On Fertile Ground: How Racial Resentment Primes White Americans to Believe Fraud Accusations

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White Americans face a democratic dilemma: remain committed to electoral democracy (which has been historically beneficial for them), or abandon it as non-white groups gain political stature. We argue "fraud" narratives offer white Americans a solution: they can reject specific democratic outcomes, while remaining committed to democracy as an ideal. We thus expect—and demonstrate—that fraud beliefs have a specifically racial valence. In three studies, we show that Black cities were at the epicenter of fraud dialog on Twitter; that electoral confidence deteriorated most for racially-resentful whites post-election in 2020; and, in a survey experiment, show that racially resentful white Americans are especially likely to believe accusations of fraud when these accusations are racialized. At a time when America's multiracial democracy appears fragile, groups poised to lose power draw on rote narratives linking race and criminality to legitimize their own denial of free and fair elections.

Key Words: Voter Fraud, Racial Resentment, Social Identity, Misinformation, Experiment

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[‡]This includes all text, table captions, figure captions, and footnotes. It excludes the title page, references, and text in tables.

Introduction

Before a single vote had been cast—a month before Joe Biden was even formally named his opponent—Donald Trump was sowing doubt about the legitimacy of the 2020 election. In a July interview on Fox News Sunday, then-anchor Chris Wallace asked Trump whether he would accept the results if he lost. "I have to see," Trump replied. "Look, you—I have to see. No, I'm not going to just say yes. I'm not going to say no, and I didn't last time either" (Trump, 2020). As the campaign wore on, Trump's musings on the topic of fraud didn't remain evasive or nonspecific. Instead, they seemed to focus directly on American cities with many African American residents. For example, at a campaign stop in Pennsylvania a week before the election, Trump raised doubts about the validity of past vote counts in Philadelphia. Trump falsely complained that Mitt Romney had received "zero votes" in 2012 (Dale, 2020), insinuating that electoral malfeasance was likely to occur in that sort of place. Philadelphia is 40% Black and 34% white; those figures for the state are 11% and 75%, respectively.

After election day in 2020, states continued counting mail ballots cast by legal voters, resulting in a "blue shift." Since Democrats voted by mail at higher rates than Republicans, these late-counted returns disproportionately went to Biden in some key states. While this shift was widely anticipated (see, for instance, Graham (2020) writing in *The Atlantic* as early as August), Trump supporters nonetheless used the late-counted ballots alongside other routine election practices to generate accusations that fraud had occurred. Like when Trump raised doubts about Philadelphia, many accusations were linked to tangible places—the cities continuing to count legally cast votes became the epicenter of the stolen election narrative.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, was a favorite target.[1] One pro-Trump Twitter account summed up what became a shibboleth among conspiracy-theorists saying, "Trump just lost the lead after they dumped a trove of mail-ins from Milwaukee. 100k lead gone in an instant.

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[1] Milwaukee is 38% non-Hispanic Black and 34% non-Hispanic white; those figures for the state of Wisconsin are 6% and 81%, respectively.

Why did it take hours for this to be released? I'm not buying it" (quoted in Hardee, 2020). In another city, Detroit,[2] protesters reacted to fraud narratives and descended on counting facilities as Trump's lead waned (Witsil, 2020). In Atlanta,[3] Donald Trump's personal attorney Rudy Giuliani added racist language to the fraud narrative. He described election workers as "passing around USB ports like they were vials of heroin or cocaine." Giuliani has since admitted in court that these accusations were false (Reily and Concepcion, 2023).

Why did Donald Trump and his allies focus on these sorts of places? What benefit did they anticipate from re-inscribing a connection between race and fraud? As Emily Badger (2020) at the *New York Times* explained, these were not the cities that cost Trump the election—but they have "long been targets of racialized charges of corruption." Meanwhile, largely white municipalities in these states like Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (64% white) or Madison, Wisconsin (73% white), overwhelmingly supported Biden but saw far fewer accusations. We argue that racialized accusations of voter fraud allow white Americans a way out of a psychological bind. White Americans have incentives to believe electoral democracy in America represents a just system, since it has historically placed them at the top. They also have incentives to abandon electoral democracy if it threatens their favored status. Belief in fraud, it would seem, is one mechanism that allows them to remain rhetorically committed to democracy while rejecting specific unfavorable democratic outcomes. It is plausible that those who sought to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the election believed that fraud narratives would be more palatable when placed in a racialized context.

By focusing accusations of election fraud on Black individuals and municipalities, elites made their claims more believable to a white audience. White Americans were more susceptible to these narratives precisely because they leveraged manufactured associations between electoral malfeasance and race (Wilson and King-Meadows, 2016). Explicit appeals to racial prejudice in service of limiting racial progress have become risky due to changes in social norms regarding racial equality (Mendelberg, 2001). Thus, in modern times, opponents

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[2]Detroit is 77% Black and 11% white, compared to 13% and 74% statewide in Michigan.
[3]Atlanta is 49% Black and 38% white, compared to 31% and 52% statewide in Georgia.

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of civil rights may move onto new topics like "crime" or "stolen election" and use them to advance policy reforms that disproportionately harm Americans of color. Moreover, the links that have been established in white Americans' minds between Blackness and criminality lend credibility to these elite-led accusations (Entman and Rojecki, 2010). Such racialized accusations of fraud leading up to and especially following the 2020 election provided an avenue through which white Americans could reject *specific outcomes* of electoral politics even as they maintain the legitimacy of the *system as a whole.*

We test these theoretical arguments in three studies, using diverse data and analyses but linked by what they can tell us about the role of racial considerations in shaping beliefs about fraud and election integrity before and after the 2020 election. First, we explore what kind of municipalities were mentioned on Twitter alongside conversations about voter fraud. We show that discussion about fraud on this public platform was indeed centered on Black cities in 2020, especially in the post-election period. Aside from Biden's vote share, the share of a city's population that was Black was the only significant predictor of how frequently it was mentioned on Twitter alongside the phrase "voter fraud." Second, we leverage the panel structure of the 2020 Cooperative Election Study to demonstrate that racially resentful white respondents saw their confidence deteriorate most in the post-election period as accusations of fraud focused on racialized municipalities. After demonstrating that racially resentful white Americans were likely susceptible to these claims, we use a survey experiment to test the relationship between racialized narratives and fraud belief in a causal framework. Manipulating the majority racial group of a fictional city, and the race of the chief election official working there, we show that accusations of fraud were most credible to racially resentful white Americans, and they were especially likely to believe them when they were levied against Black municipalities. Similarly, white Republicans found accusations against Black cities more credible than against white cities. In short, individual orientations like racial resentment intersect with elite rhetoric and stereotypes to undermine confidence among those theoretically most threatened by Black political power.

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System Justification and Electoral Politics

Social identity theory (SIT) provides a framework to understand how groups react and relate to one another (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). SIT holds that people categorize others and self-categorize into groups to help make sense of the social world. From our groups, we enjoy psychological benefits like self-esteem and social benefits like assumed trust that help us go about life with less friction or strife. The benefits that flow from group identity and membership motivate us to regard our own groups positively and vigilantly protect group status. Often, a positive view of our own group arrives by way of comparing the relative status of groups to which we do and do not belong (Tajfel, 1982). We look at and compare ourselves to others to assess how we are doing.

Few social categories have greater political significance in the United States than race. In America's racial hierarchy, whiteness enjoys the highest level of social prestige, with Black Americans at the bottom and other racial and ethnic groups falling somewhere in between (Dawson, 2001; Kim, 2003). This hierarchy does not occur or sustain itself by chance. Racialized social system theory, from Bonilla-Silva (2010), details how white Americans use coded colorblind language and other tools to maintain their position at the top of the social hierarchy. These attitudes and behaviors can be pointed outward, based in prejudicial belief or genuine antipathy toward racial and ethnic minorities (Wallsten et al., 2017). They may also point inward, focused on protecting the privileges enjoyed by the dominant group (Jardina, 2019). Even as white Americans are motivated to maintain their place at the top of the social hierarchy, powerful psychological mechanisms are at play to obscure this domination, even to themselves. In general, people do this by denying inequality, distancing themselves from the cause of the inequality, or defending broader systems that perpetuate and ossify unequal outcomes.

Members of dominant groups construct ways to justify their place on the social ladder (Shuman et al., 2022). The just world theory (e.g., Lerner, 1980) situates coping behaviors into a broader perspective. It describes how humans seek to "naturalize" their own domi-

nance. Those at the top of a social hierarchy are uncomfortable with the knowledge that social processes—processes based not in merit or hard work, but in systemic and human-produced power imbalances—explain their high status. People within dominant groups seek to render these outcomes natural and inevitable, the result of justice, not unfairness. Those at the top want to believe that they "earned" their privileges, and that individuals deserve both the benefits and ills they experience in life. Closely linked to just world theory is system justification theory (e.g., Jost, 2019): dominant groups face strong psychological pressures to justify not only outcomes, but also the social processes themselves.

Although equal access to the ballot box has never characterized American democracy (Keyssar, 2009; Bentele and O'Brien, 2013), white Americans profess a deep connection to it as a pillar of democratic society. According to the 2017–2022 World Values Survey, more than half of white American participants called democracy "Absolutely important," a 10-out-of-10 on the available scale. For Black Americans, just 1 in 3 were as bullish on democratic governance. Just world theory suggests this is not surprising: white Americans are motivated to justify political systems that have disproportionately accrued benefits to them. But it also suggests some white Americans may become more skeptical of systems that no longer reliably produce disproportionate benefits for in-group members.

