What Fraud Looks Like: A Conjoint Analysis to Examine Perceptions of Voter Fraud

Adriano Udani
Assistant Professor
Department of Political Science
Public Policy Administration Program
University of Missouri – St. Louis
udania@umsl.edu

David C. Kimball
Professor
Department of Political Science
University of Missouri – St. Louis
dkimball@umsl.edu

Abstract

Public concerns about voter fraud are widespread and are frequently cited to justify new voting restrictions and harsh punishment for violators. But, to what extent do beliefs about a perpetrator's identity shape public support for efforts to prevent and punish voter fraud? Few studies examine the images or examples people have in mind when they think about voter fraud. We report results of a national survey with a conjoint analysis, an experimental design that asks respondents to decide whether a person is more likely to cast an illegal ballot, after being given traits describing the person. Some of the traits provide implicit cues about the person's racial or ethnic identity. We find that Americans perceive typical illegal voters as immigrants, people with a criminal record, and members of the opposite political party. A second measure finds that Americans tend to overestimates the share of illegal voters who are immigrants or people of color. Among white respondents, images of illegal voters are linked to beliefs about the frequency with which voter fraud occurs, and support for controversial voter identification policies.

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Policies to combat voter fraud, such as laws requiring photo identification for voters or proof of citizenship for registrants, have been debated recently in national government and just about every state. Proponents of new voting restrictions often cite public concerns about voter fraud and the need to buttress public confidence in the voting process. Indeed, public concerns about voter fraud are widespread and there is strong public support for restrictive voting policies (Alvarez et al. 2011; Atkeson et al. 2014; Gronke et al. 2015; Udani and Kimball 2017), despite a growing body of evidence that voter fraud is extremely rare (Minnite 2010; Kahn and Carson 2012; Christensen and Schultz 2014; Ahlquist et al. 2014; Levitt 2014; Ansolabehere, Luks, and Schaffner 2015). What nurtures public beliefs about voter fraud in the face of contrary evidence?

Prior research indicates that public beliefs about voter fraud and support for photo ID laws are shaped by party identification (Atkeson et al. 2014; Gronke et al. 2015; Stewart, Ansolabehere and Persily 2016; Kane 2017), conspiratorial thinking (Edelson et al. 2017), messages about voter fraud (Wilson and Brewer 2013; Kane 2017; Udani and Kimball 2018) and animosity toward African Americans and immigrants (Appleby and Federico 2017; Wilson and Brewer 2013; Udani and Kimball 2017). These studies indicate that there are multiple sources of public support for voting restrictions and that there are partisan differences in public responses to messages about voter fraud.

However, there are gaps in our understanding of the sources of public opinion in this domain. For example, while there is evidence of partisan and ideological influences on public opinion, concern about voter fraud remains relatively high among liberals and conservatives, and among Democrats, Republicans, and Independents. In particular, we do not have much information about the images or examples people have in mind when they think about voter fraud (for a rare example, see Atkeson 2014). Who is the typical perpetrator of voter fraud?

These perceptions are important because beliefs about the typical perpetrators are likely biased and they may also shape public support for efforts to prevent and punish voter fraud.

Extensive research shows that public "typifications" of criminal offenders are heavily biased. That is, Americans tend to believe that people of color and immigrants are more prone toward violence and crime than whites. Furthermore, public images of the typical criminal offenders are strongly linked to prejudicial beliefs about immigrants and people of color. The typification of crime is important because those images influence public support for various criminal justice policies. The pictures of likely criminals that we carry in our heads shape our preferences for crime policies.

There may be a similar pattern in public beliefs about voter fraud. Political rhetoric about election reform sometimes fuses immigrant and racial threat narratives with fears about voter fraud (Dreier and Martin 2010; Minnite 2010; Hasen 2012; Ellis 2014; Udani and Kimball 2017; Smith 2017). Given evidence of racial prejudice and heightened concerns about immigration among some Americans (Kinder and Kam 2009; Abrajano and Hajnal 2015) elite rhetoric about voter fraud may reach a receptive public (e.g., Smith 2017). Thus, we hypothesize that some Americans perceive racial, ethnic, and language minorities as more typical perpetrators of voter fraud. We also hypothesize that people who believe that immigrants and people of color are more likely to commit voter fraud will tend to support more restrictive and punitive voting policies.

In this study, we report the results of a national survey module of the 2017 Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES). We use two measures to determine the traits Americans associate with the typical perpetrator of voter fraud, and both reveal evidence of perceptual biases. A conjoint analysis indicates that the mass public perceives that immigrants and people with a criminal past are the most likely voter fraud offenders. We also find important differences when we subset the data by party and race. For example, people tend to associate voter fraud with members of the opposite political party. Furthermore, different racial and ethnic groups have different profiles of voter fraud perpetrators. A second measure shows that Americans tend to overestimate the share of voter fraud offenders who are Black or immigrants while underestimating the White share of

offenders. Among White Americans, these perceptions are critical because they are associated with beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud and public support for controversial policies intended to prevent and deter voter fraud. Public support for more aggressive government restrictions on voting is partly based on a foundation of perceptual biases.

Public Beliefs about Voter Fraud

A growing body of research in American politics examines public attitudes about voter fraud. Understanding public opinion is important because of its influence on policy debates and court decisions. In addition, in several states the public has voted on election reform ballot measures where voter fraud concerns featured prominently in the campaign. For example, in 2016 Missouri voters passed a constitutional amendment to require voters to present photo identification when they vote. That same year, Alaska voters adopted a measure to make voter registration automatic for residents who apply for a dividend from the state's permanent fund (the state's oil revenues). Both campaigns focused heavily on concerns about voter fraud. More generally, efforts to change election laws may depend, in part, on public beliefs about voter fraud.

Prior research points to some factors that shape public beliefs about voter fraud and inform our hypotheses about the traits people may associate with illegal voters. For starters, partisanship is a powerful force in American politics, and it increasingly operates as a negative force. That is, partisans are motivated more by contempt for the opposition party rather than affection of their own party and its platform. Substantial portions of each party report feeling angry about the opposing party and its candidates (Mason 2018; Miller and Conover 2015). Strong party identifiers are also more likely to endorse the use of unsavory tactics to win an election or policy debate (Miller and Conover 2015). Americans are less trusting of members of the opposite party, and partisans even discriminate against members of the opposing party in hiring decisions, employee behavior,

and consumer choices (Iyengar and Westwood 2014; McConnell et al. 2018). This line of research leads us to a *negative partisanship hypothesis* – people likely believe that members of the opposite party are more likely to commit voter fraud than members of their own party.

In addition to partisanship, beliefs about voter fraud are shaped by attitudes toward immigrants and racial minorities in the United States. News reporting disproportionately covers crimes that involve African Americans and immigrants as offenders (e.g., Entman 1992; Dixon and Linz 2000). Political rhetoric also frequently frames immigrants and people of color as lawbreakers. As Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) note, "the association of violent crime and racial imagery does not go unnoticed" (p. 571). There is an extensive criminology literature on "typifications" of offenders and victims – that is, public images about the typical perpetrators and victims of crime. Americans tend to believe that people of color and immigrants are the groups most prone to violence and crime (Mancini et al. 2015; Abrajano and Hajnal 2015). Furthermore, beliefs about typical criminal offenders are linked to prejudicial beliefs about immigrants and people of color (e.g., Pickett and Chiricos 2012; Abrajano and Hajnal 2015). Images of criminals are extremely important because they influence public support for various criminal justice policies (e.g., Mancini et al. 2015). For example, those who believe that Blacks or immigrants are prone to violence and crime are more supportive of harsher punishment and increased government spending to combat crime (Barkan and Cohn 2005; Chiricos et al. 2004; Pickett 2016). The pictures of likely criminals that we carry in our heads shape our preferences for crime policies.

