/2021/12/15/voter-education-group-aims-to-rethink-january-6th>

2020 election, "...about half of Republicans believe the siege was largely a non-violent protest or was the handiwork of left-wing activists 'trying to make Trump look bad.'"⁹ In short, those who view the events of January 6th positively may believe that participating in the 2022 midterm elections is a way to increase the odds that Republicans take control of Congress and to further support the GOP and Trump's agenda.

3 Data and Measures

To examine these ideas, we make use of data from an original, nationally representative survey that we fielded after the 2020 presidential election (the survey was in the field from February 4 to February 8, 2021). The survey was administered by YouGov, a firm that uses advanced statistical techniques to recruit survey respondents online and produce a representative sample of the target population. To produce a representative sample, YouGov conducts interviews and then matches respondents down to a smaller sample to produce the final dataset (respondents are matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education).¹⁰ In total, our survey contains 1350 respondents. Research shows that YouGov surveys are equivalent to representative surveys conducted via telephone (Ansolabehere and Schaffner 2014).

The survey included four questions designed to probe perceptions about issue and events related to the 2020 presidential election. More specifically, we asked respondents to rate their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

- (1) *I support a peaceful transition of power following the 2020 presidential election*
- (2) *I accept the results of the 2020 presidential election*
- (3) *I approve of the actions of the Trump supporters who took over the U.S. Capitol building on January 6*

⁹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-politics-disinformation/half-of-republicans-believe-false-accounts-of-deadly-u-s-capitol-riot-reuters-ipsos-poll-idUSKBN2BSORZ>

¹⁰ The frame is constructed by stratified sampling from the full 2018 American Community Survey 1-year sample with selection within strata by weighted sampling with replacements. The matched cases are weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores. The matched cases and the frame were combined, and a logistic regression was estimated for inclusion in the frame. The propensity score function included age, gender, race/ethnicity, years of education, and region. The propensity scores were grouped into deciles of the estimated propensity score in the frame and post-stratified according to these deciles. The weights were then post-stratified on 2016 presidential vote choice, and a four-way stratification of gender, age, race, and education, to produce the final weight.

(4) *There was widespread fraud in the 2020 presidential election.*

Responses were recorded on the following 5-point scale: Strongly disagree (1), disagree (2), neither agree nor disagree (3), agree (4), and strongly agree (5).

In addition to these questions, we asked respondents the extent to which they agree with the following statement: “I plan to vote in the November 2022 midterm elections.” We code responses so that a value of -1 corresponds to strongly disagree/disagree, a value of 0 corresponds to neither agree nor disagree, and a value of $+1$ corresponds to strongly agree/agree. Given the nature of this measure, we use ordered logistic regression in all multivariate models that follow.

Finally, we included a battery of demographic and political questions on the survey, which we use as control variables in our multivariate models. More specifically, we make use of measures political partisanship, ideology, sex, age, race/ethnicity, income, education, political interest, and whether respondents voted in the 2020 presidential election.

4 Public Opinion on the 2020 Presidential Election

Before examining the effects of perceptions about the 2020 election on turnout intentions, it is useful to look at the distribution of public opinion on each of our questions. Figure 1 provides an overview of public perceptions about the peaceful transfer of power, acceptance of the 2020 election results, claims about widespread

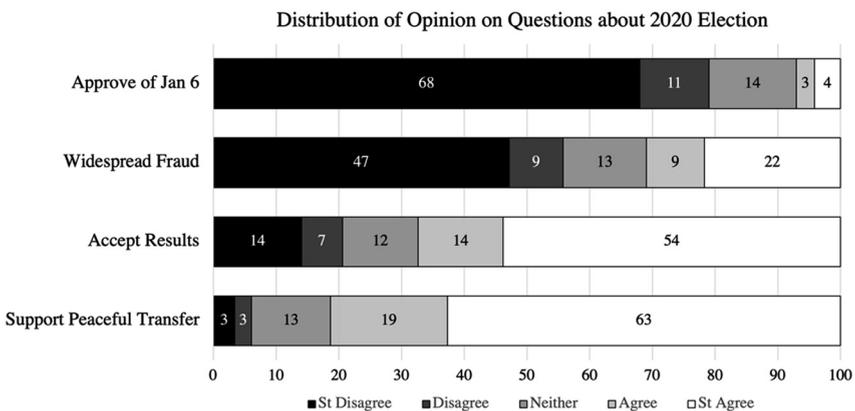


Figure 1: Public opinion on issues and events related to the 2020 presidential election.