After 2008, which saw the election of the nation's first Black president, white Americans were forced to face the reality that electoral politics might no longer result in political arrangements placing white Americans at the very top. In response, white Americans' enthusiasm for democracy is perhaps waning. In addition to highly-publicized events like the January 6th insurrection, academic scholarship documents where support for democracy is softest among this population. Jardina and Mickey (2022) show that white Americans high in white racial consciousness seek to protect group privileges, and are more supportive of authoritarian leadership that would limit the gains of multi-racial democracy. Others point to a more general out-group antipathy as a source of democratic decline. Enders and Thornton (2022), for instance, show that racially-resentful white Republicans are more dissatisfied

when their candidate loses than other Republicans, and that resentful Democrats are less satisfied when their candidate wins. Similarly, Miller and Davis (2021) argue that socially-prejudiced white Americans ascribe less importance to democratic principles like, "Having a democratic political system." Moving from the beliefs of individuals to political consequences, Morris (2023) shows that state legislators representing racially resentful districts were the most likely to sponsor bills restricting access to the franchise in the aftermath of the 2020 election. More generally, when dominant groups feel that they no longer represent the nation, they are more likely to endorse people and policies that reinforce their dominant position (Bai and Federico, 2021; Danbold, Serrano-Careaga and Huo, 2023).

This scholarship implies antidemocratic thinking in the United States cannot be divided from race and considerations about group position. White Americans who profess the value of and participate in democracy may nonetheless be skeptical when democracy doesn't work for them. Faced with electoral loss, dominant groups must make sense of why the chips did not fall their way during the previous election. A recent survey from Monmouth University suggests that even years later, as many as two-thirds of Republicans still believe Biden stole the 2020 election through fraud (Poll, 2023). On a smaller scale, but more recently, entrance polls from the 2024 Iowa Republican caucus indicate nearly two-thirds of participants believe that Joe Biden was not the legitimate winner of the 2020 contest (LeVine, 2024). It would seem people are skeptical of the process not because they are revolutionaries or reformers, but because the outcome was inconsistent with beliefs about what results the system ought to have produced.

What rationale might allow white Americans to maintain a commitment to democracy while also rejecting specific electoral outcomes? One answer is that white Americans may think some elections are corrupted by the criminality of Black Americans. Links between criminality and race grew directly out of increasing access to the franchise won by Black Americans in the mid-twentieth century. As a result, racially resentful whites may be more likely to believe Black Americans do not follow the "rules of the game;" or that they are "line

cutters;" and they receive benefits they do not deserve (Russell Hochschild, 2016; Davis and Wilson, 2021). Such pejorative perceptions go on to inform beliefs about who is capable of fraud in modern elections (Wilson, Brewer and Rosenbluth, 2014). Thus, white Americans should find it easier to believe that Black-led cheating and criminal activity coalesced to steal the 2020 election. This model of belief in fraud could help explain why fraud narratives by political actors were directed towards cities with relatively large Black populations.

Historical Links between Race, Criminality, and Voting

The racially discriminatory nature of the American criminal legal system is well documented. Scholars like Michelle Alexander (2012) and Naomi Murakawa (2014) show this is no accident of history, but rather the consequence of systematic forces of white supremacy. A related strand of scholarship focuses on how the criminal legal system impacts Black citizens' access to the ballot box. Despite the ratification of the 14th and 15th Amendments, which outlawed restrictions to the franchise "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude," Black Americans were subjected to a century of disenfranchisement. The disenfranchising forces were marked in the early years by extreme violence, though other means like state constitutions and the criminal legal system eventually became the masthead for such efforts (Behrens, Uggen and Manza, 2003; Epperly et al., 2020).

The turn among lawmakers in the mid-1960s to revive incarceration-based disfranchisement was a response to increased political opportunities among Black Americans—and can be placed in a larger process described by Vesla Weaver (2007) as "frontlash." Frontlash is an elite-driven project undertaken with intentional and strategic foresight. The goal is for losers in one political fight to advance to another policy domain, reframe the terms in which that domain is understood, and attempt to recoup past losses. In this interpretation, the increasingly liberal civil rights of the 1960s and the increasingly repressive—and racist—use of the carceral state in the 1970s are not independent of one another. Rather, the same elites

who resisted the federal civil rights acts of the 1960s became the most vocal proponents of an emboldened and aggressive state the following decade. The conflation of Blackness and crime by both elites and the media (e.g., Entman, 2006) was, according to Weaver, an intentional response to gains made in the realm of electoral politics.

Eubank and Fresh (2022) provide compelling evidence of how racially discriminatory disenfranchisement followed from the 1965 Voting Rights Act. In the aftermath of the passage of the VRA, jurisdictions which had previously relied on now-illegal devices to control the Black population's political power were suddenly stripped of these favored tools. In response to the new legal context, a substitution occurred: the states that previously disenfranchised their citizens to such an extent that they were covered under Section 5 of the VRA increased the rate at which they incarcerated Black—but not white—citizens. The authors conclude that their results "are most likely to derive from white reaction to the crumbling of the Jim Crow sociopolitical order" (803). Their conclusion is bolstered by systematic heterogeneity *within* states covered by Section 5: "incarceration varied systematically," they note, "in proportion to the electoral threat posed by Black voters" (791). When federal intervention (i.e., the VRA) increased the likelihood that Black political power might threaten a white-dominated status quo, elites turned to this alternative state apparatus to neuter the threat.

In short, it is no accident that the *political* content of crime in the United States is singularly racialized; since at least the 1960s, conservative elites have sought to tie Blackness to criminality in the public mind to justify policies undermining their electoral power. Some of these elites have ascended to high positions of power and influence. Speaking against aspects of a bill that would restore the ballot to citizens formerly convicted of a felony, U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) said, "Voting is a privilege; a privilege properly exercised at the voting booth, not from a prison cell... we are talking about rapists, murderers, robbers, and even terrorists or spies...those who break our laws should not dilute the vote of law-abiding citizens" (U.S. Congress 2002, p. S802). This link between race, crime, and voting may underlie support for more strict voter ID laws (Wilson, Brewer and Rosenbluth,

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2014), and these laws may serve as a means for white Americans to exclude less deserving groups (Chouhy, Lehmann and Singer, 2022). In other words, white Americans have been primed for decades to believe in the plausibility of accusations of crime levied against Black Americans, a link that was born out of struggles surrounding access to the franchise and re-ignited by strategic politicians when it suits their needs.

Fraud Narratives Resolve Whites' Democratic Dilemma

Narratives about the criminal nature of Black Americans—exactly the sort that sustain racial resentment—are linked closely with attitudes toward the electoral process. In fact, because the white superstructure has moved to paint electoral gains by Black Americans as ill-gotten or undeserved, racial concerns likely shape attitudes about the integrity of the process and the legitimacy of the outcomes. White Americans' association between Black criminality and elections helps to resolve the tension between commitments to democracy and the status threat of a politically muscular Black America. By believing in Black-instigated electoral malfeasance like fraud, white Americans who supported a losing candidate do not need to re-evaluate the popularity of their policy preferences or consider whether the candidate put forward by their party represented the interests of a wide enough set of the country. Instead, if a poor electoral showing is rationalized as the result of malfeasance, one need not consider whether their commitment to democratic systems are in tension with their skepticism of a racially progressive state.

Rather, individuals dissatisfied with outcomes they can rely on old tropes casting Black Americans as cheaters and criminals. In this scenario, people can continue telling themselves they are committed to democracy, and that they reject the 2020 election because it was not itself a legitimate democratic outcome. In short, racially motivated beliefs about fraud can be identity protective. When the psychological need to refute electoral loss meets ongoing elite rhetoric pointing to plausible (i.e., non-white) scapegoats, racial considerations

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can predict susceptibility to fraud narratives and facilitate a lack of confidence in the electoral process. In service of our argument, we engaged in three studies to understand the extent to which racial considerations structure the public's engagement with and belief in election fraud in 2020.

Study 1: Analysis of Twitter Data

Journalists and activists have argued that accusations of fraud heavily target Black municipalities; however, to the best of our knowledge, this has not yet been thoroughly established. We evaluate the claim that accusations center on Black places with an analysis of Tweets collected in January, 2021. This corpus includes the 2.7 million Tweets that were A) Tweeted in 2020; B) publicly viewable in January, 2021; and C) contained the phrase "voter fraud." The `tm` package in `R` allows us to identify each Tweet that also mentions a large American municipality.[4] The list of cities comes from simplemaps,[5] which uses data from the US Census Bureau and US Geological Survey to create a list of cities' standardized names. This list is supplemented with common nicknames and abbreviations for these cities, such as "NYC" for "New York," "NOLA" for "New Orleans," and "Philly" for "Philadelphia." Some cities whose names are similar to other political concepts, individuals, or common English words—such as "Independence," "Elizabeth," and "Warren"—were removed.[6] For municipalities that share names, we assume that the target of the rhetoric applies to the largest one (thus dropping places like Portland, Maine, in deference to Portland, Oregon).

From this population of Tweets, approximately 95,000 include references to one of these large municipalities. We merge this information with a variety of sociopolitical indicators such as Biden vote share in 2020, population, and racial characteristics. Biden

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[4]We define municipalities as "large" if they have a population of at least 100,000 under the assumption that smaller cities are unlikely to generate national conversations about fraud.

[5]https://simplemaps.com/data/us-cities

[6]The set removed consists of: Bend, Brandon, Corona, Elizabeth, Enterprise, Hollywood, Independence, Lincoln, Logan, Lynn (a man named Robert Lynn was arrested for voter fraud in October, 2020 (Blackburne, 2020)), Mobile, Orange, Reading, Surprise, Warren, Washington (as many Tweets referred to the federal government this way), and York.

voteshare is calculated by using data from the Voting and Election Science Team[7] which publishes election results and shapefiles at the precinct-level. Municipal election results are estimated by aggregating up from all precincts whose centroid falls inside the municipal boundaries according to Census Bureau designated "places," which generally conform to municipal boundaries. Other demographic data is taken from the 5-year ACS estimates ending in 2020, once again according to Census places. We test the relationship between the number of times a city was mentioned alongside fraud and its demographics sing ordinary least squares regressions. The Twitter data allow us to test the following expectation.