Voter fraud is another type of crime, so Americans likely hold biased images of typical illegal voters as well. Highly charged debates about voting restrictions in the United States sometimes include explicit or implicit references to race, such as allegations of "inner city" voter fraud (Wilson and Brewer 2013; Dreier and Martin 2010; Ellis 2014). Similar rhetoric links an immigrant threat narrative with concerns about voter fraud. For example, in congressional testimony, Kansas

Secretary of State Kris Kobach alleged that "the problem of aliens registering to vote is a massive one, nationwide" (Pavlich 2015). During and after the 2016 presidential campaign Donald Trump made repeated and unsubstantiated claims about voter fraud, often labeling immigrants as perpetrators (Johnson 2016; House and Dennis 2017). President Trump then created a voter integrity commission, led by Mr. Kobach, to investigate voter fraud in the United States. Not surprisingly, racial and immigrant resentment are strong predictors of public beliefs about voting integrity (Wilson and Brewer 2013; Udani and Kimball 2017; Appleby and Federico 2017). The frequent charges of non-citizen voting made by President Trump and others have "immigrationalized" the issue of voter fraud, to borrow a term from one recent study (Garand, Xu, and Davis 2015). Thus, our *typification hypothesis* holds that Americans perceive immigrants and people of color as typical illegal voters. Consistent with similar research in criminology, we also hypothesize that people who believe immigrants and people of color are more prone to voter fraud will also support more restrictive and punitive policies to combat voter fraud.

Finally, partisanship and group biases come together to inform our final hypothesis about voter fraud. Party identification is a strong predictor of public opinion about voter fraud, reflecting the partisan nature of debates about election laws. Republicans tend to believe that voter fraud is a more serious and frequent problem than Democrats (Wilson and Brewer 2013; Udani and Kimball 2017; Bowler and Donovan 2016). Much of the rhetoric raising the specter of voter fraud comes from Republican elites and allied groups. In contrast, much of the rhetoric downplaying the threat of voter fraud comes from Democrats. In particular, Democratic elites tend to argue against efforts to frame immigrants and people of color as typical voter fraud offenders. Political debates about proposed voting restrictions, particularly proof of citizenship and photo ID laws, often feature arguments from Democrats about how those laws will disproportionately affect people of color,

who are less likely to have a government-issued photo ID or the documents needed to obtain one (Barreto, Nuño and Sanchez 2009; Hershey 2009).

We suspect that people tend to follow partisan cues in voter fraud debates. If partisans in the mass public internalize the messages coming from party elites, then that may also explain the partisan divide in public beliefs about voter fraud. There is some evidence that messages from political elites influence public confidence in elections (Vonnhame and Miller 2013; Beaulieu 2014; Wilson and Brewer 2016, 2013). Thus, our *party cue hypothesis* holds that Democrats are less likely than Republicans to perceive immigrants and people of color as typical illegal voters in the United States.

Data and Methods

We use survey data from 1,000 respondents from the 2017 CCES, which seeks to study how Americans view Congress and hold their representatives accountable during elections, how they voted and their electoral experiences, and how their behavior and experiences vary with political geography and social context (Ansolabehere, Schaffner and Luks 2016). The 2017 CCES involved 60 teams, each of which purchased a sample survey of at least 1,000 respondents. The same questions were asked across teams (i.e. Common Content), which yielded a sample of 64,600 cases. The survey module with our questions was conducted online by YouGov after the November 2017 elections.

After YouGov establishes a target population of all adults enumerated by the 2010 American Community Survey, it uses a matched random sample methodology which occurs in two steps. First, a random sample is drawn from the target population, and was selected by stratification by age, race, gender, education, and voter registration, and by simple random sampling within strata. Second, YouGov generated a matched sample by selecting one or more matching members from a pool of "opt-in" respondents who agree to participate in YouGov surveys (Ansolabehere et al. 2016).

YouGov selection is then matched to a frame of 64,600 people on demographics and on having completed a post-election interview.[1]

We used our specific CCES module to study attitudes toward people who allegedly cast illegal ballots. To this end, we conduct the following experiment. Each respondent is given a table that compares a profile of two hypothetical people. The participant is then asked which person (Person A or B) is more likely to cast an illegal ballot. A selected person is coded as 1 and 0 otherwise. As a validation measure, we also ask for the probability that each person will cast an illegal ballot. We ask respondents to perform this task four times, each time giving them a different comparison of two people. The profile of each person is based on eight attributes: sex, race, age, party, citizenship, language, occupation, and whether the person has a criminal record. We believe that voter fraud debates feature binary language that contrasts undeserving and deserving populations. Political elites have employed such language to efficiently give the public a choice between aligning with "us" who are interested in social order and following the rules or with "them" who work to disrupt law and order. Consistent with other studies (Schachter 2015), we chose three occupational categories to convey social class differences. Building on these studies, we choose three ages to convey differences in the lifecourse.

For one hypothetical person, each attribute has different values (see Table A-1 in Appendix), which produce 3,240 different combinations. Thus, a comparison of two people produces more than a million possibilities. Out of this universe of profile comparisons, we randomly choose the values of 8000 comparisons and assign them to our respondents. That is, we ask each of our 1,000

[1] Demographics include gender, age, race, region, education, interest in politics, marital status, party identification, ideology, major religion, church attendance, income, voter registration, and metropolitan statistical area. The final set of completed pre-election interviews were then matched to the target frame, using a weighted Euclidean distances metric.

respondents to choose between two profiles of people in four separate tasks (1000 respondents x 2 choices x 4 tasks).

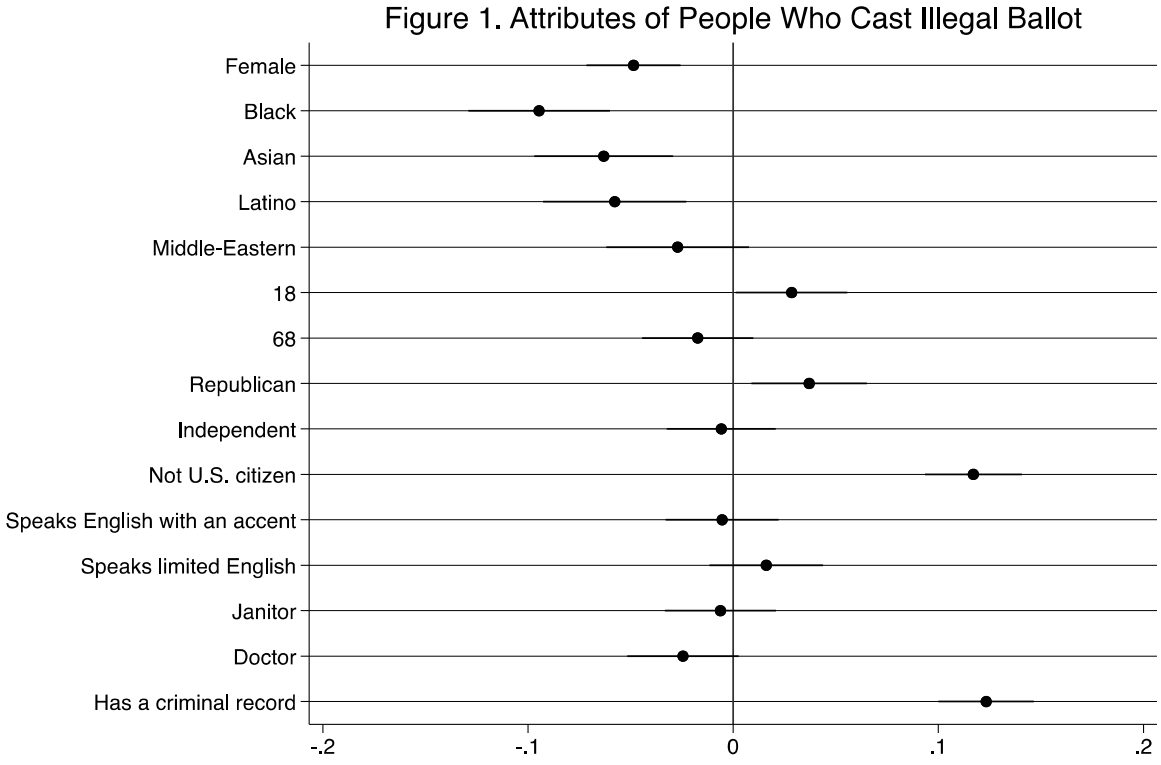
Given that we are working with a substantially reduced total number of profiles, we check whether the randomization actually produces experimental groups that are well balanced in a given sample (Hainmueller et al. 2014). We use multinomial regression models of indicator variables for all profile attributes, controlling for respondent characteristics involving race, education, sex, and party identification. The results provide more evidence that most attributes are not imbalanced across these characteristics. Models of attributes involving criminal records, citizenship, and race provided null results. However, we did find that black and Latinx respondents were more likely than white respondents to be assigned a person who is black while black and Asian respondents were more likely than whites to be assigned an independent or not sure of their partisanship and a school teacher than a janitor. More educated respondents were more likely assigned an older person than a young person, were more likely assigned a Democrat than a Republican, and a doctor than a janitor. Older respondents were more likely assigned a person who speaks English with an accent. After conducting these tests, we are confident that our results are not biased because certain attribute values were more likely to be included in the profiles compared to others.