voter fraud, and the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol. Starting with the peaceful transfer of power, most Americans express support for this idea. Overall, 82% of people said that they agree or strongly agree with the statement “I support a peaceful transition of power following the 2020 presidential election.” Only 6% of Americans said they disagree or strongly disagree. Turning to acceptance of the elections results, we see that 68% of Americans agree with the statement “I accept the results of the 2020 presidential election.” While most people express support for this norm, the level of support is considerably lower than the 82% who support the peaceful transfer of power. Interestingly, about 21% of people say that they disagree or strongly disagree with this statement. When it comes to the question about widespread fraud during the 2020 presidential election, we see that while 56% of people strongly disagree or disagree that there was widespread fraud in the 2020 presidential election, many people (31%) agree or strongly agree that there was widespread fraud in 2020. This is consistent with the results from other surveys on perceptions of fraud in 2020. For instance, a January 2021 poll done by the *Survey Center on American Life* found that 29% Americans said the statement “there was widespread fraud in the 2020 election” was mostly or completely accurate. Lastly, when it comes to the actions of the Trump supporters who took over the U.S. Capitol building on January 6, nearly 80% of Americans disapprove, while 7% of people approve of the actions.

In Table 1 below, we provide a correlation matrix showing how the four measures are related. Given the likely role of political identities in shaping how people react to the 2020 election, we also include measures of respondent partisanship (coded 1–7, where higher values indicate stronger identification with the Republican party), ideology (coded 1–3, where higher values reflect being more conservative), and whether a respondent voted for Trump in 2020 (coded 1 if yes, 0 if no). Overall, the four election measures are related in expected ways. For instance, those who support the peaceful transfer of power are more likely to accept the election results and less inclined to think there is widespread voter fraud than those who do not. They are also less likely to approve of the events of January 6th than their counterparts. Similarly, those who accept the results of the 2020 election are less inclined to think there is widespread voter fraud than those who do not accept the results. They are also less likely to approve of the events of January 6th than their counterparts. There is a strong, positive correlation between perceptions of fraud and approval of the January 6th Capitol takeover. Those who believe that there was widespread fraud are much more likely to express support for January 6th than those who do not. It is worth noting that respondent vote choice, partisanship, and ideology are strongly related to their responses on these questions. Trump supporters, conservatives, and Republicans are all less likely than their counterparts to support a peaceful transfer of power (with the

Table 1: Correlation matrix of election perceptions and several political variables.

	Trump voter	Ideology (conservative)	Party ID (Republican)	Peaceful transfer	Accept results	Widespread fraud	Approve Jan 6
Trump voter	1						
Ideology (conservative)	0.73	1					
Party ID (Republican)	0.81	0.75	1				
Peaceful transfer	-0.54	-0.46	-0.48	1			
Accept results	-0.80	-0.65	-0.68	0.67	1		
Widespread fraud	0.84	0.70	0.72	-0.57	-0.84	1	
Approve Jan 6	0.51	0.42	0.43	-0.51	-0.55	0.58	1

All correlations (Pearson's r) are statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level.

correlations being -0.54 , -0.46 , and -0.48 , respectively) and to accept the election results (with the correlations being -0.80 , -0.65 , and -0.68 , respectively). This is consistent with the notion that “in an age of elite polarization, norms have been politicized” (Kingzette et al. 2021, 663). In addition, Trump supporters, conservatives, and Republicans are also much more likely that their counterparts to believe that there is widespread fraud (with the correlations being 0.84 , 0.70 , and 0.72 , respectively) and to support the attack on the U.S. Capitol (with the correlations being 0.51 , 0.42 , and 0.43 , respectively).

