Who Endorses Election Conspiracies?

Research Report: PCIS-003 | March 12, 2022

Research Question

In this report, we consider a new set of conspiracies related to the last two presidential elections. When Donald Trump was elected to the presidency in 2016, a chorus of Democrat journalists, academics and politicians insisted the election was fraudulent due to Russian interference (Adams, 2019). Then, when Joe Biden was elected to the presidency in 2020, a chorus of Republican journalists, academics and politicians insisted the election was fraudulent due to the interference of activist progressives (Yang, 2022). It would appear, then, that election conspiracies exist on both sides of the political aisle. Given this, a reasonable question to ask is: who in the US most doubts the legitimacy of elections?

Methodology

Data Source

- Paranormal and Conspiratorial Ideation Study ("PCIS," collected in July-August 2021)

Data Quality Control

- All participants in this dataset passed attention, response time, fraud, duplication, and bot checks.

Participants

- 3,073 adults in the United States (53.3% Female)
- Average Age = 46.47 years (*SD* = 19.38 years)
- 58.1% White; 21.4% Hispanic; 14% Black; 6.4% Asian

Measures

- Endorsement: Respondents were asked whether they agree with the following statements. Answer options ranged from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" using a 7-point Likert scale. Statements:
  1. "The 2016 presidential election of Donald Trump was fraudulent because it was tampered with by high-ranking politicians and computer programmers in Russia."
  2. "The 2020 presidential election of Joe Biden was fraudulent because it was tampered with by high-ranking politicians, voting machine programmers, and poll workers."
- Political Orientation: Respondents were asked, "When thinking about social issues, where would you place yourself on the political continuum?" Participants that answered "very liberal" or "very conservative" were included in analyses for Fig. 2.

Summary of Findings

1. About half of Democrats, and almost 60% of Republicans doubt the legitimacy of recent presidential elections (Fig. 1).
2. On average, those identifying as "very liberal" were somewhat more likely to doubt the legitimacy of Trump's election. Those identifying as "very conservative" were much more likely to doubt Biden's election (Fig. 2).
3. Generally speaking, gender was not predictive of election conspiracy endorsement (Fig. 3).
4. Endorsement did differ by race. For example, half of Black respondents, and 39% of Hispanics and Asians, believed the election of Donald Trump was fraudulent (Fig. 4).
5. Agreement with the Biden election conspiracy did not vary by education, but people with higher levels of education were less likely to agree that Trump's election was fraudulent (Fig. 5).

Take-Home Message

- Our data indicate that belief in election conspiracies are common amongst members of both political parties.
- One important caveat: attitudes about the prevalence of election fraud may be stronger regarding the 2020 election simply because the election of Joe Biden was more recent than the election of Donald Trump (i.e., a recency bias).
- Another important caveat: because political attitudes are often tribal and self-interested, people affiliated with the party in power may be motivated to downplay the role of fraud in elections.

Do you have an interpretation of this you want to share? Email us (research@skeptic.com) and it may be included in Skeptic Magazine.