Our proposed research design is also known as a conjoint analysis experiment, which scholars have increasingly used in public opinion, psychology, health policy, and economics (Schachter 2016; Hainmueller and Hopkins, 2015; Hainmueller et al. 2014; Wright, Levy and Citrin, 2016; Caruso, Rahnev and Banaji, 2009; Earnhart, 2002). Our experimental design provides an advantage over prior observational and experimental approaches used in the voter fraud and restriction literature. With regards to studies that find an influential effect of racial animus, we are able to disentangle the effects of correlated characteristics with race. This is an important step to take when considering prior evidence on immigrant resentment and perceptions of voter fraud and

support for voter restrictions. To date, few have disaggregated important components of resentment of immigrants, which others have shown involves beliefs about criminality, and notion of citizenship, and gender. In our experimental design, we are able to identify the effect of each organizational attribute on the probability of selection.

Conjoint Analysis Results

Even though we are examining a respondent's selection as a bivariate outcome, we use an OLS regression model and cluster standard errors by respondent to estimate attribute effects (Hainmueller et al. 2014). An OLS regression model provides a computational shortcut that allows us to calculate the differences in means between attributes, averaging across the four decision tasks we ask respondents to complete. Further, OLS coefficients indicate an average marginal conditional effect, which can be interpreted as a probability of selected a particular person given a set of randomly selected attributes. In Figure 1, we visualize the size of coefficients on each attribute with their 95% confidence intervals using the whole sample. Any effects of attributes shown in conjoint experiments should be considered in relation to the attributes of the base profile. Our base profile in our models consists of a hypothetical person who is a 48-year-old white male Democrat who is a citizen, speaks fluent English, is a public school teacher, and has no criminal record.

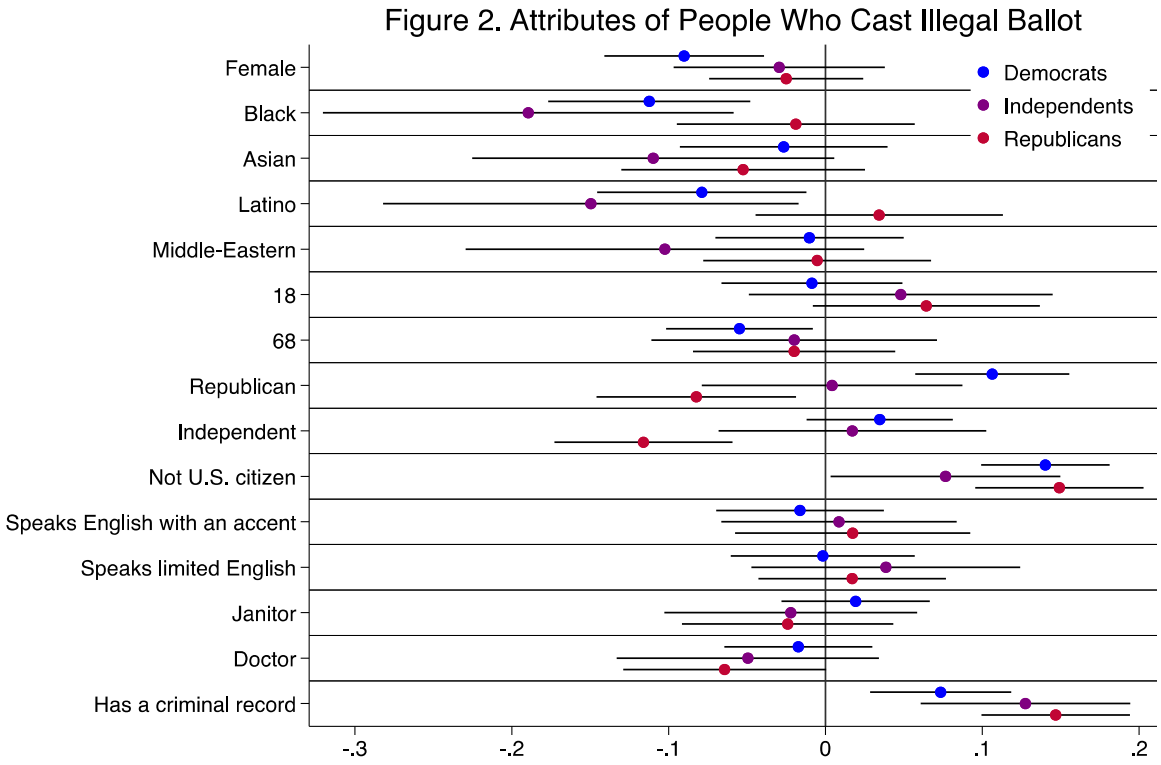


Consistent with the *party cue hypothesis*, our results show that respondents were less likely to say that people of color would cast an illegal ballot. Respondents expressed that a black person is less likely than a white person to cast an illegal ballot (b=-0.09, s.e.=0.02, p<0.001). They had similar feelings about Asian (b=-0.06, s.e.=0.02, p<0.001) and Latino people (b=-0.06, s.e.=0.02, p<0.001). One way to interpret our findings is through research on party cues. Democratic Party elites typically dispel the voter fraud myth (Hasen 2012; Kropf and Kimball 2012; Minnite 2010; Atkeson et al. 2014; Gronke et al. 2015) and argue that voter restrictions disenfranchise black, Asian, and Latino voters (Hajnal, Lajevardi, & Nielson, 2017). Our sample consists of a majority of Democrats (48.80%), which suggests that respondents are mostly responding to their party's stance on voter fraud. The party cue hypothesis receives further support from the effect of partisan attribute. When told a person is a Republican as opposed to a Democrat, respondents are more likely to think that the person will cast an illegal ballot (b=-0.04, s.e.=0.01, p<0.01). A sore loser effect (Beaulieu,

2014; Sances & Stewart 2014; Wolak 2014) reinforces the party cues. In the wake of Donald Trump's surprising victory in the 2016 presidential election and reports of Russian involvement in U.S. elections, respondents tend to think that Republicans are casting illegal ballots to sway election outcomes and maintain control of the status quo.