5 The Relationship Between Attitudes about the 2020 Election and 2022 Turnout Intentions

We now turn to an analysis of how perceptions related to the 2020 presidential election influence respondents’ intentions to vote in the 2022 midterm elections. In Table 2, we provide a series of ordered logistic regression models showing how the four election measures are related to turnout intentions. Given that there are competing expectations for our four variables of interest, we use two-tailed tests for all significance tests. Importantly, we note that the models include controls for political interest (coded 1–4, where higher values represent more interest), previous voter turnout (coded so that 1 means voted in 2020 and 0 means did not vote in 2020), and a series of standard measures that capture key demographic attributes.¹¹ Model 1 shows the relationship between the four election measures after accounting for the controls. Overall, we find that two of the four attitudinal measures significantly affect 2022 turnout intentions. More specifically, those who support the peaceful transition of power following the 2020 presidential election are more likely to report intending to vote in the 2022 midterms than their counterparts ($p < 0.001$). In addition, the measure capturing approval of the events of January 6th is also significantly related to turnout intentions in 2022 ($p < 0.05$); those who approve of the attack on the U.S. Capitol are more likely to report intending to vote in 2022 than those who disapprove. Age, prior voting (in 2020) and political interest also influence 2022 voting intentions, while other socio-demographic traits appear to exert few (if any) effects.

¹¹ We code age in years, income on a 1–16 scale where higher values correspond to more yearly family income (min of $< \$10,000$ and max of $500,000$ or more per year), education on a 1–6 scale ranging from no high school degree to post-graduate degree, race as a series of dummies (with other race/ethnicity as the omitted category), and male as a dummy variable where 1 corresponds to male and 0 to female.

Table 2: Ordered logit models showing relationship between perceptions of election 2020 and turnout intention in 2022 midterms.

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Peaceful transfer	0.575***	0.617***	0.616***	0.637***	0.574***	0.610***
	0.134	0.143	0.144	0.143	0.146	0.152
Accept results	0.182	0.128	0.121	0.122	0.256	0.224
	0.135	0.146	0.146	0.147	0.152	0.158
Widespread fraud	0.17	0.177	0.185	0.177	0.191	0.194
	0.123	0.125	0.125	0.128	0.127	0.127
Approve Jan 6	0.284*	0.256*	0.257*	0.260*	0.287*	0.262*
	0.129	0.128	0.128	0.131	0.137	0.133
Political interest	0.627***	0.610***	0.609***	0.586***	0.649***	0.662***
	0.112	0.113	0.113	0.113	0.119	0.118
Voted 2020	2.419***	2.448***	2.449***	2.338***	2.489***	2.525***
	0.225	0.23	0.231	0.248	0.238	0.24
Age	-0.098**	-0.102**	-0.103**	-0.104**	-0.090*	-0.090*
	0.037	0.039	0.039	0.039	0.039	0.040
Age ²	0.001**	0.001**	0.001**	0.001**	0.001**	0.001**
	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Income	-0.041	-0.045	-0.045	-0.05	-0.051	-0.055
	0.03	0.031	0.031	0.031	0.032	0.032
Education	0.114	0.107	0.107	0.107	0.074	0.069
	0.079	0.08	0.08	0.081	0.079	0.079
White	0.147	0.189	0.201	0.122	-0.303	-0.302
	0.638	0.651	0.648	0.662	0.585	0.588
Black	0.107	0.062	0.063	0.014	-0.27	-0.33
	0.648	0.647	0.645	0.659	0.612	0.61
Hispanic	0.329	0.322	0.322	0.263	-0.184	-0.199
	0.684	0.688	0.686	0.695	0.625	0.634
Asian	0.597	0.663	0.655	0.662	-0.039	0.008
	0.832	0.842	0.839	0.874	0.795	0.805
Male	0.001	-0.038	-0.04	-0.02	-0.08	-0.107
	0.194	0.198	0.198	0.198	0.214	0.214
7-Point PID (GOP)		-0.021				-0.019
		0.064				0.073
3-Point PID (GOP)			-0.088			
			0.162			
Democrat (dummy)				0.524*		
				0.243		
Republican (dummy)				0.422		
				0.331		
Ideology (conservative)					0.145	0.181
					0.152	0.177