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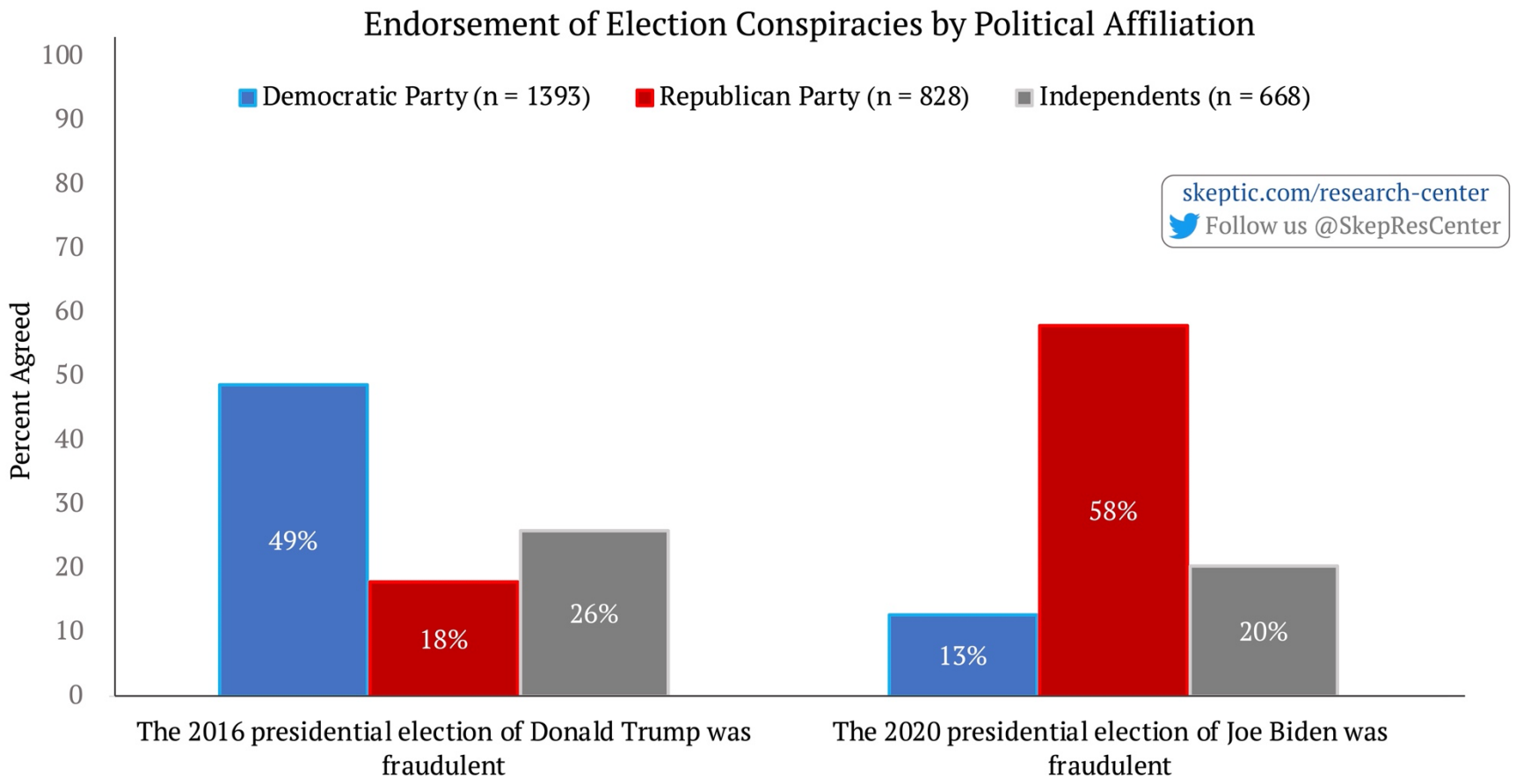
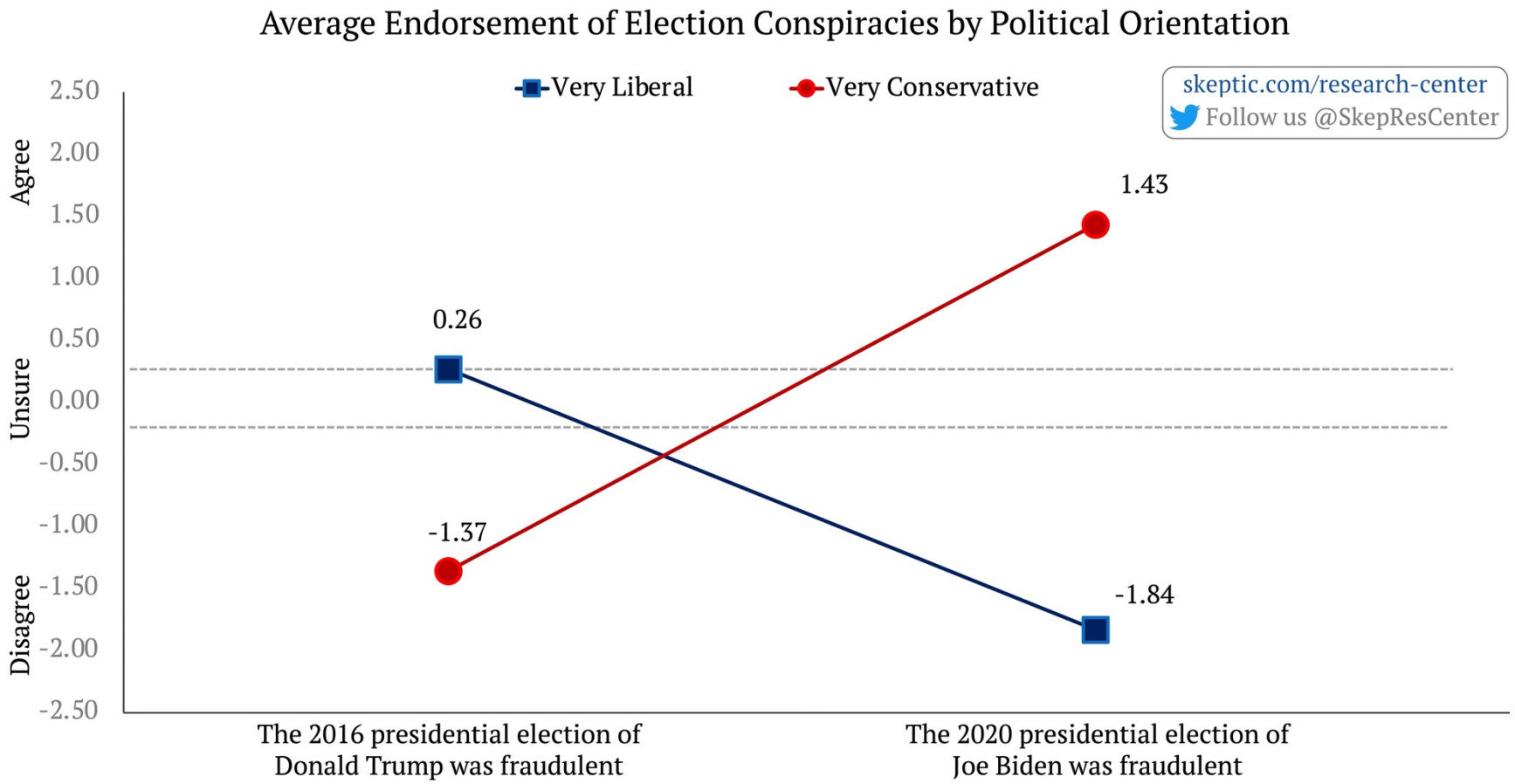
Figure 1



Note: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. Data comes from PCIS Report #3.

For additional information (e.g., statistical output, citations) not included in this document, view the supplemental page for this report located at skeptic.com/research-center/paranormal-conspiratorial-ideation-study/

Figure 2



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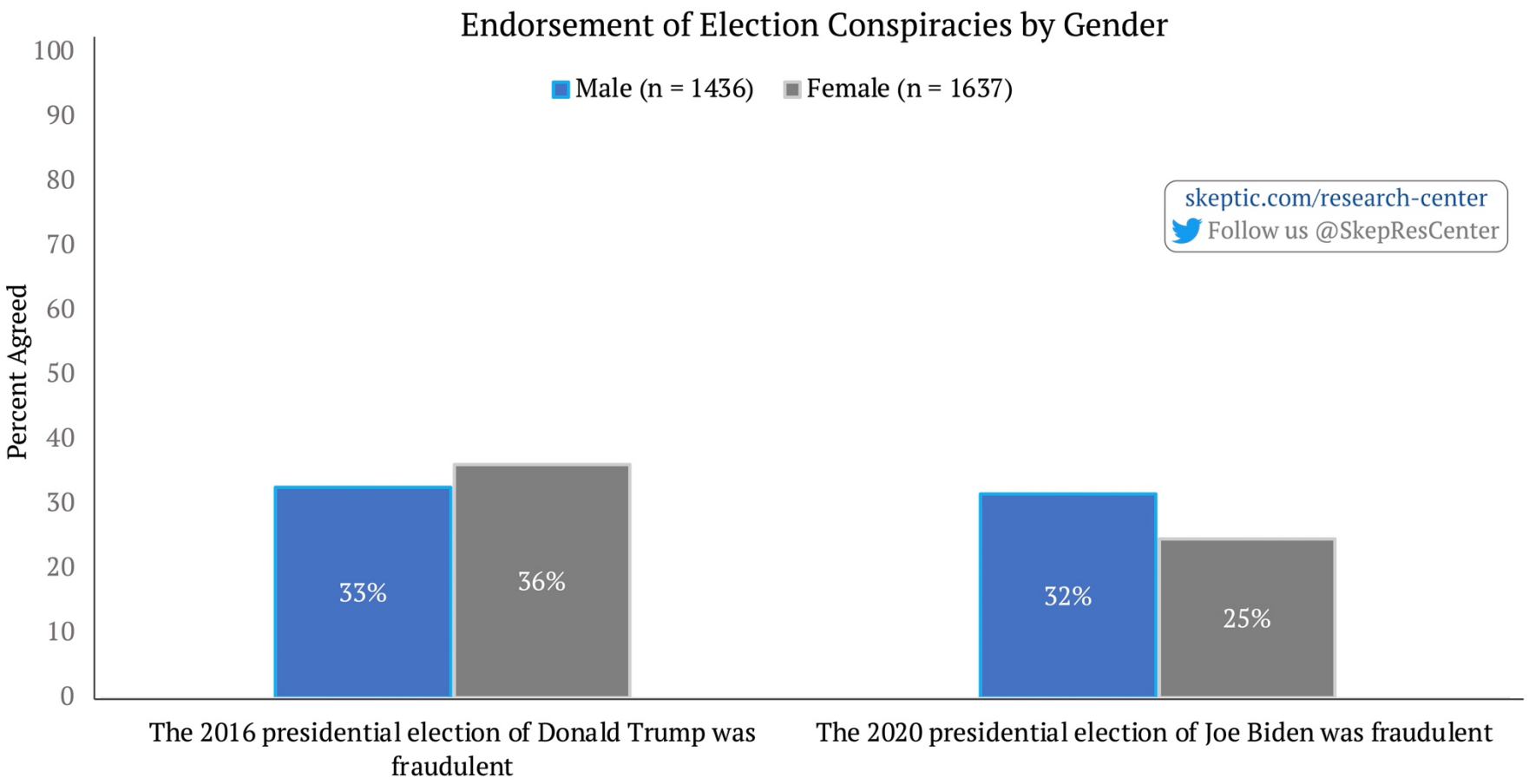

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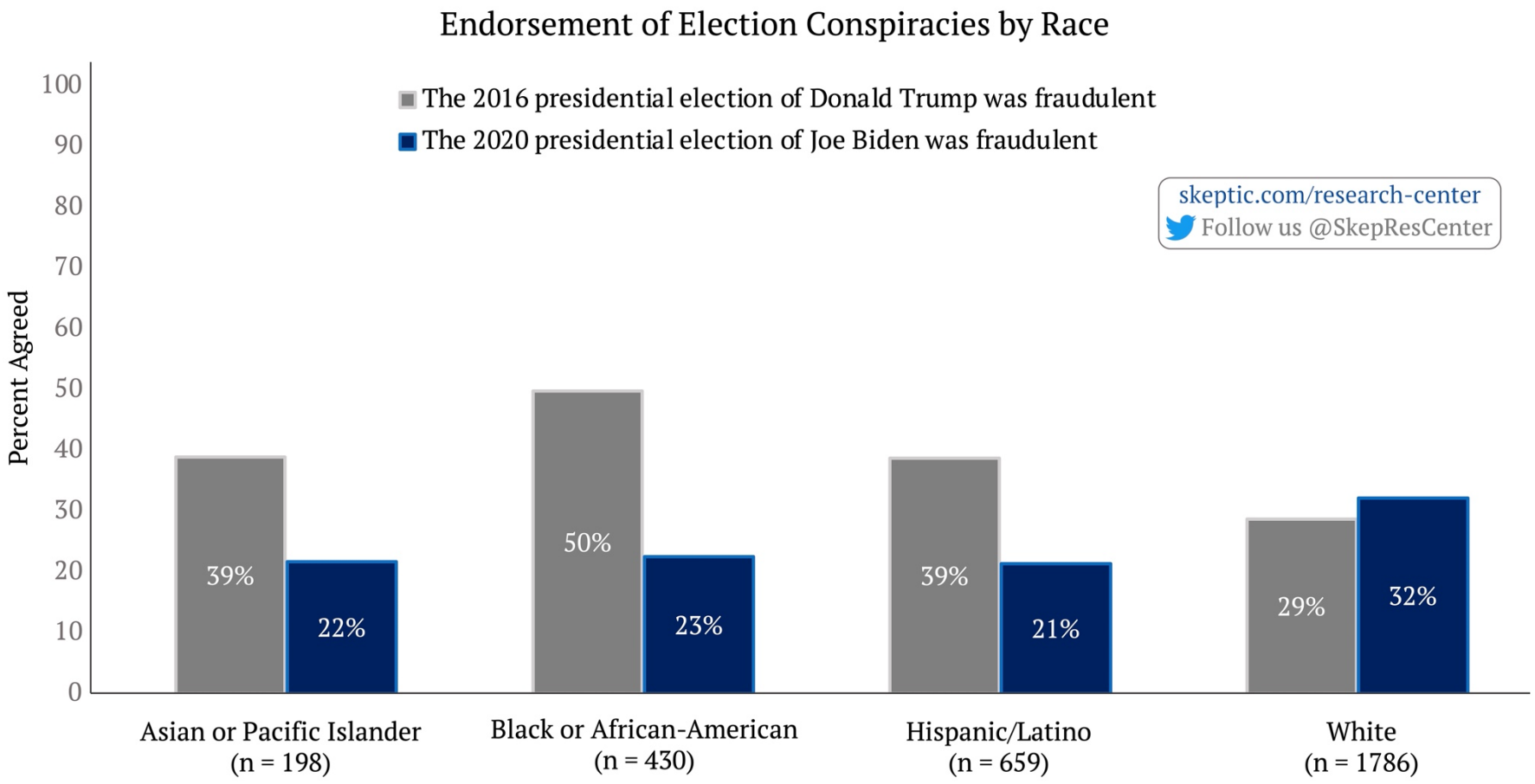

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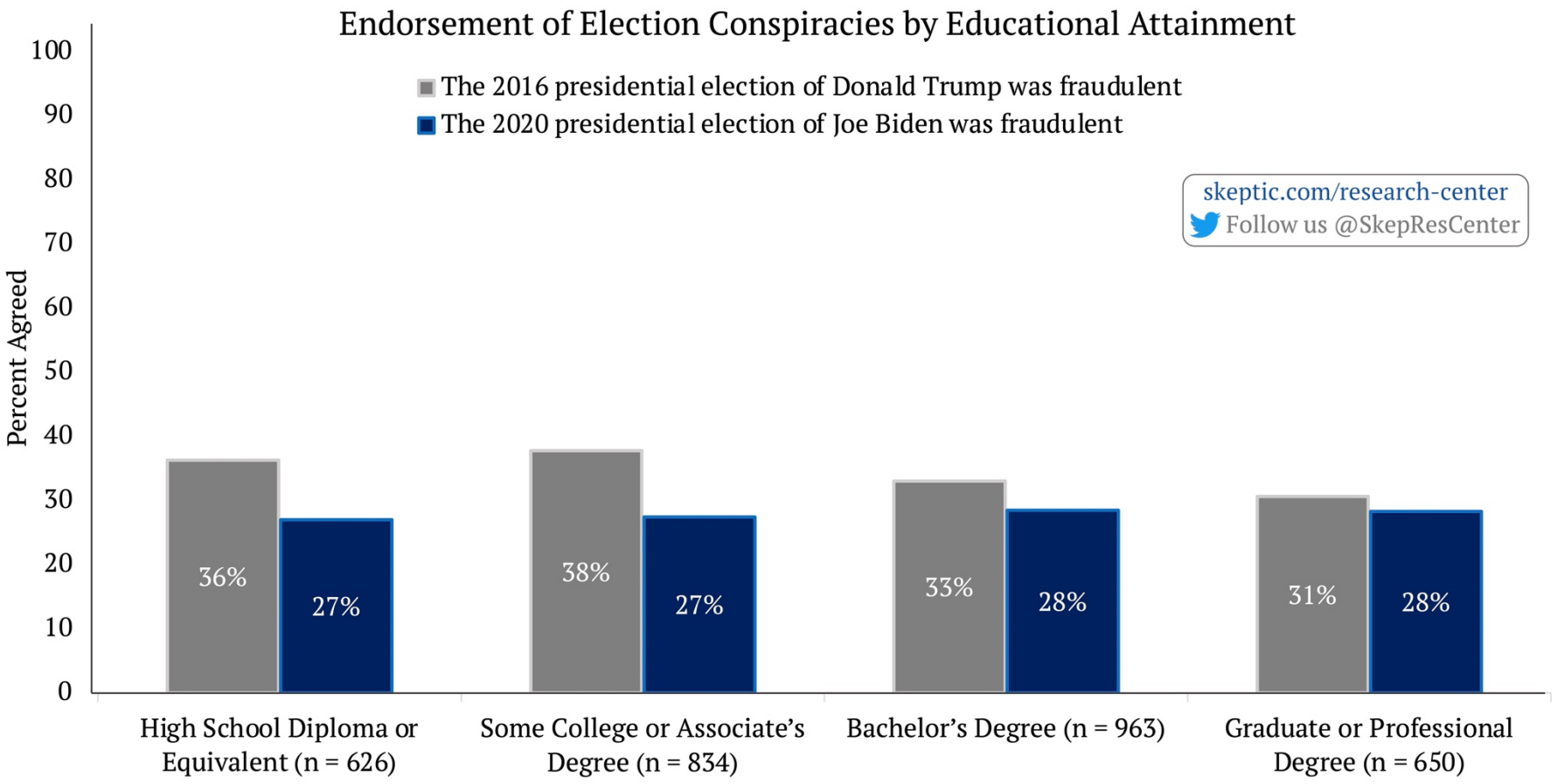

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