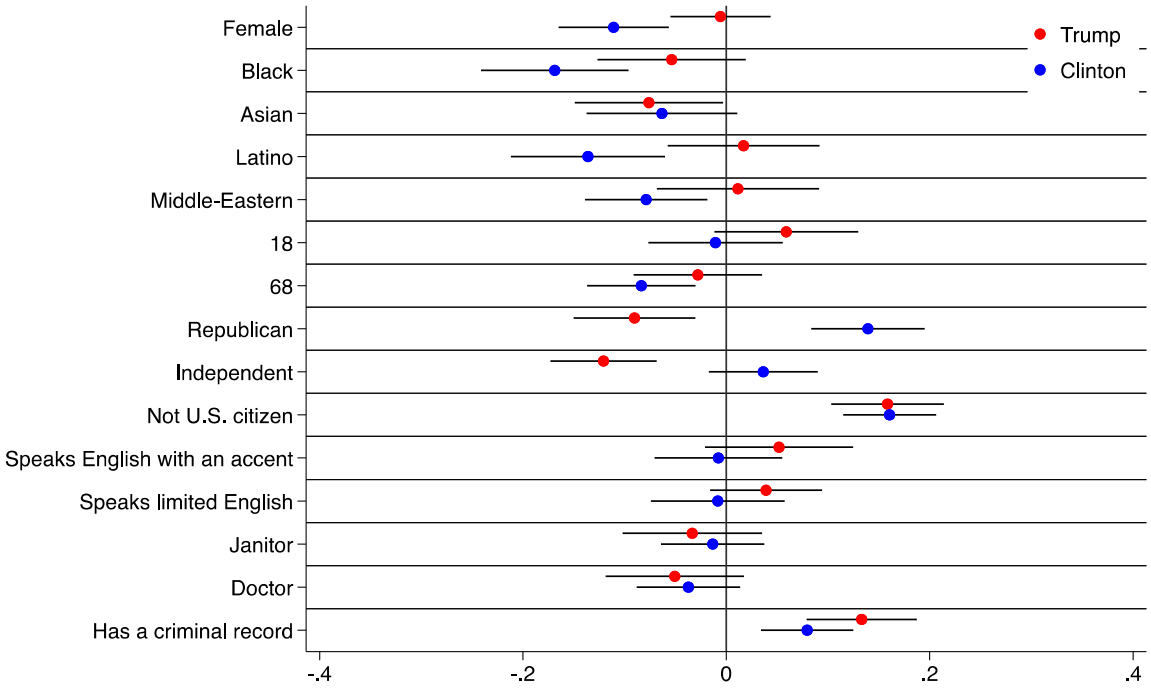
However, the *party cue hypothesis* is insufficient to understand the whole story. The results show that respondents are more likely to think that a person will cast an illegal ballot when they are told that the person is not a citizen ($b=0.12$, s.e.$=0.01$, $p<0.001$) or has a criminal record ($b=0.12$, s.e.$=0.01$, $p<0.001$). Our results show relatively stronger effects from attributes involving ascriptive citizenship and having a criminal history than the race of the alleged fraudulent voter. This suggests that voter fraud allegations that involve narratives about illegal immigrants or criminals are being absorbed by the mass public.

When we run separate models by respondent party identification, we further find evidence to show the effect of party cues and that citizenship and criminality transcend party cues. Figure 2 disaggregates attribute effects among respondents who identify as Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. Both Democrats and Independents are less likely than Republicans to think that people who cast illegal ballots are black or Latino, though the estimates for Independents vary more widely. We also find evidence of negative partisanship. Democrats tend to believe that a Republican is more likely than a Democrat to commit voter fraud ($b=0.11$, s.e.$=0.02$, $p<0.001$), while Republicans believe the opposite ($b=-0.08$, s.e.$=0.03$, $p<0.01$). There is a bit of asymmetry in that Republicans also believe that Independents are less likely than Democrats to cast illegal ballots ($b=-0.12$, s.e.0.03, $p<0.001$).

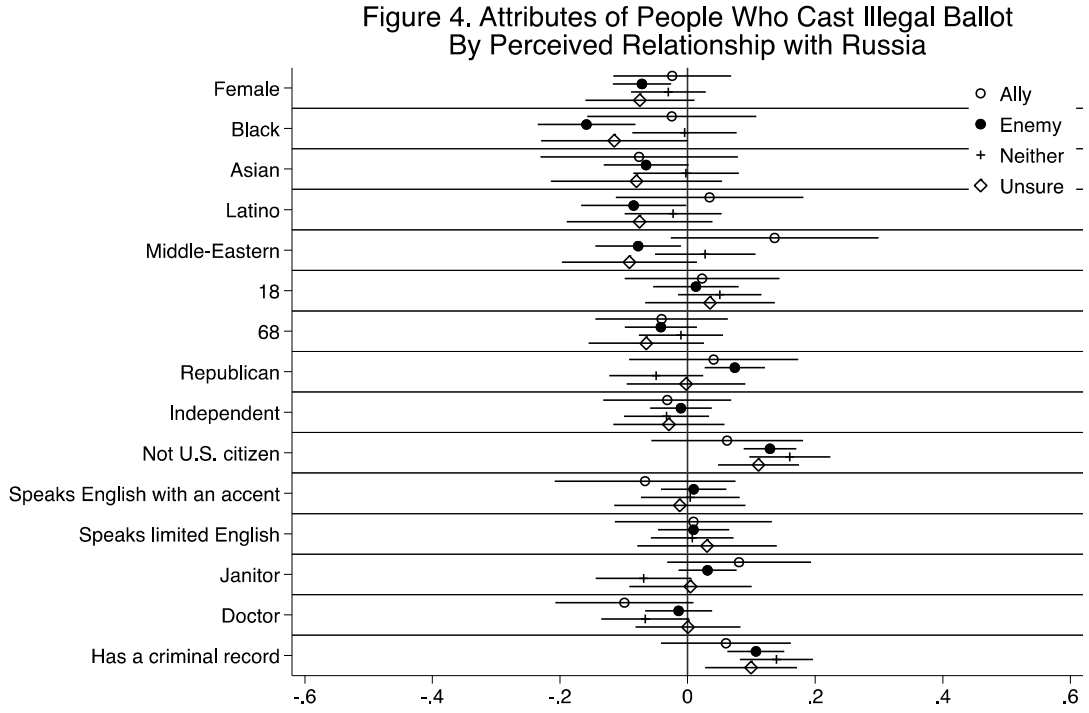


Nevertheless, we still find that ascriptive citizenship and a criminal record have significant and robust effects across partisan groups, even among Independents (b=0.08, s.e.=0.04, p<0.05). Being told that a person is not a citizen has a similar positive effect on Democratic (b=0.14, s.e.=0.02, p<0.001) and Republican beliefs about casting an illegal ballot (b=0.15, s.e.=0.03, p<0.001). Having a criminal record has a positive effect on Democrats (b=0.07, s.e.=0.02, p<0.001), Independents (b=0.13, s.e.=0.03, p<0.001), and Republicans (b=0.15, s.e.=0.02, p<0.001). These results are particularly interesting given extant findings on voter fraud. Even as voter fraud has become a partisan issue (Wilson and Brewer 2013; Bowler and Donavan 2015), all party identifiers associate non-citizens and criminals with fraudulent votes.

Figure 3. Attributes of People Who Cast Illegal Ballot
By 2016 Presidential Vote



We further test the partisan cue hypothesis using validated data on whether the respondent voted for Trump of Clinton (See Figure 3). The results are similar to our estimates conditioned on party identification in Figure 2. Consistent with our other findings, Clinton voters tend to believe that most racial and ethnic minorities are less likely to cast an illegal ballot than white voters. We also find that Clinton voters are more likely to suspect Republicans as illegal voters while Trump voters think that Democratic voters are more likely to cast illegal ballots. Yet, Trump and Clinton voters are nearly equally likely to think that a person casts an illegal ballot after being told that the person is either not a U.S. citizen or has a criminal record, though Trump voters have a slightly higher probability when told the latter.