Table 2: (continued)

	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se	b/se
Cut point 1	3.481*	3.269*	3.176*	3.527*	3.826*	3.869*
	1.379	1.414	1.439	1.401	1.547	1.568
Cut point 2	5.101***	4.818***	4.726***	5.087***	5.279***	5.287***
	1.372	1.404	1.429	1.394	1.538	1.557
Pseudo R^2	0.2672	0.2628	0.2630	0.2661	0.2496	0.2492
n	1150	1130	1130	1130	1083	1073

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$ (two-tailed).

Given the relationships in Table 1 between political attributes and the four election measures, it is important to make sure the results for the election measures in Model 1 are not simply capturing partisan or ideological identities. While partisanship and ideology are correlated with our four election measures of interest, there is good reason to think that they may also be related to our dependent variable. Indeed, some research has found evidence to support “differential turnout” in midterm elections (e.g., Burmilla 2014). The basic idea is that voters from the out-party are more likely to vote in midterm elections than voters from the president’s party. In short, partisanship and ideology might also influence turnout intentions in the 2022 midterms. In Model 2, we add the standard 7-point measure of partisanship to the model. Overall, the inclusion of this measure does little to influence the relationship between the peaceful transfer of power measure and turnout intentions and between approval of January 6th and turnout intentions. Model 3 includes partisanship but uses a 3-point measure rather than the 7-point measure (strong partisans, weak partisans, and leaners are combined for each of the major parties and pure independents are the middle category; 1=Democrat, 2=Independent, 3=Republican). Again, the inclusion of this measure has little impact on the relationship between the election measures and turnout intentions. In Model 4, we include partisanship, but this time measure it as a series of dummy variables (with pure Independents as the omitted category). Once again, the two statistically significant relationships of interest remain unchanged. In Model 5, we omit partisanship as a control and instead include our measure of ideology (1 = liberal, 2 = moderate, 3 = conservative). Even after accounting for respondent ideology, the relationships between our peaceful transfer of power and approval of January 6th measures and turnout intentions in the 2022 midterms persist. Finally, Model 6 includes both partisanship and ideology. Comfortingly, even with both measures included as controls, the two election measures remain statistically significant. This gives us a fair amount of confidence that the election

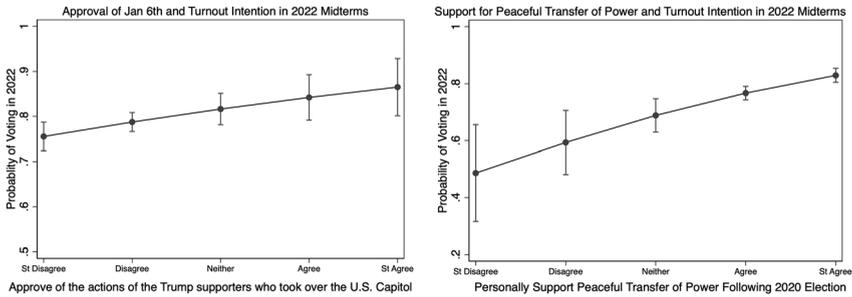


Figure 2: Predicted relationships between peaceful transfer of power (*left panel*) and support for January 6th (*right panel*) and 2022 turnout intentions.

measures are not simply capturing political identities that are also related to turnout intentions in the 2022 midterms.