- **H1**: Other things being equal, cities where Black residents make up a larger share of the population will be more likely to appear in discussions of voter fraud.

About 40% of Tweets with "voter fraud" were posted on or before November 3, 2020; the remainder were posted between election day and the end of the year. Table 1 shows the 10 municipalities most frequently named (per 1,000 residents) alongside "voter fraud" in the post-election period.

Table 1: Most Frequently Mentioned Municipalities
Mentions per Thousand Residents

City	State	Total Mentions	Pre-Election Mentions	Post-Election Mentions	Share Black
Detroit	Michigan	14.3	0.8	13.5	76.6%
Philadelphia	Pennsylvania	6.6	1.5	5.1	40.1%
Atlanta	Georgia	4.3	0.3	4.0	49.3%
Montgomery	Alabama	3.9	0.2	3.8	60.6%
Durham	North Carolina	4.7	1.0	3.7	37.1%
Milwaukee	Wisconsin	3.9	0.3	3.6	38.3%
Erie	Pennsylvania	3.8	0.3	3.5	15.0%
Lansing	Michigan	2.5	0.1	2.5	22.3%
Louisville	Kentucky	2.2	0.3	1.8	23.7%
Marysville	Washington	1.6	0.0	1.6	1.4%

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[7] https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/electionscience

Table 2: Twitter Municipal Regressions (Mentions per 1k residents)

	All Mentions	Pre-Election Mentions	Post-Election Mentions
Share Non-Hispanic Black	1.291**	0.088	1.203***
	(0.455)	(0.276)	(0.328)
Share Non-Hispanic White	0.135	0.030	0.105
	(0.445)	(0.270)	(0.321)
Biden Vote Share, 2020	1.499**	0.729*	0.770*
	(0.483)	(0.293)	(0.348)
Median Age	0.003	0.000	0.003
	(0.014)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Median Income	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Share with Some College	-0.643	-0.594	-0.050
	(0.884)	(0.536)	(0.637)
Num.Obs.	417	417	417
R2	0.096	0.034	0.093
R2 Adj.	0.082	0.020	0.080

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The list includes municipalities most associated with Blackness and Black political power: Detroit, Philadelphia, and Atlanta all make the list, as do Montgomery, Alabama, and Milwaukee, Wisconsin. The average Black share of these ten cities is about 36%—far larger than the Black share of municipalities nationwide (6.8%) and even the set of large cities included in this analysis (16%).

We present the results of OLS models testing the relationship between city-level mentions and characteristics in Table 2. Model 1 tests the relationship between the share of a city's population that was Black and the frequency with which it was mentioned for all of 2020; Model 2 restricts the timeline to the pre-election period, and Model 3 tests these relationships in the post-election period when the fraud rhetoric became much more widespread. By way of reminder, the unit of observation in Table 2 are the municipalities with a population of at least 100,000 according to the ACS 5-year sample ending with 2020.

The relationships uncovered in Table 2 provide strong support for the hypothesis that fraud rhetoric specifically centered on Black cities. While fraud rhetoric definitely

was centered in cities where Biden won a larger vote share, it was also centered in Black cities after accounting for Biden's popularity. This relationship was especially strong in the post-election period, when the fraud rhetoric had its highest valence. We show in the Supplementary Information (SI) that our results are not driven by a small set of outlier cities: when we re-estimate the post-election model 10,000 times, randomly excluding 10 municipalities each time, the p-value on the coefficient on *Share Non-Hispanic Black* never exceeds 0.05. In short, the view from Twitter makes clear that Black cities were at the center of fraud narratives in the aftermath of the 2020 election.

The question remains, however, whether the mass public was *leading* or *following* elites in this conversation. To test this, we identified Tweets in our corpus posted by members of Congress.[8] We find little evidence that these elites participated in this conversation in a meaningful way: members of Congress posted just 883 Tweets in 2020 containing the phrase "voter fraud," and just 57 of these mentioned a municipality. We visualize this relationship for the cities mentioned by Trump in a November 27 Tweet.[9] As Figure 1 makes clear, we see no spike in public conversation about these municipalities in the days following a member of congress mentioning them alongside "voter fraud." All 4 cities see local spikes on days when *no* Congressperson mentioned the city using this phrase. To be sure, other elites could be driving this association between Black cities and voter fraud, but it is not coming from federal politicians.

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[8]Data on Congressional Tweets come from Alex Litel's "Tweets of Congress" project (`https://github.com/alexlitel/congresstweets`).

[9]"Biden can only enter the White House as President if he can prove that his ridiculous "80,000,000 votes" were not fraudulently or illegally obtained. When you see what happened in **Detroit, Atlanta, Philadelphia & Milwaukee**, massive voter fraud, he's got a big unsolvable problem!" (`https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/1332352538855747584`).

Figure 1: Post-Election "Voter Fraud" Tweets by City
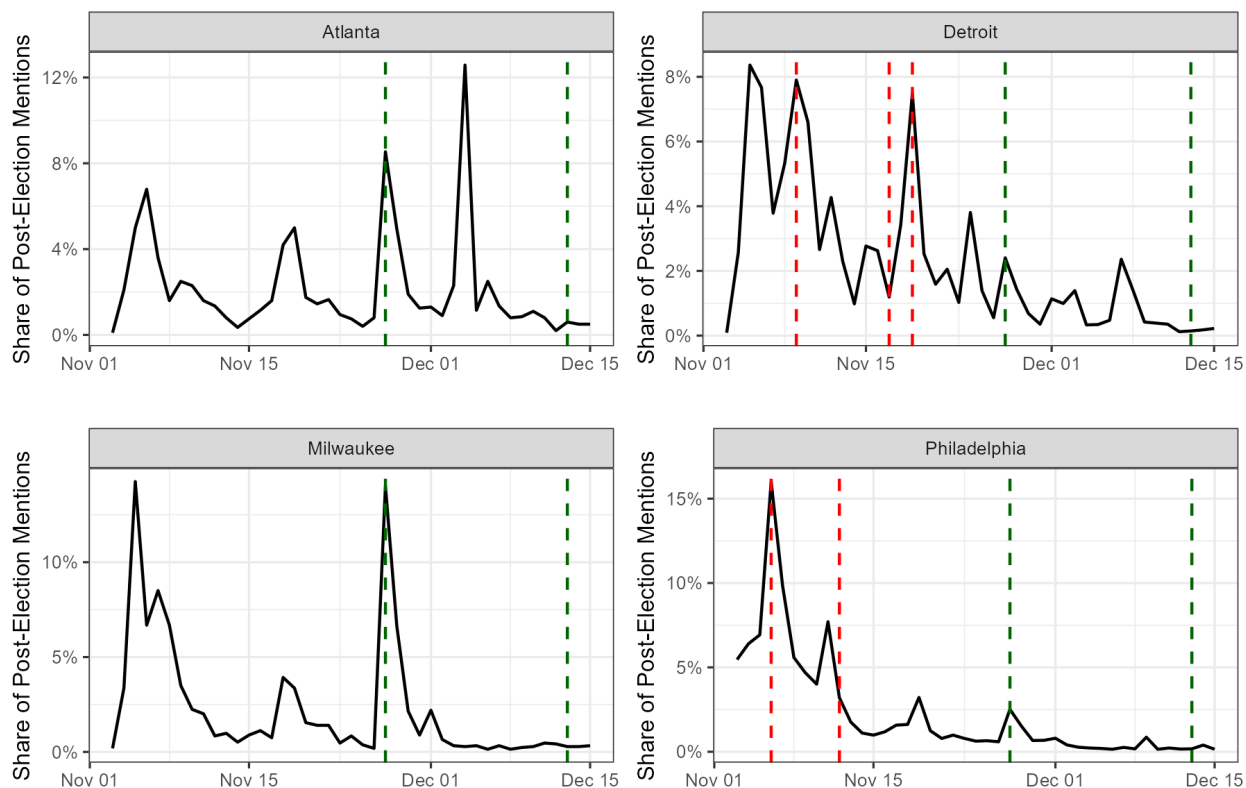
Note: Each day plots the share of total post-election Tweets mentioning that city that occurred on that day. Red lines indicate days that a member of Congress Tweeted about that city and said "voter fraud." The green lines mark days on which Trump mentioned these cities alongside "voter fraud." While the data extend to 12/31/2020, we cap the X-axis for legibility reasons.

Study 2: Survey Data

The previous section showed public rhetoric (as proxied by Twitter posts) associated voter fraud with Black municipalities, and that members of Congress were not the drivers of this phenomenon; they generally *followed* public conversations. Given that public discussion about fraud and election insecurity were racialized, we expect that racially-resentful individuals were susceptible to this narrative. The panel nature of the Cooperative Election Study can tell us how individuals' confidence in the election shifted over the course of the 2020 election cycle. Seven CES teams asked respondents about their confidence in the election before and again after November 3rd, yielding roughly 4,300 white respondents (the wording

of these questions varied from team to team. The precise language used can be found in the SI).[10] The different question wordings allow for different levels of granularity (depending on the instrument, respondents have 3, 4, or 5 possible levels of confidence to choose from) and we recode them such that responses on each item range from 0 to 1.

In addition to these questions about confidence in the election, we incorporate questions from the CES Common Content that are asked of all respondents regardless of the module to which they are assigned. The most important of these questions for the project at hand are those asking which presidential candidate a respondent voted for (or, if they did not vote, which candidate they preferred), along with two questions from the symbolic racism or classical racial resentment scale (Kinder and Sanders, 1996). The CES unfortunately asks respondents how strongly they agree with just 2 of the usual 4 statements. Despite this limitation, the paired-down scale from the CES has been used to reliably measure racial resentment in other academic studies (e.g., Nteta and Tarsi, 2016; Citrin, Levy and Wong, 2017; Garcia and Stout, 2020; Morris, 2023). Although the racial resentment questions are asked in the post-election wave—after potential exposure to what we argue is the "treatment" of racialized fraud rhetoric from Trump and others—recent experimental work indicates that racial resentment is a stable characteristic that is not influenced by racialized treatments (Albertson and Jessee, 2022).