Partisan beliefs about voter fraud were exacerbated by negative reports of Russian involvement in the 2016 election. In the 2017 CCES Common Content, respondents were asked whether they think Russia is either an ally, enemy, or neither. Respondents were also given the option to express that they were unsure. The distribution of respondents in our module was 8.70%, 45.40%, 28.00%, and 17.90%, respectively. We run separate models on respondents' perceived relationship with Russia and plot the coefficients in Figure 4. One of the major differences from our other results concerns respondents who view Russia as an ally. That is, respondents who view Russia as an ally were not likely to think that a person without U.S. citizenship or having a criminal record would cast an illegal ballot. This result stands in stark contrast with the answers from respondents who viewed Russia as an enemy, neither as an enemy nor ally, or who were unsure. We find it interesting that one of the few conditions under which voter fraud allegations do not influence perceptions involves a subset of the U.S. electorate who have favorable views toward the

relationship between Russia and the United States, in spite of popular discourse that alleged Russian vote tampering.

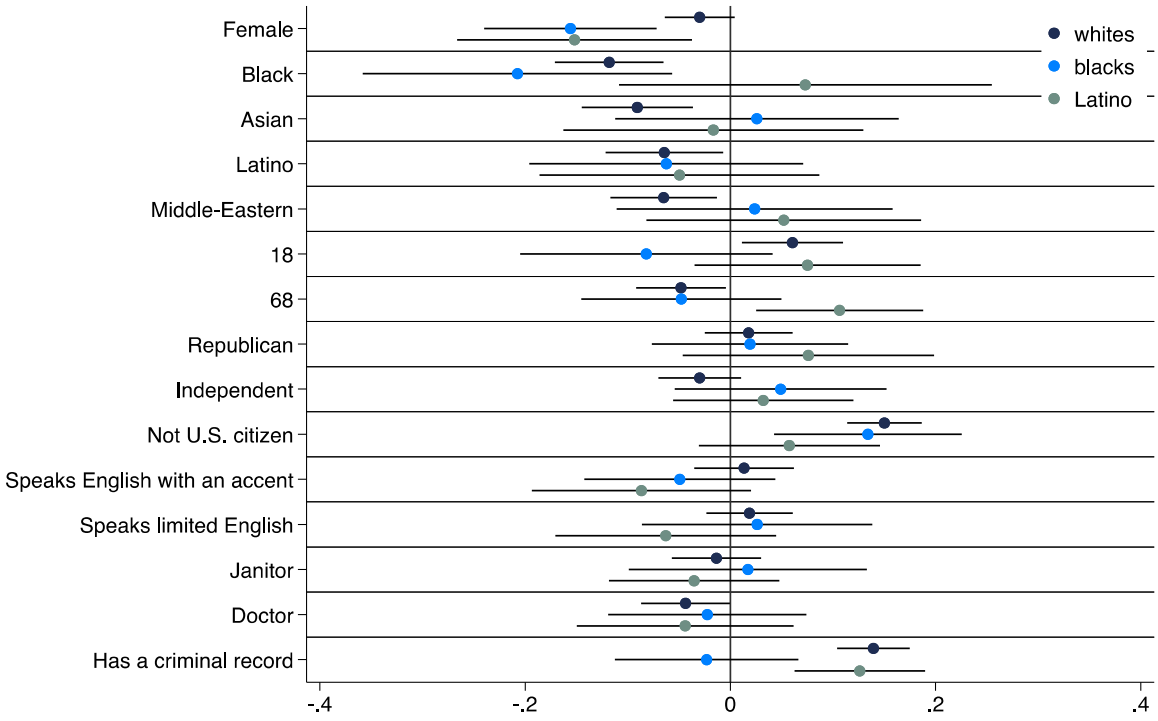
We further test the robustness of the criminal and citizenship attributes across racial groups. Racial messages that implicitly elicit racial thinking will effectively prime racial thinking on political issues for white Americans (White 2007). Scholars find that dominant stereotypes in popular culture and elite rhetoric can code issues as racial (Gilens 1999; Gilliam and Iyengar 2000), even if those issues give no reference to race (Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002) while others have shown that some verbal cues can also be implicitly racial (Hurwitz and Peffley 2005). While the attribute of having a criminal record does not explicitly reference any racial group, popular discourse has tended to construct blacks as criminals (Hurwitz and Peffley 2005). Other findings show that law enforcement has disproportionately targeted blacks and thus reinforced the criminality narrative (Lerman and Weaver 2014; Soss and Weaver 2017). Yet, research on black public opinion (White 2007) questions the extent to which personal attributes involving criminal records would influence voter fraud judgments on black respondents. Tali Mendelberg (2001) argues that white Americans are conflicted between their belief in the norm of equality on one hand and their resentment toward Blacks on the other. Further, she argues that awareness of the racial nature of a message will lead most Whites to reject that message because they would not want to violate the equality norm. To this end, whites are expected to reject explicit references to race and instead use more coded language to inform their political attitudes. Yet, as Ismail White (2007) maintains, most blacks are not conflicted between norms of equality and having resentment toward blacks, and therefore would not be motivated to utilize coded language to structure their political attitudes. As such, we anticipate the criminal record attribute to have no effect on black respondents' beliefs about casting illegal ballots.

Ismail White's theory also has implications for other implicit racial cues and coded language for Latinos. When Americans imagine a stereotypical immigrant, studies suggest that they tend to envision a Latino (Brader, Valentino, and Suhay, 2008; Dunaway, Branton, and Abrajano, 2010; Gilliam and Iyengar, 2000; Haynes, Merolla, and Ramakrishman, 2016). Other work suggests that cues reminding Anglo Americans of Latinos tend to elicit feelings of threat (Brader et al., 2008). The evidence suggests that cues that reference a person not having U.S. citizenship will tend to make stereotypical images of a Latino. If true, then Ismail White's theory predicts that the citizenship attribute will have no effect on Latino respondents' beliefs about casting illegal ballots.

It is important to also remember that our conjoint experimental design allows us to disentangle the effects of explicit and implicit racial cues. The criminal record and citizenship attribute were nearly equally distributed in profiles of suspected fraudulent voters who were members of different racial groups (see Tables A-2 and A-3 in the Appendix). This allows us to test the effect of implicit cues (i.e. criminal record and citizenship) in the presence of more explicit racial cues (race) while also controlling for a variety characteristics involving party, class (work history), and additional markers of ethnicity (language ability).

We run separate models of voter fraud perceptions for white, black, and Latino respondents and provide the results in Figure 5. Consistent with dominant findings in implicit racial cue scholarship, white respondents are less likely to think that a person casts an illegal ballot when they are told that the person is black ($b=-0.12$, s.e.$=0.03$, $p<0.001$), Asian ($b=-0.09$, s.e.$=0.03$, $p<0.001$), or Latino ($b=-0.06$, s.e.$=0.03$, $p<0.05$). Attributes such as these make explicit references to a person's race. However, when they are told that the person is not a citizen ($b=0.15$, s.e.$=0.02$, $p<0.001$) or has a criminal record ($b=0.14$, s.e.$=0.02$, $p<0.001$), white respondents are more likely to think that person is a fraudulent voter.