To provide a sense of the magnitude of the relationship between each of the statistically significant election measures and turnout intentions, Figure 2 plots the predicted probabilities of intending to vote in 2022 at each level of the election measures (estimates are derived from Model 1 in Table 2). In the left panel in Figure 2, we see that there is a fairly strong relationship between support for the peaceful transfer of power and intending to vote in 2022. Indeed, among those who strongly disagree about supporting the peaceful transfer of power, the predicted probability of intending to vote in 2022 is 0.49 [0.32, 0.66], whereas the predicted probability of intending to vote is 0.83 [0.80, 0.85] for those who strongly agree about the peaceful transfer of power. In short, there is a difference of 34 percentage points between the two groups. The relationship between support for January 6th and turnout intentions (right panel) in the 2022 midterms is less pronounced, though still statistically significant. Among those who strongly disagree with the actions taken on January 6th, the predicted probability of intending to vote in 2022 is 0.76 [0.72, 0.79]. Among those who strongly agree with the actions taken on January 6th, the predicted probability of intending to vote is 0.87 [0.80, 0.93]. Overall, this amounts to a difference of 11 percentage points.

The key findings summarized above suggest attitudes and perceptions about the 2020 election are likely to affect voting patterns in the 2022 midterms, perhaps more so than other demographic factors. In particular, views about the peaceful transfer of power and the January 6 insurrection will loom large over turnout decisions in 2022. At a minimum, these findings imply the composition of the November 2022 electorate may be shaped, at least in part, by retrospective views about the outcome and aftermath of the previous (November 2020) election. The results also imply that 2022 voters will be somewhat divided along partisan

or ideological lines. Since those who support the peaceful transfer of power are oriented in a Democratic and liberal direction, while respondents who report approving of the events of January 6 skew in a conservative and Republican direction, these countervailing forces may be reflected in the composition of the 2022 midterm electorate. We note that previous research indicates that voter turnout is especially important during midterm elections, where turnout is appreciably lower compared to presidential elections. In short, the composition of the electorate can play an important role in terms of election outcomes (Burmila 2014; Campbell 1987; Jackson 2000). The finding about the impact of views about the January 6 insurrection is also worth underscoring further. It suggests that intensive sentiments about the 2020 election are unlikely to dissipate, and may manifest themselves in 2022; those who approve of the extreme actions rioters engaged in on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021 are highly motivated to contest the 2022 midterm elections at the ballot box. Clearly, this subgroup of voters appears to be mobilized based on their views about January 6, compared to other voters. Such predispositions could render these voters fertile ground for political parties and campaigns seeking partisan advantage in 2022. As a result, extreme rhetoric or allusions to the events of January 6 may be pervasive on the 2022 campaign trail as candidates target January 6 supporters for voter mobilization activities.

6 Discussion and Conclusion

In this paper, we used data from a nationally representative survey to better understand public perceptions about four key issues and events surrounding the 2020 presidential election—the peaceful transfer of power, acceptance of the 2020 election results, claims about widespread voter fraud, and the January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol. Our data showed that most Americans (82%) support the peaceful transfer of power and accept the results of the 2020 election (68%). In addition, nearly 80% of Americans disapprove of the actions of the Trump supporters who took over the U.S. Capitol building on January 6th. Finally, we found that 56% of people disagreed that there was widespread fraud in the 2020 presidential election. Still, a large segment of the population (31%) agreed that there was widespread fraud in 2020. In addition to examining the distribution of public opinion on these topics, we explored whether public views were related to turnout intentions in the 2022 midterms. Two of our four measures were significantly related to turnout intentions. More specifically, those who support the peaceful transition of power following the 2020 presidential election were more likely to report intending to vote in the 2022 midterms than their counterparts. In addition,

approval of the events of January 6th was significantly related to turnout intentions in 2022. Interestingly, those who approve of the attack on the U.S. Capitol were more likely to report intending to vote in 2022 than those who disapprove.