To test whether resentment was associated with post-election changes in confidence, we leverage a two-way fixed effect model, with fixed effects for individual respondents and the period (i.e., pre- or post-election). Our dependent variable is confidence, and our primary independent variable is the interaction of the post-election fixed effect with respondents' racial resentment scores. Of course, factors other than racial resentment might have driven changes in confidence in the election in the period following November 3. More conservative respondents, for instance, might have suffered from the sore loser effect: Americans whose preferred candidate lose are generally less trusting of government (Anderson and LoTempio,

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[10]About 13% of white individuals surveyed by these teams in the pre-election wave failed to complete the post-election wave. In the SI, we show that attrition is unrelated to ideology or pre-election confidence.

2002; Anderson and Guillory, 1997). These voters also often have higher levels of racial resentment. To control for this possibility, we also interact the post-treatment dummy with the following characteristics: 7-point ideology, age, income, gender, collegiate education, Trump support, and whether a respondent watched Fox News.[11] Finally, it seems possible that slight differences in question wording might be taken up differently in the pre- and post-election waves. We thus also interact the post-dummy with team-specific dummies to address these potential confounders. We can thus be relatively sure that relationships between resentment and changes in confidence are not being driven by a third characteristic that happens to be correlated with resentment.

Using these CES data, we test the following hypothesis:

H2: Other things equal, white Americans high in racial resentment expressed greater distrust of the elections *after* their preferred candidate lost.

Table 3 presents the results of these regressions. Model 1 presents results for all respondents, while models 2 and 3 present those for Trump and Biden supporters alone. The table clarifies a number of things. Firstly, as expected, racial resentment is associated with lower confidence in the post-election period, even after accounting for ideology and candidate support (though confidence also deteriorated more for conservative respondents, and those who supported Trump). Model 2 shows that even when the analysis is limited only to those who supported Trump, racial resentment is associated with a decline in confidence relative to the pre-election period. Importantly, racial resentment is unassociated with change in electoral confidence for white Biden supporters—Americans who, presumably, do not need to "explain away" unfavorable election results.

While other characteristics like age and income are unassociated with changes in confidence, ceteris paribus, women who supported Trump saw their confidence decline more than similar men; the opposite was true for non-Trump supporters, perhaps indicating that

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[11]Rupert Murdoch conceded that Fox News had "endorsed" lies about the election in the aftermath of November 3 (Folkenflik, 2023); as such, watching Fox News might have decreased electoral confidence in the post-election period. Unfortunately, this question was asked only in the pre-election wave of the CES. Nevertheless, it remains the best proxy for election-lie media exposure available in the survey.

Table 3: Confidence in Election Results, 2020 CES

|	All Respondents	Trump Supporters	Biden Supporters
Post × Racial Resentment	-0.029*	-0.032*	-0.020
	(0.010)	(0.012)	(0.013)
Post × Family Income	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Post × Female	-0.014	-0.060**	0.038*
	(0.007)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Post × 4-year Degree	-0.010	0.004	-0.025
	(0.010)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Post × Age	0.000	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.001)
Post × Ideology	-0.022*	-0.024*	-0.010
	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.006)
Post × Supported Trump	-0.280***		
	(0.023)		
Post × Watched Fox News	-0.012	-0.004	-0.060
	(0.010)	(0.006)	(0.033)
Post	0.643***	0.157	0.341***
	(0.039)	(0.073)	(0.032)
Respondent Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Team Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Post × Team Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Num.Obs.	7702	3326	3950
R2	0.833	0.783	0.753
R2 Adj.	0.665	0.562	0.502

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Robust standard errors clustered by respondent and team.

female respondents are more susceptible than men to winner / loser effects.

Regression tables can obscure the magnitude of these relationships. Figure 2 visually presents the relationships between racial resentment and confidence in the pre- and post-election periods for each group, net of the other covariates (which are held at their means). Figure 2 makes clear that—across respondents as a whole—racial resentment was related to confidence in the pre-election period. Put differently, those high in resentment were more likely to predict there would be fraud in the election before it was held. This relationship

Figure 2: Racial Resentment and Confidence in the 2020 Election
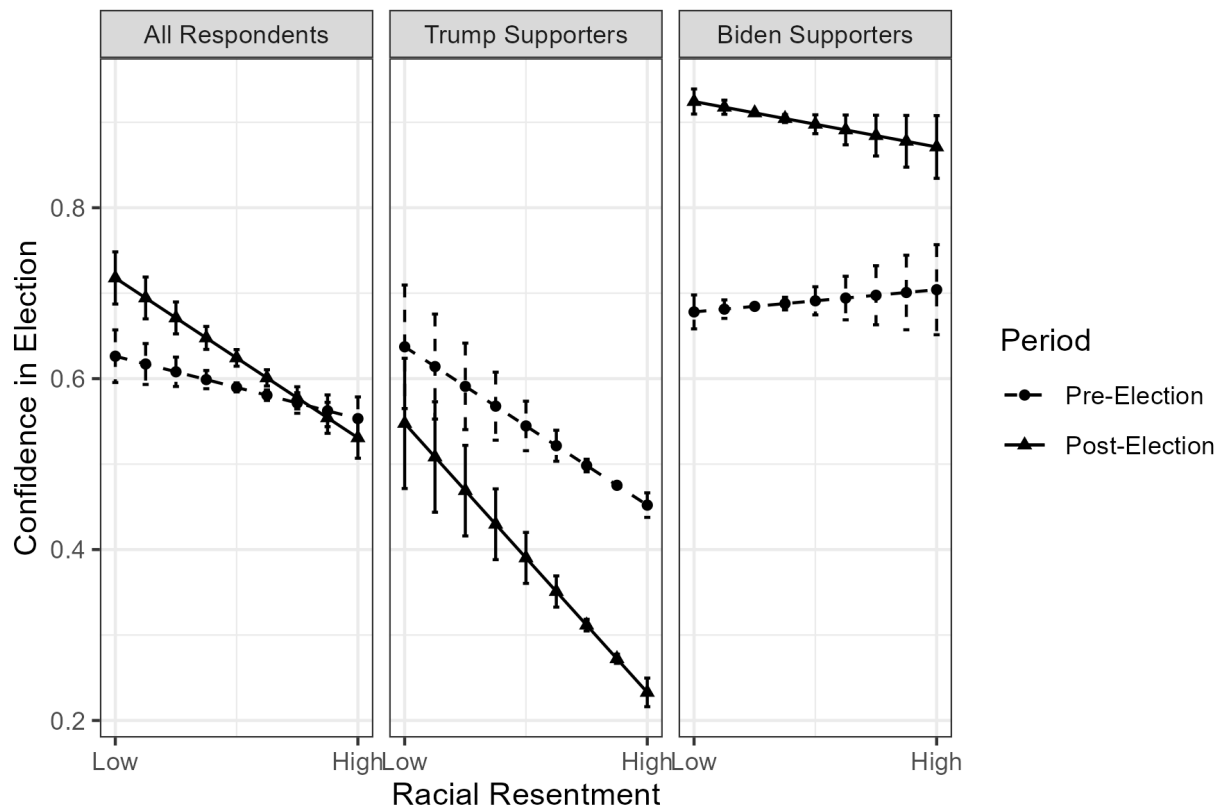
Note: Relationships net of 'Post-Election' interacted with: ideology, Trump support, gender, age, education, income, whether an individual watched Fox News, and team / module fixed effects. Robust standard errors clustered by team and respondent.

is, however, far stronger in the post-election period. In fact, the second panel shows that Trump supporters low in racial resentment had about as much confidence in the election after November 3 as they did beforehand. Those Trump supporters that were racially resentful, however, saw their confidence bottom out in November and December—after being bombarded by the racialized rhetoric about voter fraud. The CES data thus provide strong support for our first set of individual-level expectations. We hypothesized a negative relationship between racial resentment and change in electoral confidence, especially for white Americans who were seeking grounds on which to reject an unfavorable election outcome (that is, those whose preferred presidential candidate lost). Table 3 and Figure 2 provide support for this hypothesis.

The panel nature of the CES data provide a nice test of how perceptions about election integrity shifted in the real world in the fall of 2020. By re-interviewing the same individuals two or three months apart, the surveys allow us to examine broad shifts in the public. Nevertheless, the treatment is imprecise. We cannot know for sure that all CES participants were exposed to equal rhetoric; it is possible that the racially resentful individuals were exposed to more fraud accusations and thus would have seen their confidence deteriorate, whether or not these accusations were racialized. Our third test of the relationship between racial orientations and election confidence uses an experiment to understand whether the relationship detailed above is causal.

Study 3: Survey Experiment[12]

While the CES data make it possible to test how individuals' real-world confidence in the election shifted over the course of the fall of 2020, it does not allow a *direct* test of the causal relationship at play: that certain white Americans found exposure to (racialized) claims of voter fraud particularly convincing. To directly test the causal effects of fraud accusations, we fielded a survey experiment between July 9–10, 2024. We ran the survey using Prolific resulting in 1,500 completed surveys by self-identified white American adults.[13]

Participants were randomly assigned to read one of three treatments made to look like a local news report (as we show in the SI, our randomization was successful). One story was apolitical and about a local restaurant. This was our control condition.[14] The other two featured identical text accusations of corruption and election malfeasance in the fictional city of "Lancaster, Michigan." This story was designed to evoke reactions to "fraud" narratives

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[12]The experiment reported in this section was pre-registered. Please see the SI for the pre-registration plan.

[13]We used two attention screeners prior to randomization to remove low attention respondents from our study near the start of the survey. We used a mix of items designed to flag a range of inattentiveness as shown by Berinsky et al. (2021). We recognize that Berinsky, Margolis and Sances (2014) show how exclusion based on screeners can reduce generalizability because passage is correlated with politically relevant characteristics. However, our goal is internal validity, and our design screens individuals prior to random assignment.

[14]The decision to use a story about food as our apolitical placebo story was inspired by Berlinski et al. (2021).

that swirled after the 2020 election. While the text of the vignette was identical in the two treatment arms (including names), the treated respondents were primed to the city as a predominately white or Black city (with equal probability). Alongside the text, respondents saw pictures of the inside of a polling place. In the "Black city" treatment group, the poll workers and voters were Black. The inverse was true for the "white city" treatment. Voters were also exposed to picture of a local election official (LEO) named Morgan Johnson whose race was consistent with the treatment arm. Respondents were randomly shown one of four Black LEOs or one of four white LEOs. Figure 3 show one of the four potential white and Black LEOs, as well as the picture of the polling place seen by all treated respondents. We paired each white and Black potential LEO as closely as possible in terms of age and gender. The four white and Black LEOs each included two younger pictures (one male presenting, the other female) and two older pictures (again balancing on apparent gender). For the most part, these pictures feature real legislators in Michigan.

After reading the story respondents answered questions about their belief that fraud took place in Lancaster. Participants then answered a factual manipulation check about the story they just read. Respondents were debriefed about the nature of the study, that Lancaster was a fictional city, and that election fraud is rare.[15] Our study was deemed exempt by the REDACTED FOR REVIEW Institutional Review Board.

Our dependent variable captures the extent to which respondents believe fraud occurred in Lancaster, Michigan, in the 2020 presidential election. To measure this attitude we use the 11-item index from the Survey of the Performance of American Elections.[16] This index includes 11 items on a 4-point scale ranging from, "It almost never occurs" to "It is very common," regarding a series of election related activities that are against the law. For example, respondents were asked how often, "People voting more than once in an election"

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[15]The entire survey too participants an average of 6 minutes and 20 seconds. Participants were paid $1.25 for completed surveys.

[16]To the best of our knowledge, this scale has not yet been used in published work. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis for this battery of items prior to fielding our study, using the 2022 SPAE. We uncovered a single factor using principle-component-factor method. In addition, we observed an Cronbach's alpha of .92 suggesting a high level of internal consistency and inter-item correlation.

Figure 3: Treatment Images

(a) One of Four Potential Black LEOs Shown

(b) Black Treatment Arm Polling Place

(c) One of Four Potential White LEOs Shown

(d) White Treatment Arm Polling Place

or "Officials changing the reported vote count in a way that is not a true reflection of the ballots that were actually counted" occurred. The experimental manipulation along with the election fraud belief index allow us to test our first two experimental hypotheses:

- **H3**: Perceptions of electoral fraud will be greater for respondents in both the "Black City" and "White City" conditions compared to respondents in the control condition.
- **H4**: Perceptions of electoral fraud will be greater for respondents in the "Black City" condition relative to the "White City" condition.

We are not just interested in how these accusations operate across the white population as a whole; as we showed in the previous section, they are likely to be especially salient for white Americans high in racial resentment. To explore this possibility, we used two measures of racial resentment to test whether the experimental treatment was moderated

by outgroup animus. We use the two-item version of the classic racial resentment questions (Kinder and Sanders, 1996) (for consistency with the CES-related analyses in Study 2) and a more recent four-item index from Davis and Wilson (2021), "White Resentment Toward African-Americans." In addition to these two measures of racial resentment and *negative out-group* sentiment, recent work (e.g., Jardina, 2019; Jardina and Mickey, 2022) indicates antidemocratic feelings among white Americans might be driven by *positive in-group*, status-protecting considerations; we therefore include the white consciousness index from Jardina and Mickey (2022). The experimental data allow us to test the following hypotheses:

- **H5**[17]: Exposure to accusations of fraud (regardless of the racial characteristics of the city) will increase belief in fraud more for white Americans high in:
  - **H5a**: Racial resentment.
  - **H5b**: White Resentment Towards African-Americans.
  - **H5c**: White consciousness.

- **H6**: Exposure to accusations of fraud against a Black city will increase belief in fraud more than exposure to accusations against a white city for white Americans high in:
  - **H6a**: Racial resentment.
  - **H6b**: White Resentment Towards African-Americans.
 - **H6c**: White consciousness.

We begin by presenting the average level of perceived fraud in each of the treatment arms. Unsurprisingly, respondents assigned to the control group—in which they were presented with no accusations of fraud—were the least likely to believe fraud had occurred. Respondents assigned to both the Black and white treatment conditions believed fraud was more likely in Lancaster in 2020.[18] This is consistent with work showing that mere information asserting fraud, even when unsubstantiated, can increase individual belief that it is occurring (Berlinski et al., 2021; Clayton et al., 2021). We find no difference in belief

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[17]This hypothesis was not pre-registered.
[18]Manipulation check passage rates were 93% for the Control, 85% for Black, and 80% for white arms. Individuals who passed and who failed are included in these models.

Figure 4: Reported Beliefs in Election Fraud
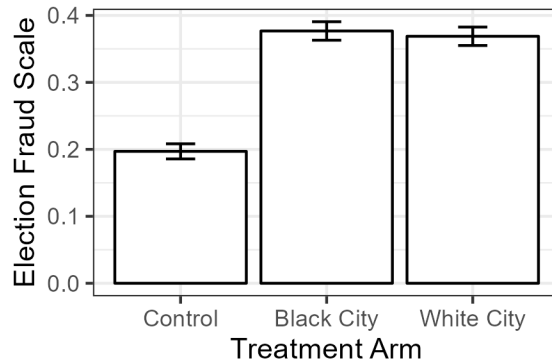
in fraud between the Black and the white treatment arms. While information about fraud moved attitudes, it did so equally whether the city was presented as white or Black. This is evidence in favor of H3, but not H4, where we expected a differential effect across the Black and white treatment groups.

However, Figure 4 obscures important partisan differences in responses to the treatments.[19] While white Democrats and moderates were not more likely to believe accusations against Black than white cities, the same was not true for Republicans: those who identified as relatively strong Republicans found accusations against Black cities more credible. While Republicans in the "white city" treatment arm scored about 0.58, on average, on the election fraud scale, those in the "Black city" arm scored 0.65—or about 12% higher.

Finally, we explore whether the treatment effects were moderated by antipathetic social characteristics (racial resentment and white consciousness). In Figure 6, we test whether exposure to *any* accusations of fraud—whether against a white or Black city—had a different impact on fraud beliefs for individuals high in resentment or white consciousness. Figure 6 makes two things clear. First, even among individuals in the *control* group, there is a strong relationship between antipathetic characteristics and belief in fraud: those high in resentment and white consciousness are far more likely to believe that fraud occurred in Lancaster, even when they were exposed to no narratives indicating that was the case. Sec-

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[19]Our partisan analysis was not pre-registered.

Figure 5: Reported Beliefs in Election Fraud by Party
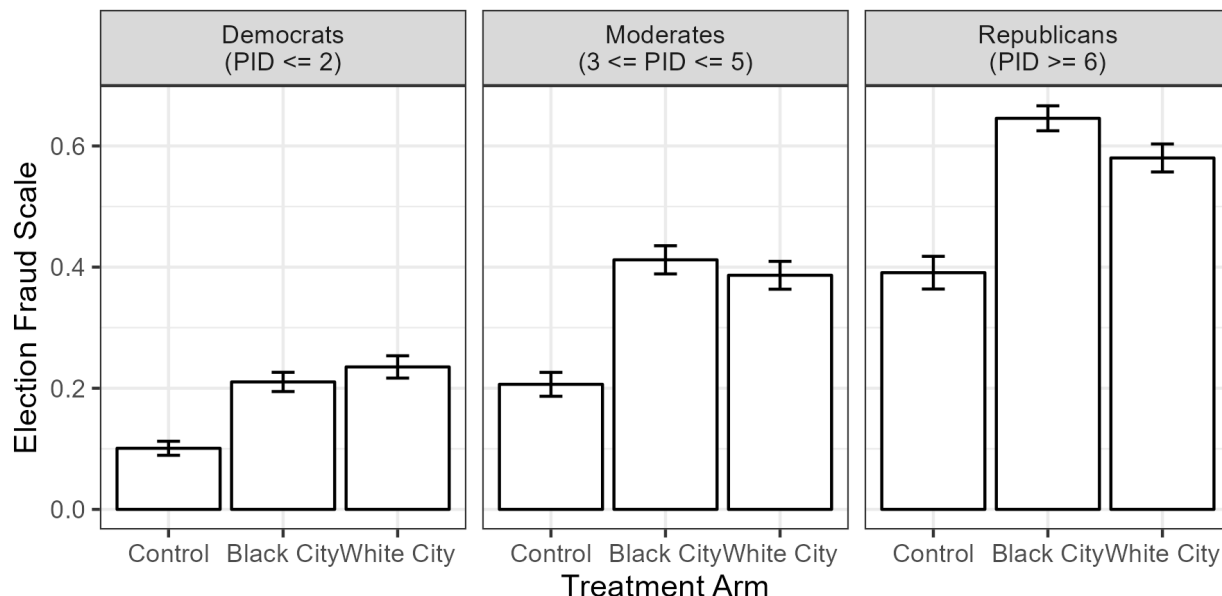
ondly, when it comes to resentment (either the traditional measure, or White Resentment Towards African-Americans), the treatment was especially powerful. To be sure, even those respondents low in resentment were more likely to believe that fraud occurred if they were in a treatment group. But the news story about accusations of fraud moved the distrust of resentful individuals considerably more. (It is also worth noting that *treated* respondents low in resentment were less suspicious of fraud than *control* respondents high in resentment).

We end by asking whether racially antipathetic characteristics led to different responses to the white and Black treatment arms. By way of reminder, we expected that white respondents high in antipathetic characteristics would find accusations of fraud *especially* credible if they were made against a Black municipality. Here, our evidence is somewhat mixed: for all three measures, the interaction of the Black treatment (relative to the white treatment) and a respondent's antipathetic characteristics are positive, providing support for our hypotheses. However, this result is only statistically significant using a two-tailed test when it comes to the traditional racial resentment questions ($p = 0.03$).

The interaction between the Black treatment arm and the measure of White Resent-

Figure 6: Treatment Effect on Reported Beliefs in Election Fraud, Moderated by Racial Antipathy
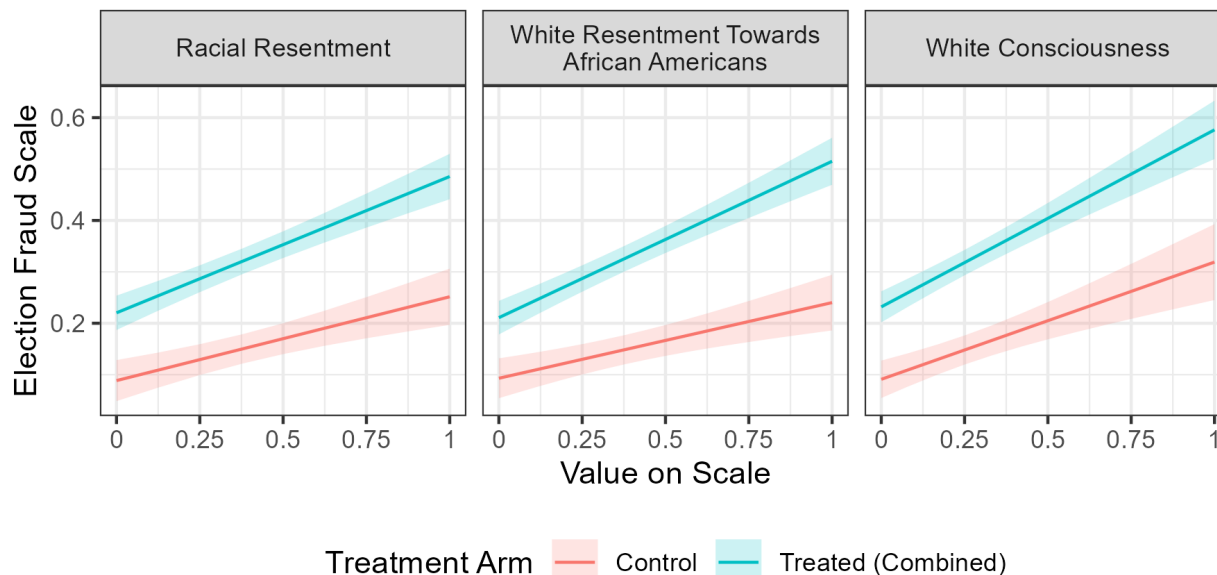
Note: Relationships net of age, gender, education, income, party ID, and ideology.

ment Towards African-Americans is only marginally significant ($p = 0.09$) using a two-tailed test. While we did not pre-register whether this test would be run using a one- or two-tailed test, given that we pre-registered a directional hypothesis (that the interaction between this measure and the Black city treatment would be positive), a one-tailed test might be more appropriate. If we use a one-tailed test, our results provide evidence that supports our hypothesis. We further note (and show in the SI) that while the interaction between the Black treatment and White Resentment Towards African-Americans is statistically significant relative to the control group, the same is not true for the interaction between the white treatment and White Resentment Towards African-Americans. We conclude that it is very likely that resentful white Americans are more likely to believe accusations of fraud made against Black municipalities than against white ones, though future work should continue to explore this.

Figure 7: Treatment Effect on Reported Beliefs in Election Fraud, Moderated by Racial Antipathy
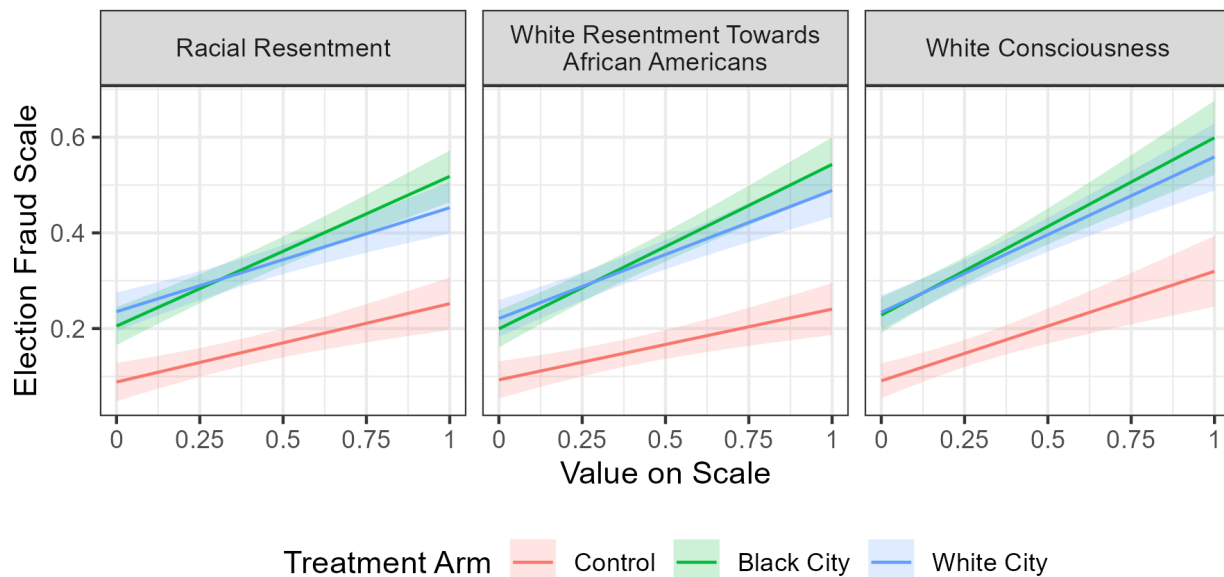
Note: Relationships net of age, gender, education, income, party ID, and ideology.

Discussion

In the aftermath of the 2020 election, many grass-roots organizers, pundits, and journalists called attention to the racialized nature of the Big Lie: the most prevalent accusations of fraud, it seemed, centered on Black municipalities, and cast Black Americans as the most frequent perpetrators of election crime. This paper shows that the public narratives about voter fraud were indeed centered on Black municipalities—and that race and racial antipathy play an important role in how those accusations are received and incorporated into beliefs about election security. Three distinct approaches support this conclusion: an analysis of the geographical content of Tweets talking about voter fraud; an examination of individual whites' beliefs about election security before and after the 2020 presidential election; and a survey experiment testing the effect of racialized fraud claims on white Americans' electoral confidence.

The first study shows that when specific municipalities were mentioned alongside

"voter fraud" on Twitter in 2020, these municipalities were often Black ones. In fact, the only other municipal characteristic associated with how frequently a city's name was mentioned was Biden's vote share in 2020. To be sure, this study has limitations, and future work should continue to explore the precise contours of this public narrative. Firstly, the view from Twitter might not be representative of the narrative experienced and created by the American public more broadly. Secondly, within the Twitter data, future work should explore the different ways in which this narrative was expressed. For the purposes of this study, establishing that Black cities played an out-sized role in the national conversation about fraud was sufficient. And yet, a fuller accounting of the breakdown between those *promoting* accusations of fraud versus those *contesting* them would be helpful. So, too, would an analysis of the narrative being generated in these posts, versus amplified by them (either by liking / re-Tweeting, or by sharing news articles and written work produced off of Twitter). Finally, sentiment analysis of these Tweets could provide richer data on whether the ways in which Black municipalities are tied to voter fraud rhetorics, in addition to simple frequencies.

After establishing that voter fraud rhetoric was centered on Black cities in 2020, particularly in the post-election period, we analyzed changes in white Americans' views of election security over the period in which the Big Lie was the most active. While these data are not causal in nature, the panel structure of the Cooperative Election Study makes it possible to hold individual-level characteristics constant across the fall of 2020 to look at attitudinal shifts. White Trump supporters high in racial resentment should have been the most threatened by the outcome of the presidential election that fall. Did they trust the security of the election less as a way of coping with this loss?

The results corroborate these expectations. There was a much stronger relationship between racial resentment and election confidence in the post-election period, after Americans were subjected to widespread (and, as the Twitter data shows, racialized) claims about voter fraud. These results held even after accounting for the possibility that more conservative white Americans might have seen their confidence decline more as a "sore-loser"

outcome; similarly, the analyses allowed that Fox News viewers might have a different shift from the pre- to post-election period.

The first two empirical sections of this paper established that A) public narratives about fraud were centered in Black municipalities in the post-election period, and B) that racial resentment was negatively related to electoral confidence, especially in the post-election period. But is there a *causal* relationship here? Are white Americans more susceptible to false accusations of fraud when levied against Black and Black-led municipalities? And is this moderated by individual-level racially antipathetic measures? While the first sections cannot answer these questions causally, the survey experiment provides some supportive evidence.

Broadly speaking, white Americans are not more likely to believe accusations of fraud levied against Black municipalities than against white cities. While this is a good thing, it obscures important differences within the white population. Republicans, for instance, are significantly more likely to believe accusations against Black than white municipalities. And while racially resentful white Americans are more likely to believe in fraud, regardless of whether they were treated with accusations of fraud, they were especially responsive to accusations levied against Black cities. Importantly, in our experiment, fraud beliefs map more cleanly onto out-group focused measures of resentment than onto in-group measures of white consciousness. Of course, it seems possible that accusations of fraud are considered more credible when made against Black cities *because of* the national dialogue that centered Black cities like Detroit, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia. Untangling whether the underlying beliefs structure the public conversation, or the conversation drives the skepticism of Black cities—and the role of elite rhetoric in these processes—will be a challenging but necessary endeavor for future work. We encourage others to investigate how implicit or explicit racial primes help decrease confidence in elections.

Taken as a whole, the results paint a dismal—if unsurprising—picture of the central role of anti-Blackness in public discourse and belief-formation about election insecurity in the

contemporary United States. Racial concerns fully imbue the rhetoric of and receptiveness to fraud narratives. Black cities are over-represented in the conversation and white Republicans and resentful individuals find fraud accusations made against Black cities more credible than those made against white ones. Further, we find that white Americans high in resentment were far more suspicious of fraud—even when assigned to the control condition in which fraud was not mentioned.

Black-white racial cleavages are at the center of American politics. The American social hierarchy places white Americans at the very top, and centuries of "democratic" practices have rendered the socially-constructed nature of this arrangement invisible to white Americans. Recent years have seen that system challenged, and some of its uglier truths made explicit. Often, these advances have been made within the formal bounds of electoral politics, through the obvious example of Barack Obama's presidency, but also through other displays of Black political power in races like Georgia's recent Senate contests (January 5th 2021). It is perhaps symbolic that the very next day, a mostly white crowed decried an American election with violence and anger. That white voters should undermine this political strength of Black and nonwhite Americans with appeals to criminality is nothing new; as scholars like Weaver (2007) and others have shown, pivots—or "frontlashes"—to focus on the purported criminality of Black America in response to increased access to the franchise is a well-established feint. Recognizing the role that these patterns continue to play in fights over the ballot box is of signal importance as the felt threat of diminished power for white Americans continues to grow in the coming decades.

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Supplementary Information

Contents

Table A1: Twitter Municipal Regressions

	All Mentions	Pre-Election Mentions	Post-Election Mentions
Share Non-Hispanic Black	977.504*	14.597	746.277**
	(481.697)	(113.478)	(251.156)
Share Non-Hispanic White	-45.245	195.064	403.562
	(509.476)	(114.996)	(254.515)
Biden Vote Share, 2020	-339.569	295.761*	398.794
	(504.807)	(120.698)	(267.136)
Median Age	20.362	4.092	7.266
	(11.994)	(3.487)	(7.718)
Median Income	-0.001	0.000	0.001
	(0.004)	(0.001)	(0.002)
Share with Some College	-84.694	-439.067	-820.775
	(821.524)	(224.798)	(497.536)
Log(Population)	535.912***	174.817***	300.878***
	(55.312)	(17.539)	(38.818)
State Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
Num.Obs.	417	417	417
R2	0.332	0.231	0.183
R2 Adj.	0.234	0.218	0.169

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

A.1 Study 1 Appendices

A.1.1 Alternate Twitter Regressions

In the body of the manuscript, we present regressions using data from Twitter in which the dependent variable is the number times a city was mentioned on the platform with "voter fraud." We included population as a covariate. Here, we show our results are consistent when instead we make the dependent variable the number of per-capita mentions, and drop population as a covariate.

A.1.2 Twitter Regression Robustness Check

In the body of the manuscript, we argue that the share of a city that was Black was highly correlated with the number of times it was mentioned on Twitter alongside the phrase "voter

Figure A1: Distribution of p-values on Coefficient for *Share Non-Hispanic Black* for Post-Election Twitter Mentions
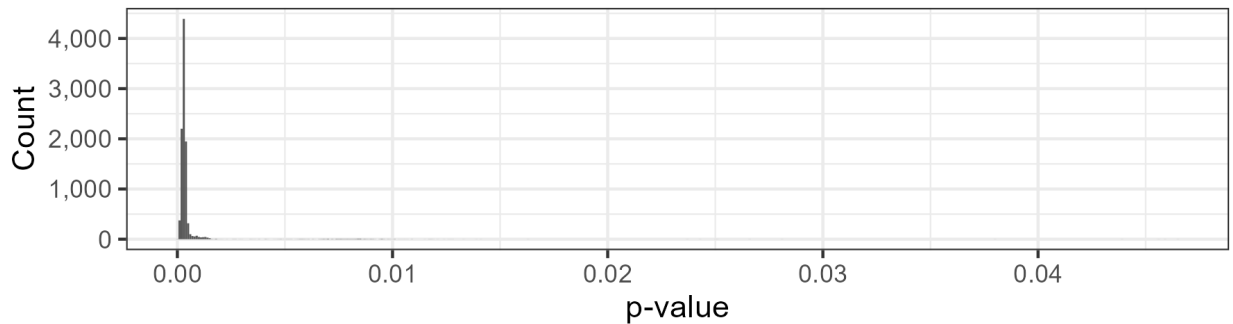
Regression controls for share white, Bident's vote share, median age, median income, and share with at least some college.

fraud," other things being equal. Of course, a few cities dominated the narratives about voter fraud in the 2020 election. Is it possible that a few cities that happened to be largely Black are driving this result, for reasons other than their racial composition?

We argue that this is not the case. To ensure that our analysis is not being driven by outliers, we re-ran the post-election regressions 10,000 times. Each time, we randomly dropped 10 cities from the analysis. As Figure A1 indicates, the p-value on *Share Non-Hispanic Black* never exceeded 0.05. In 95% of cases, the p-value was less than 0.001. We consider this to be strong evidence that outlier municipalities are not driving our results, and that there really is a substantively important relationship between the share of a city that was Black and its role in voter fraud narratives.

A.2 Study 2 Appendices

A.2.1 Wording of CES Module Questions

- Module: YLS

    - Pre-Election Question: "In your view, how likely is it that the following [Voters are counted fairly] will occur in the November election?"
    - Post-Election Question: "In your view, how often did the following [Voters are

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counted fairly] will [*sic*] occur in the November election?"

- Module: UTB

    - Pre-Election Question: "How confident are you that your vote will be counted as you intended if you vote in the November 2020 General Election?"

    - Post-Election Question: "How confident are you that your vote in the 2020 General Election was counted as you intended?" *or* "If you would have voted in the 2020 General Election, how confident are you that your vote would have been counted as you intended?"

- Module: UGA

    - Pre-Election Question: "For the **upcoming** presidential election, how confident are you that votes nationwide will be counted as voters intend?"

    - Post-Election Question: "For the presidential election that occurred in November, how confident are you that votes nationwide were counted as voters intended?"

- Module: UCR

    - Pre-Election Questions (Averaged): "In the elections this November, how accurately do you think the votes from the following [Traditional polling places; Mail-in-ballots] will be counted?"

    - Post-Election Questions (Averaged): "In the elections this November, how accurately do you think the votes from the following [Traditional polling places; Mail-in-ballots] were counted?"

- Module: RCO

    - Pre-Election Question: "How confident are you that votes *nationwide* will be counted as voters intend?" *or* "I am confident that votes *nationwide* will be counted as intended."

    - Post-Election Question: "Think about vote counting throughout the country. How confident are you that votes **nationwide** were counted as voters intended?" *or* "I am confident that votes **nationwide** were counted as intended."

- Module: MCS

    - Pre-Election Question: "How confident are you that votes **nationwide** will be counted as voters intend?"

    - Post-Election Question: "Finally, think about vote counting throughout the country. How confident are you that votes **nationwide** were counted as voters intended?"

- Module: LSU

- Pre-Election Question: "When it comes to the 2020 election, how much confidence do you have that all votes will be counted accurately?"
- Post-Election Question: "How much confidence do you have that all votes were counted accurately?"

A.2.2 Attrition Regression

In the body of the manuscript we study individuals who responded to both the pre- and post-election waves of the 2020 Cooperative Election Study. Unfortunately, about 13% of individuals who responded to the pre-election wave attrited for the post-election wave. If the characteristics of these individuals were correlated with other drivers of confidence (or change in confidence) in the 2020 election, this could cause problems for our analysis. Table A2 indicates this is not the case. Here, the dependent variable is whether a respondent attrited from the sample. We are, of course, limited to only the characteristics collected in the pre-election wave of the CES. Nevertheless, we show that attrition is uncorrelated with either pre-election confidence in the election or ideology. While Trump supporters were slightly more likely to attrit, there was no relationship between these characteristics and attrition *among* Trump supporters. Note that here we use pre-election candidate preferences, while the models in the body of the manuscript use post-election support.

A.3 Study 3 Appendices

A.3.1 Experiment Details

The following bolded words link to the anonymous OSF (Open Science Framework) registry: **CLICK FOR BLIND PEER REVIEW**. The two files on this page are our PAP (pre-analysis plan) and our survey items and treatment language for our July 2024 survey experiment. This file includes the study's theoretical justification, description of a pilot study, variables used, sample size justification, pre-registered hypotheses, and more. We flag deviations from our pre-analysis plan within the manuscript.

Table A2: Attrition from Pre- to Post-Election Wave, 2020 CES

	All Respondents	Trump Supporters	Biden Supporters
Pre-Election Confidence	-0.068	0.008	-0.122*
	(0.029)	(0.036)	(0.034)
Family Income	0.000**	0.000*	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female	-0.043**	-0.033**	-0.032
	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.016)
Age	-0.009***	-0.008***	-0.008***
	(0.000)	(0.001)	(0.000)
Ideology	0.012	-0.003	0.004
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.006)
Supported Trump (Pre-Election)	-0.066*		
	(0.026)		
Watched Fox News	0.026	0.027	0.028
	(0.018)	(0.024)	(0.049)
Num.Obs.	4393	1813	2100
R2	0.262	0.237	0.222
Team Fixed Effects	✓	✓	✓
R2 Adj.	0.259	0.232	0.217

* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Robust standard errors clustered by team.

A.3.1.1 Participant Contact and Compensation

We collected our sample using Prolific. Participants are notified by Prolific of opportunities to participate when they meet study requirements. Recruitment materials that potential participants saw were as follows:

- Title: A Research Study on Your Political Opinions

- Description: You will take a 5-6 minute survey asking about your opinions on politics and elections.

- Keywords: survey, political opinions, politics

Participate were screened beforehand to ensure they were U.S. adults, living in the U.S., and self-identified as white. At the end of data collection (July 9-10, 2024), we had collected 1,500 completed responses. Participants were compensated for their participation. Respondents were paid $1.25 for participation. The survey took an average of about 6 minutes to complete. As a result, participants were paid an acceptable ethical wage of approximately $12.50 per hour (per Prolific's standards).

A.3.1.2 Consent

After qualifying, participants were given a link to our Prolific survey. Before beginning the survey, participants were asked to give consent and told that they were about to take part in an academic study reviewed by an IRB (study was reviewed by BLINDED FOR REVIEW) and deemed exempt from full review. Participants were told the nature of the study and that their participation was voluntary. Informed consent was given in the affirmative on the second page participants interacted with in our survey. The first page was a mandatory confirmation of their Prolific ID. This is needed before the consent page to ensure that their response was recorded and they would be compensated.

A.3.1.3 Potential Presence of Deception

A small amount of what could be considered deception was used in the experimental vignettes. In the control condition participants read about a made up restaurant. In the treatment conditions, participants read a story that alleged election malfeasance occurred in a fictional city. Because we wanted to understand the effect of such accusations in places with different racial valence, we needed to emulate the assertions made by elites and bad actors, even though the evidence of such broad claims is scarce.

This story around a fake municipality was read by participants in July of 2024, about a month removed from major state primary elections and multiple months from the federal election. As a result, it is unlikely participation interfered with the political process in tangible or enduring ways. That said, we are cognizant of the fact that repeated rhetoric of this nature has the potential to erode electoral confidence, especially when repeated by high profile political leaders (Clayton et al., 2021). Of note, on the second day our survey was open, the House passed a bill to ban noncitizens from voting in federal elections, potentially heightening the salience of voter fraud in the eyes of the public. However, by this time, we were only missing roughly 8 respondents—and do not believe this is sufficient to have biased our study. If anything, this would perhaps make it harder to find differences between individuals exposed to the treatment and control conditions since it would heighten baseline awareness that fraud can occur in elections. In addition, we took steps at the end of our survey to mitigate lasting effects of deception via a concise and unambiguous debrief.

Participants were debriefed at the end of the survey to clarify that any information they read about the prevalence of voter fraud did not reflect the true state of the world. That language is below. "You may have been asked to read a story about possible election malfeasance in the city of Lancaster, Michigan. This city and the local newspaper covering the events were both fictional. The fraud described did not occur. Nationally, instances of coordinated election fraud and ballot tampering are exceedingly rare and are not found to be pivotal in election outcomes."

Table A3: Randomization Check

	Control	Black City	White City
Classic Racial Resentment	0.36	0.38	0.37
White Resentment Against African Americans	0.35	0.35	0.34
White Consciousness	0.24	0.24	0.24
Age	40.4303	41.3443	39.2786
Female	57.23%	60.08%	61.27%
4 Year Degree or More	51.81%	55.60%	56.15%
Income	$68,132.53	$71,653.06	$70,942.62
7-Point Party ID	3.21	3.35	3.38
7-Point Ideology	3.29	3.38	3.22

Notes:

* Mean different from control respondents (t-test, $p < 0.05$).

† Distribution different from control respondents (Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, $p < 0.05$).

A.3.1.4 Survey Items and Experimental Vignettes

Survey items and full vignette language and images are available here.

A.3.1.5 Randomization Check

Table A3 shows that the randomization process was successful. In no case are either the mean or the distribution of any characteristics in the control and treatment groups different.

A.3.2 Regression Tables for Experimental Models

Here we present the regressions for the overall experimental effects, as well as those broken out by the party identification of the respondents. Effects are measured relative to respondents in the white city treatment arm.

A.3.2.1 Overall Experimental Models

A.3.2.2 Interaction Models

In the body of the manuscript, we present marginal effects plots visually showing the levels of belief in fraud for the pooled set of treated respondents and control units (Figure 4),

Table A4: Fraud Beliefs by Treatment

	Overall	Democrats (PID <= 2)	Moderates (3 <= PID <= 5)	Republicans (PID >= 6)
Black City Treatment	0.008	-0.026	0.025	0.065*
	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.031)	(0.033)
Control	-0.172**	-0.134**	-0.180**	-0.189**
	(0.018)	(0.022)	(0.031)	(0.033)
Num.Obs.	1477	637	515	324
R2	0.077	0.066	0.089	0.161
R2 Adj.	0.076	0.063	0.086	0.156
F	61.527	22.301	25.047	30.826

† p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01
Effects measured relative to individuals in the White City treatment.

and for each treatment arm (Figure 5), interacted with respondents' racially antipathetic characteristics. Here we present the underlying regression tables. In each case, the omitted category for the treatment arm are control respondents.

Tables A5 and A6 measure the treatment arms relative to the control group. They provide support for the conclusion that respondents high in racially antipathetic characteristics were more likely to believe the fraud accusations for the full pooled set of treated respondents (Table A5), and for the accusations against a Black municipality, relative to the control condition. While those high in White Resentment Towards African-Americans were *also* more likely to believe fraud accusations against a *white* city, relative to the controls, the same was not true for those high in classical racial resentment and white consciousness; these respondents only responded to accusations against a white municipality.

However, Tables A5 and A6 do not directly test whether the white and Black treatment arms differed from one another. Table A7 directly tests the control and Black treatment conditions relative to the white treatment condition. Here, we can see that the Black treatment (relative to the white treatment) only disproportionately moved individuals high in classical racial resentment. We note, however, that individuals high in White Resentment Towards African-Americans were perhaps *marginally* ($p = 0.09$) more likely to believe ac-

Table A5: Fraud Beliefs: Interactions Between Antipathetic Measures and Treatment

	Classic Racial Resentment	White Resentment Toward African Americans	White Consiousness
Antipathetic Measure	0.163**	0.147**	0.228**
	(0.038)	(0.037)	(0.046)
Pooled Treatment	0.132**	0.118**	0.141**
	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Pooled Treatment × Antipathetic Measure	0.102*	0.157**	0.116*
	(0.040)	(0.039)	(0.053)
Age	-0.001**	-0.001**	-0.002**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female	0.084**	0.089**	0.080**
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
No High School Degree	-0.093	-0.078	-0.056
	(0.069)	(0.069)	(0.069)
High School Graduate	0.031	0.029	0.051*
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Some College	0.017	0.016	0.027†
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
2-year college degree	-0.001	0.002	0.011
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Income	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
7-Point Party ID	0.022**	0.020**	0.024**
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.005)
7-Point Ideology	0.041**	0.039**	0.044**
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Num.Obs.	1444	1442	1447
R2	0.440	0.446	0.449
R2 Adj.	0.434	0.441	0.444
F	86.262	88.580	89.928

† p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01

Treatment relative to control.

Education measured relative to respondents with 4-year college degree.

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Table A6: Fraud Beliefs: Interactions Between Antipathetic Measures and Treatment

	Classic Racial Resentment	White Resentment Toward African Americans	White Consiousness
Antipathetic Measure	0.164**	0.148**	0.229**
	(0.038)	(0.037)	(0.046)
Black City Treatment	0.117**	0.107**	0.137**
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Black City Treatment × Antipathetic Measure	0.149**	0.196**	0.142*
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.062)
White City Treatment	0.147**	0.128**	0.143**
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.020)
White City Treatment × Antipathetic Measure	0.053	0.120**	0.096
	(0.046)	(0.044)	(0.059)
Age	-0.001**	-0.001**	-0.002**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female	0.083**	0.089**	0.080**
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
No High School Degree	-0.096	-0.079	-0.055
	(0.069)	(0.069)	(0.069)
High School Graduate	0.030	0.029	0.051*
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Some College	0.018	0.017	0.027†
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
2-year college degree	0.000	0.003	0.012
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Income	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
7-Point Party ID	0.022**	0.021**	0.024**
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
7-Point Ideology	0.041**	0.039**	0.044**
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Num.Obs.	1444	1442	1447
R2	0.441	0.448	0.450
R2 Adj.	0.435	0.442	0.444
F	75.215	77.015	77.917

† $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Treatment relative to control.

Education measured relative to respondents with 4-year college degree.

cusations against Black cities using a two-tailed test, though significant with a one-tailed test (consistent with our pre-registered directional hypothesis). Recall, too, that the interaction between the Black treatment arm and White Resentment Towards African-Americans was statistically significant relative to the *control* group, while the white treatment arm interacted with White Resentment Towards African-Americans was not.

Table A7: Fraud Beliefs: Interactions Between Antipathetic Measures and Treatment

	Classic Racial Resentment	White Resentment Toward African Americans	White Consiousness
Antipathetic Measure	0.217**	0.268**	0.325**
	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.043)
Black City Treatment	-0.030	-0.022	-0.006
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Black City Treatment × Antipathetic Measure	0.096*	0.076†	0.046
	(0.045)	(0.045)	(0.060)
Control	-0.147**	-0.128**	-0.143**
	(0.022)	(0.021)	(0.020)
Control × Antipathetic Measure	-0.053	-0.120**	-0.096
	(0.046)	(0.044)	(0.059)
Age	-0.001**	-0.001**	-0.002**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Female	0.083**	0.089**	0.080**
	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.012)
No High School Degree	-0.096	-0.079	-0.055
	(0.069)	(0.069)	(0.069)
High School Graduate	0.030	0.029	0.051*
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Some College	0.018	0.017	0.027†
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
2-year college degree	0.000	0.003	0.012
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Income	0.000**	0.000**	0.000**
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
7-Point Party ID	0.022**	0.021**	0.024**
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
7-Point Ideology	0.041**	0.039**	0.044**
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Num.Obs.	1444	1442	1447
R2	0.441	0.448	0.450
R2 Adj.	0.435	0.442	0.444
F	75.215	77.015	77.917

† $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Treatment relative to white city treatment.

Education measured relative to respondents with 4-year college degree.

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