Figure 5. Attributes of People Who Cast Illegal Ballot by Race



Our findings are consistent with the expectations of White (2007), but also offer new contributions. In forming perceptions of voter fraud, white respondents are strongly influenced by the implicit cues of citizenship status and a criminal record. While black respondents are not influenced by the criminal record attribute, black respondents do associate a non-citizen with fraudulent voting ($b=0.13$, s.e.$=0.05$, $p<0.01$). Latino respondents are not influenced by the citizenship attribute; however, Latino respondents are told that a person has a criminal record, they are more likely to think that the person is an illegal voter ($b=0.13$, s.e.$=0.03$, $p<0.001$). Our findings indicate that implicit racial cues referencing criminality and citizenship used in voter fraud allegations can be accessible to some people of color. Further, in the context of other studies on racial tensions and feelings of relative deprivation between blacks and Latinos (Gay 2006), our results suggest that some dominant tropes in recent voter fraud rhetoric can drive a wedge among people of color, who are most likely to be disenfranchised by current voter restriction initiatives (Hajnal, Lajevardi, and

Nielson, 2017). Having provided evidence of the traits people tend to associate with illegal voters, in the next section we investigate the policy consequences of these perceptions.

The Policy Consequences of Voter Fraud Typification

To examine the policy consequences of public images about voter fraud perpetrators, we examine three sets of dependent variables: (1) public beliefs about how frequently voter fraud occurs, (2) support for restrictive voter identification laws pitched as policies to prevent fraud, and (3) support for harsh punishment for those caught committing voter fraud. Beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud are important predictors of support for election reform policies, particularly photo ID and proof of citizenship laws (Wilson and Brewer 2013; Udani and Kimball 2018).

To measure beliefs about voter fraud our survey module included the following question: "Please indicate how often you think these activities occur in a presidential election." Each of the illegal activities is listed in Table 1, along with the frequencies for each response. We randomized the order of activities that participants view. The frequencies in Table 1 reveal considerable variation across respondents in beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud. On most items between 30 and 40 percent believe the fraudulent activity occurs a few thousand times or more, but a similarly sized share of respondents believes that voter fraud occurs less than a dozen times or never. We observe much less variation across items, suggesting that people have a general perception about voter fraud rather than distinguishing between different categories of fraud. On the other hand, non-citizen voting is the fraudulent activity with the highest response in the "million times or more" category (16 percent). Thus, non-citizen voting may be the exemplar of voter fraud that most readily comes to mind for many Americans.

Table 1. Beliefs about the Frequency of Voter Fraud

How often does this occur in a presidential election?	A million or more	A few thousand	A few hundred	A few dozen	Less than a dozen	Never
Voting more than once in an election (n=1,000)	7%	21%	18%	17%	25%	11%
Stealing or tampering with ballots (N=1,000)	8%	17%	20%	19%	25%	12%
Pretending to be someone else when voting (N=999)	9%	20%	19%	18%	23%	11%
People voting who are not U.S. citizens (N=1,000)	16%	24%	15%	12%	20%	13%
Voting an absentee ballot intended for another (N=1,000)	7%	25%	20%	19%	21%	9%
Officials preventing eligible voters from voting (N=1,000)	10%	23%	21%	17%	16%	12%

Source: 2017 CCES. Sampling weights applied.

In addition to the conjoint analysis described above, we create a more direct measure of voter fraud typifications for each respondent. Our survey module asked respondents to estimate the share of voter fraud perpetrators belonging to three different groups (immigrants, Blacks, and Whites). The exact wording of the question is: "What percentage of people who commit voter fraud in this country would you say are [immigrants/Black/White]." Once again, the order of the questions was randomized. Responses ranged from 0 percent to 100 percent, and there is considerable variation in estimates across respondents (each item has a standard deviation between 24 and 29). The mean estimate for Whites (46%) exceeds the mean estimates for Blacks (33%) and immigrants (37%). We don't have reliable measures of each group's share of actual voter fraud violators in the United States. However, since voter fraud is rare we might start with each group's share of the U.S. population. According to the most recent five-year estimates from the American Community Survey (U.S. Census Bureau 2017), Whites make up a much larger share of the American population (73.3%) than foreign born residents (13.5%) and Blacks (12.6%). Assuming a roughly equal offender rate across groups, our respondents tend to significantly overstate the immigrant and Black share of voter fraud violators and underestimate the White share. As further evidence, estimates of the immigrant share of illegal voters are strongly correlated with a measure of

immigrant resentment (r=.63, p<.001). Similarly, Black voter fraud typification is correlated with a measure of conservative racial attitudes (r=.32). Meanwhile, immigrant resentment and conservative racial attitudes are negatively correlated with White voter fraud typification. Estimates of the immigrant and Black percentages of voter fraud perpetrators are strongly correlated (r=.69, p<.001), so we examine those two measures separately in the analyses below. Estimates of the White share of fraudulent voters are only weakly correlated with the estimates for immigrants and Blacks.

To measure policy support, our survey asked respondents whether they supported or opposed a variety of election reform policies, including two restrictive voter identification items: (1) requiring "all people to show proof of citizenship when they register to vote" and (2) requiring "all people to show government issued photo ID when they vote". There are four response categories: support strongly, support somewhat, oppose somewhat, and oppose strongly. Roughly 80 percent of respondents support each of the voter identification proposals and a slim majority strongly supports each policy.[2] This is consistent with other national polling on these policy proposals (Alvarez et al. 2011; Gronke et al. 2015; Stewart et al. 2016).

To measure support for various punishments our module asked respondents "Please indicate the appropriate penalty for someone found guilty of committing each of the following activities. You can choose more than one penalty, if appropriate." We queried respondents on the appropriate punishment for four types of voter fraud (order randomized): (1) people voting who are not U.S. citizens, (2) voting more than once in an election, (3) pretending to be someone else when going to

[2]We queried respondents on several other election reforms, including voting by mail, weekend voting, online voter registration, automatic voter registration, Election Day registration, and felon re-enfranchisement. The other reform proposals, except for voting by mail, enjoy majority public support but at markedly lower levels than the two voter identification policies. An exploratory factor analysis with promax rotation yields two factors, with the two restrictive policies loading heavily on one factor and the remaining policies loading heavily on a separate factor. This indicates that the public treats voter identification restrictions as distinct from other proposals designed to increase access to the voting franchise.

vote, and (4) officials preventing eligible voters from casting a ballot. The forms of punishment that respondents could apply included prison time, unpaid community service, probation, fine, a warning (with no other penalty given), or no penalty at all. Finally, we included a question wording experiment in this portion of the survey. Legal definitions of voter fraud usually include intent as a key component (Minnite 2010). That is, someone accused of voter fraud can often avoid conviction if they prove that the violation occurred because of an administrative error or an honest mistake. To test whether intent carries weight with the public, a randomly chosen half of the sample was told that the violator was guilty of "intentionally committing" versus "committing" the act described in the question. As we show below, the question wording treatment had no impact on responses to the punishment questions. It is possible that language on being "found guilty" in the question overwhelms the intent treatment, or it is possible that the mass public does not consider intent when evaluating voter fraud.

Table 2. Public Support for Voter Fraud Punishment

Type of Fraud	Prison	Community Service	Probation	Fine	Warning only	No penalty
Non-citizen voting	38%	26%	20%	44%	11%	5%
Double voting	35%	28%	24%	47%	6%	2%
Voter impersonation	48%	25%	25%	45%	4%	2%
Officials preventing people from voting	57%	20%	20%	40%	5%	3%

Cell entries indicate the percent selecting each punishment for each type of voter fraud.
Respondents were allowed to select more than one form of punishment, if appropriate.
N=1,000
Source: 2017 CCES

We report the share of respondents selecting each punishment option for various types of voter fraud in Table 2. The vast majority of American adults believe that some punishment, beyond a warning, is appropriate for voter fraud violations. In addition, prison time and a fine are the most

preferred punishments for voter fraud. Even though respondents could apply multiple punishments for the same violation, the harshest punishment (prison time) tends to be viewed by the public as an alternative to the other options. For each type of voter fraud, a preference for prison time is negatively and significantly correlated with a preference for any other form of punishment.

We estimate public beliefs about voter fraud and support for restrictive voting policies and punishment as a function of perceptions about the typical voter fraud perpetrators, with additional controls for partisanship. In the analyses of public policies and punishment we also control for beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud, based on the logic that people who think fraud is widespread will more likely support policies to prevent and deter voter fraud. Finally, we control for the "intentional" question wording treatment in the analysis of punishment. We measure party identification with the familiar seven-point scale, with strong Republicans at the high end of the scale. We expect Republicans are more likely to believe that voter fraud occurs frequently and are more supportive of restrictive voter identification policies and harsher punishment for voter fraud.

Results – The Frequency of Voter Fraud

We first examine beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud as a function of voter fraud images and party identification. Public beliefs about voter fraud are shaped by negative attitudes toward immigrants and people of color (e.g., Wilson and Brewer 2013; Udani and Kimball 2017; Appleby and Federico 2017). Thus, we expect that those who perceive that immigrants and Blacks make up a larger share of voter fraud violators will believe the voter fraud occurs more frequently. In this analysis we focus on three types of voter fraud that are committed by individual voters, rather than election officials or party operatives. Our dependent variables have ordered categories so we estimate an ordinal logit model for these analyses. We code each independent variable on a 0-1 scale so that the estimated effects can be compared. Since the conjoint analysis showed differences

between non-Hispanic whites and other respondents, we estimate separate models for non-Hispanic white respondents and respondents of color. The coefficient estimates for white respondents are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Predictors of Beliefs about Voter Fraud, Non-Hispanic White Respondents

Independent Variable	Non-Citizen Voting		Impersonation		Double Voting	
Voter fraud images	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)
Perceived percent immigrant	3.3* (0.5)		2.7* (0.5)		2.4* (0.4)	
Perceived percent Black		2.3* (0.5)		2.4* (0.8)		2.5* (0.5)
Perceived percent White	-0.4 (0.3)	-0.6* (0.3)	0.2 (0.3)	-0.1 (0.3)	0.1 (0.3)	-0.3 (0.3)
Controls						
Party identification	1.9* (0.3)	2.3* (0.3)	1.3* (0.3)	1.7* (0.3)	1.3* (0.3)	1.6* (0.3)
N	637	637	637	637	637	637
Pseudo R^2	.13	.09	.09	.07	.08	.07

Source: 2017 CCES.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. Cell entries are ordinal logit coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). The dependent variable is coded so that higher values indicate a belief that voter fraud occurs more frequently.

As expected, among white Americans voter fraud typifications are clearly associated with beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud. White respondents who perceive that immigrants and Blacks comprise a large share of illegal voters believe that voter fraud occurs more frequently. Estimates of the immigrant share of voter fraud perpetrators is most closely associated with beliefs about non-citizen voting, the one type of voter fraud that is defined by immigration status. Moving from the 10th percentile to the 90th percentile on immigrant typification (model 1) yields a whopping

51 percentage point increase in beliefs that non-citizen voting occurs a few thousand times or more.[3] In contrast, for white respondents estimates of the White share of voter fraud offenders are largely unrelated to beliefs about how frequently voter fraud occurs. Finally, partisanship is a reliable predictor of beliefs about voter fraud – Republicans are more likely than Democrats to believe that fraud occurs frequently. The belief that voter fraud occurs at least a few thousand times is rougly 30 percentage points higher for a strong Republican than for a strong Democrat. However, immigrant and Black voter fraud typifications produce stronger associations with voter fraud beliefs than partisanship.

Table 4. Predictors of Beliefs about Voter Fraud, Non-White Respondents

Independent Variable	**Non-Citizen Voting**		**Impersonation**		**Double Voting**	
Voter fraud images	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)
Perceived percent immigrant	2.3* (0.7)		0.7 (0.7)		0.8 (0.7)	
Perceived percent Black		0.5 (0.6)		-0.1 (0.6)		0.2 (0.7)
Perceived percent White	1.1 (0.6)	1.4* (0.6)	0.6 (0.7)	0.7 (0.6)	1.3 (0.7)	1.4* (0.7)
Controls						
Party identification	0.7 (0.4)	1.1* (0.4)	0.4 (0.4)	0.5 (0.4)	0.9* (0.4)	1.0* (0.4)
N	355	355	354	354	355	355
Pseudo R^2	.05	.02	.01	.01	.02	.02

Source: 2017 CCES.
* $p < .05$, two-tailed. Cell entries are ordinal logit coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). The dependent variable is coded so that higher values indicate a belief that voter fraud occurs more frequently.

Meanwhile, among non-white respondents voter fraud typifications and partisanship are much less reliable predictors of beliefs about the frequency with which voter fraud occurs (see Table 4). The one consistent finding is that estimates of the immigrant share of illegal voters are positively

[3] The predicted probabilities reported throughout the paper are "as observed" – calculated while holding other independent variables at observed values and then averaging over all cases in the sample (see Hanmer and Kalkan 2013).

and significantly associated with beliefs about the frequency of non-citizen voting. Furthermore, among non-white respondents estimates of the White share of voter fraud offenders tend to be positively associated with beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud. Finally, partisanship has the expected effect among non-white respondents, but the estimates are much less certain than among white respondents.

Results – Policy Preferences

We next turn to public support for restrictive voter identification policies. We model support for these policies as a function of voter fraud typifications, party identification, and beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud. We start with proposals to require that people provide proof of citizenship (such as a birth certificate) in order to register to vote. Our dependent variable has four ordered categories so we estimate an ordinal logit model. We again generate separate model estimates for non-Hispanic white respondents and respondents of color, although overall support for these policies is roughly the same for both groups. The coefficient estimates are presented in Table 5.

The results show support for our hypotheses among White respondents. Even after controlling for party identification and beliefs about voter fraud, immigrant and Black voter fraud typifications are linked to stronger support for proof of citizenship laws, while White typification is associated with weaker support for those laws. Moving from the 10th percentile to the 90th percentile on immigrant typification (model 1) yields a 27 percentage point increase in strong support for a proof of citizenship policy. Moving from the 10th percentile to the 90th percentile on Black voter fraud typification (model 2) is associated with a 17 percentage point increase in strong support for a proof of citizenship law. In contrast, moving from the 10th percentile to the 90th percentile on White voter fraud typification (model 2) is associated with a 17 percentage point <u>decrease</u> in strong support for a proof of citizenship policy. Party identification and beliefs about voter fraud are also associated

with support for proof of citizenship laws. Comparable changes in beliefs about non-citizen voting and partisanship increase strong support for the policy by 26 points and 40 points, respectively. Republicans and those who believe that non-citizen voting occurs frequently are more likely to support proof of citizenship requirements.

Table 5. Predictors of Support for Proof of Citizenship Laws

Independent variables	Sample: Non-Hispanic Whites		Sample: Latino, POC	
Voter fraud images	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)
Perceived percent immigrant	1.9* (0.5)		2.2* (0.7)	
Perceived percent Black		1.5* (0.5)		1.1 (0.8)
Perceived percent White	-1.2* (0.4)	-1.3* (0.4)	1.3* (0.6)	1.2 (0.6)
Controls				
Frequency of non-citizen voting	1.4* (0.4)	1.7* (0.4)	-0.2 (0.5)	0.3 (0.5)
Party identification	2.1* (0.4)	2.2* (0.4)	0.3 (0.5)	0.5 (0.5)
N	634	634	353	353
Pseudo R^2	.17	.16	.05	.03

Source: 2017 CCES.
* $p < .05$, two-tailed. Cell entries are ordinal logit coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). The dependent variable is coded so that higher values indicate stronger support for proof of citizenship policies.

We observe very different patterns of support for proof of citizenship laws when examining non-white respondents. Neither partisanship nor beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud explain support for proof of citizenship laws among non-white respondents. One consistent finding across both groups is that immigrant voter fraud typification is linked to stronger support for a proof of citizenship law. However, among non-white respondents White voter fraud typification is linked to stronger support for a proof of citizenship law, although the estimated effects are less precise.

When we examine the predictors of support for photo ID laws (Table 6) we observe even sharper differences between white and non-white respondents. For white respondents, the results are very similar to the proof of citizenship case – voter fraud perceptions, partisanship and beliefs about voter fraud predict support for photo ID requirements. Once again, for white respondents, immigrant and Black voter fraud typification is linked with stronger support for photo ID laws, while White voter fraud typification is associated with decreased support for photo ID. But among non-white respondents none of the independent variables are statistically significant predictors of support for photo ID laws. For white Americans, images about illegal voters and beliefs about voter fraud and partisanship are strongly related to support for restrictive voting policies. But for non-white Americans support for voting restrictions does not seem to be based on those foundations.

Table 6. Predictors of Support for Photo ID Laws

Independent variables	Sample: Non-Hispanic Whites		Sample: Latino, POC	
Voter fraud images	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)
Perceived percent immigrant	2.3* (0.6)		1.0 (0.6)	
Perceived percent Black		2.2* (0.6)		0.9 (0.6)
Perceived percent White	-1.4* (0.4)	-1.6* (0.4)	0.2 (0.5)	0.1 (0.5)
Controls				
Freq. of voter impersonation	2.4* (0.6)	2.6* (0.5)	0.8 (0.5)	0.8 (0.5)
Party identification	2.3* (0.3)	2.5* (0.3)	-0.4 (0.4)	-0.3 (0.4)
N	629	629	352	352
Pseudo R^2	.23	.22	.01	.01

Source: 2017 CCES.
* $p < .05$, two-tailed. Cell entries are ordinal logit coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). The dependent variable is coded so that higher values indicate stronger support for photo ID policies.

Our final analysis focuses on support for prison time as a punishment for illegal voting. We model support for prison time as a function of voter fraud typifications, party identification, and

beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud. We focus on three types of voter fraud (non-citizen voting, voter impersonation, and double voting) where we have a corresponding estimate of the frequency of fraud. In this section each dependent variable is binary so we estimate a binary logit model. We just report model estimates for non-Hispanic white respondents. With one exception, none of the independent variables significantly predicts support for prison time among non-white respondents. Support for prison time for illegal voters is roughly ten percentage points higher among white respondents than non-white respondents. The coefficient estimates for white respondents are presented in Table 7.

Among white respondents, we see that beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud reliably predict support for imprisonment of illegal voters. Those who think voter fraud occurs frequently are more likely to favor prison time for offenders. However, partisanship and the "intentional" question wording treatment are largely unrelated to preferences for prison time. When controlling for party identification, question wording, and voter fraud beliefs we still see evidence that voter fraud typifications are associated with support for prison time in the cases of non-citizen voting and voter impersonation. Higher estimates of the immigrant and Black share of illegal voters are linked to stronger support for prison as a penalty for violating laws against non-citizen voting.[4] Meanwhile, among white respondents, White typification is associated with weaker support for prison time in the cases of non-citizen voting and voter impersonation. The impact of typfications is likely mediated by beliefs about the frequency of voter fraud. If we remove the voter fraud variable as a predictor then the estimated impact of the typification measures gets stronger. In any case, we find additional evidence that the perceptions white Americans hold about illegal voters are linked to preferences about how the government should deal with voter fraud.

[4] Among non-white respondents immigrant typification is also associated with stronger support for prison time for non-citizen voting offenders.

Table 7. Predictors of Support for Prison Time for Illegal Voters, White Respondents

Independent variables	Non-Citizen Voting		Voter Impersonation		Double Voting	
Voter fraud images	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)	coef. (s.e.)
Perceived percent immigrant	1.3*		0.3		0.3	
	(0.5)		(0.4)		(0.4)	
Perceived percent Black		1.2*		-0.1		0.7
		(0.6)		(0.5)		(0.5)
Perceived percent White	-0.9	-1.1*	-0.9*	-0.9*	-0.2	-0.4
	(0.5)	(0.5)	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.5)	(0.5)
Controls						
Frequency of voter fraud	1.6*	1.8*	1.9*	2.0*	1.8*	1.8*
	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.4)
Party identification	0.5	0.6*	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3
	(0.4)	(0.4)	(0.3)	(0.3)	(0.4)	(0.4)
"Intentional" treatment	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.2	-0.0	-0.0
	(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.2)	(0.2)
N	637	637	637	637	637	637
Pseudo R^2	.13	.12	.08	.08	.07	.07

* $p < .05$, two-tailed. Cell entries are logit coefficients (standard errors in parentheses). Intercept not shown. The dependent variable is coded so that 1 equals support for prison time.
Source: 2017 CCES.

Conclusion

In the past year, two cases of harsh punishment for voter fraud violations have been extensively reported in the United States. In March of 2018, Crystal Mason, an African-American woman, was sentenced to five years in prison for voting while on supervised release from prison. This is a violation of Texas law, although Ms. Mason testified that she didn't know that she was not allowed to vote (Mitchell 2018). In 2017, Rosa Maria Ortega, a permanent resident, was sentenced to eight years in prison (and likely deportation after that) for voting illegally in 2012 and 2014. Ms. Ortega also testified that she did not know it was illegal for her to vote (Wines 2017). One may wonder how such severe punishment could be imposed in these cases. However, if politicians and judges are taking their cues from white public opinion then we can begin to form an explanation based on the images of voter fraud people tend to hold.

Our conjoint analysis shows that Americans associate immigrants and a prior criminal record (traits with implicit racial and ethnic cues) with illegal voting. A separate measure indicates that Americans tend to overstate the immigrant and Black share of voter fraud offenders, while underestimating the White share. These voter fraud perceptions are important because, among white respondents, they are linked with beliefs about how frequently voter fraud occurs and support for controversial policies to prevent and punish voter fraud. On the other hand, non-white Americans tend to resist the dominant images of illegal voters and their association with anti-fraud policies. Finally, images of voter fraud provide further evidence of negative partisanship. Public images and beliefs about voter fraud are highly polarized along multiple lines of division.

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Appendix

Table A-1. Attribute Values for Conjoint Experiment

Attribute	Value
Sex	Male Female
Race	White Black Asian Latino Middle-Eastern
Language Ability	Speaks English fluently Speaks English with an accent Speaks limited English
Age	18 48 68
Party Affiliation	Republican Independent Democrat
Work History	Janitor Primary School Teacher Doctor
Criminal History	No criminal record Has a criminal record
Citizenship	U.S. citizen Not U.S. citizen

Table A-2. Profiles That Include Attributes Involving Criminal Record and Race

	White	Black	Asian	Latino	Middle-Eastern	Total
No criminal record	48.41% 774	48.47% 759	50.78% 814	48.38% 774	48.53% 792	48.91% 3,913
Has criminal record	51.59% 825	51.53% 807	49.22% 789	51.62% 826	51.47% 840	51.09% 4,087
Total	1,599 100.00	1,566 100.00	1,603 100.00	1,600 100.00	1,632 100.00	8,000 100.00

Table A-3. Profiles That Include Attributes Involving Citizenship and Race

	White	Black	Asian	Latino	Middle-Eastern	Total
U.S. Citizenship	48.72% 779	50.45% 790	48.85% 783	50.50% 808	50.98% 832	49.90% 3,992
No U.S. Citizenship	51.28% 820	49.55% 776	51.15% 820	49.50% 792	49.02% 800	50.10% 4,008
Total	1,599 100.00	1,566 100.00	1,603 100.00	1,600 100.00	1,632 100.00	8,000 100.00