Overall, the results presented here are important for several different reasons. First, given the unprecedented norm violations that occurred during 2020 presidential election, it is critical to understand how the American public has reacted to election and the events that followed. Second, it is valuable to understand whether and how perceptions related to the 2020 election are related to future political behavior. According to our analyses, public views about the 2020 presidential election appear to have important effects on the likelihood of future electoral participation. We believe that there are several possible research ideas that stem from the results presented here. First, it would be valuable to continue to track public perceptions about the topics we studied in this paper. This could be done by fielding cross-sectional surveys like the one examined here or by collecting data on the same respondents over time. Additional data will provide a sense of how attitudes about the 2020 election change (or remain stable) over time. Second, it would be valuable to study whether attitudes and perceptions about the 2020 election have even longer-term effect than those explored here. For example, will perceptions about the 2020 election impact voters during the 2024 presidential election or beyond? Finally, while we studied views of the U.S. public, it could be interesting to examine perceptions about the 2020 U.S. election among those in other countries and to explore whether those perceptions have any effect on political attitudes or behaviors.

References

- Alvarez, R. M., T. E. Hall, and M. H. Llewellyn. 2008. "Are Americans Confident Their Ballots Are Counted?" *The Journal of Politics* 70 (3): 754–66.
- Ansolabehere, S., and B. F. Schaffner. 2014. "Does Survey Mode Still Matter? Findings from a 2010 Multi-Mode Comparison." *Political Analysis* 22 (3): 285–303.
- Berlinski, N., M. Doyle, A. M. Guess, G. Levy, B. Lyons, J. M. Montgomery, B. Nyhan, and J. Reifler. 2021. "The Effects of Unsubstantiated Claims of Voter Fraud on Confidence in Elections." *Journal of Experimental Political Science*: 1–16, <https://doi.org/10.1017/XPS.2021.18>.
- Birch, S. 2010. "Perceptions of Electoral Fairness and Voter Turnout." *Comparative Political Studies* 43 (12): 1601–22.
- Brown, H., and L. Cormack. 2021. "Angry about Fraud: How Congress Took up Trump's Claims of Fraud." *The Forum* 19 (1): 77–95.
- Burmila, E. M. 2014. "Surge and Decline: The Impact of Changes in Voter Turnout on the 2010 Senate Elections." *Congress and the Presidency* 41 (3): 289–311.
- Campbell, J. E. 1987. "The Revised Theory of Surge and Decline." *American Journal of Political Science*: 965–79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2111231>.

- Chang, W.-C. 2017. "Media Use, Democratic Values, and Political Participation: Empirical Evidence from Taiwan." *Japanese Journal of Political Science* 18 (3): 385–406.
- Dalton, R. J. 2008. "Citizenship Norms and the Expansion of Political Participation." *Political Studies* 56 (1): 76–98.
- Enders, A. M., J. E. Uscinski, C. A. Klofstad, K. Premaratne, M. I. Seelig, S. Wuchty, M. N. Murthi, and J. R. Funchion. 2021. "The 2020 Presidential Election and Beliefs about Fraud: Continuity or Change?" *Electoral Studies* 72: 102366.
- Jackson, R. A. 2000. "Differential Influences on Participation in Midterm versus Presidential Elections." *The Social Science Journal* 37 (3): 385–402.
- Kingzette, J., J. N. Druckman, S. Klar, Y. Krupnikov, M. Levendusky, and J. B. Ryan. 2021. "How Affective Polarization Undermines Support for Democratic Norms." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 85 (2): 663–77.
- Stewart III, C., S. Ansolabehere, and N. Persily. 2016. "Revisiting Public Opinion on Voter Identification and Voter Fraud in an Era of Increasing Partisan Polarization." *Stanford Law Review* 68: 1455–89.
- Weinschenk, A. C., C. Panagopoulos, and S. van der Linden. 2021. "Democratic Norms, Social Projection, and False Consensus in the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election." *Journal of Political Marketing* 20 (3–4): 255–68.

Bionotes

Costas Panagopoulos

Professor of Political Science, Northeastern University, Boston, MA, USA
costas@post.harvard.edu

Costas Panagopoulos is Professor and Chair in the Department of Political Science at Northeastern University

Aaron Weinschenk

Professor of Political Science, University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, Green Bay, WI, USA
weinscha@uwgb.edu

Aaron Weinschenk is Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay.