

# Online Appendix A: Question wording

## Ipsos/CivicPulse

Consider the issue of voter fraud – that is, people voting who are not legally eligible or voting multiple times. About 135 million votes were cast in the 2016 presidential election. Roughly how many of those votes do you think were the result of voter fraud? (direction of scale randomized)

- Millions [0]
- Hundreds of thousands [.25]
- Tens of thousands [.5]
- Thousands [.75]
- Less than a thousand [1]

You may have heard about the idea that the world’s temperature may have been going up slowly over the past 100 years. What is your personal opinion on this? Do you think this has probably been happening, or do you think it probably hasn’t been happening?

- Has probably been happening [1]
- Probably hasn’t been happening [0]

What is your best guess of the percentage of federal income tax revenue that comes from the top 1 percent of earners?

- 0-10 percent [0]
- 11-20 percent [.33]
- 21-30 percent [.67]
- 31 percent or more [1]

To the best of your knowledge, does the federal government spend more on health care or the military or are they about the same? (order of options in questions and response options randomized)

- Health care [1]
- Military [0]
- About the same [.5]

Out of every 100 people living in [RESPONDENT’S COUNTY], how many do you think were born outside of the United States? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)

-[answers recoded to 0–1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in the United States, how many do you think were born outside of this country? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)

-[answers recoded to 0–1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in [RESPONDENT’S COUNTY] who have a job or are actively looking for a job, how many do you think are currently unemployed? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)

-[answers recoded to 0–1 scale]

Out of every 100 people living in the United States who have a job or are actively looking for a job, how many do you think are currently unemployed? (Please enter a number from 0 to 100.)

-[answers recoded to 0–1 scale]

## **YouGov/CivicPulse**

A needle exchange program is a social service which provides clean needles to drug users to reduce the spread of disease (like HIV or Hepatitis C). However, some people think these programs encourage drug use.

What do you think? Do you think that needle exchange programs (NEPs) increase drug use, or do you think that they do not?

-I think that NEPs increase drug use (0)

-I think that NEPs do not increase drug use (1)

-I don't know (0.5)

Genetically modified crops are crops that have had changes made in their DNA to improve resistance to disease or pests. However, some people think they are unsafe to eat.

What do you think? Do you think genetically modified (GM) crops are safe to eat, or do you think they are not safe to eat?

-I think GM crops are safe to eat (1)

-I think GM crops are not safe to eat (0)

-I don't know (0.5)

## Online Appendix B: Sample composition

### Sample demographics and survey marginals

Table B1: Sample demographics

	Public (Ipsos)	Public (YouGov)	Elites (CivicPulse)
Female	51%	55%	31%
Nonwhite	15%	31%	8%
Age 45 or older	50%	56%	84%
College graduate	60%	28%	78%
Democrats	44%	43%	45%
Republicans	44%	34%	49%
N	2000	526	743

All values are unweighted. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For elites, we include both public officials who reported running for office as partisans or who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners).

Table B2: Mean accuracy of factual beliefs by item

	Public	Elites
<i>Issue beliefs</i>		
Health care spending	0.34 (N=1990)	0.42 (N=732)
Tax share from 1%	0.41 (N=1998)	0.50 (N=731)
GMO safety	0.52 (N=251)	0.69 (N=257)
Voter fraud	0.65 (N=1998)	0.75 (N=726)
Climate change	0.80 (N=2000)	0.89 (N=729)
Needle exchanges	0.58 (N=275)	0.72 (N=285)
<i>Population beliefs</i>		
National foreign born	0.80 (N=2000)	0.90 (N=703)
National unemployment	0.84 (N=1997)	0.96 (N=591)
Local foreign born	0.82 (N=1996)	0.91 (N=596)
Local unemployment	0.87 (N=1996)	0.96 (N=511)

Factual beliefs measured on a 0–1 scale where 1 represents the most accurate answer. All values are un-weighted.

## Government official sample

How representative is the sample of government officials who participated in our online survey? While there is limited demographic information available covering officials across U.S. states, we can gain some insights into this question by comparing the demographic features of the municipalities, counties, and state legislative districts represented in the survey sample compared with the nation as a whole. Respondents associated with state legislative districts (legislators and staffers associated with specific legislators) were matched to Census data using standard district-specific IDs that identify state legislative districts in each state. The county respondents were matched to Census data using standard county-level FIPS codes. Municipal officials were matched to Census data using the state and name of the municipalities (e.g., town, township, or city). Exact matching rates of 95% was achieved for municipal officials, 92% for state legislators and their staffers, and 100% for county officials.

By using this matching technique, we compare how representative each geographic boundary unit represented in this survey is with the full distribution of municipalities and counties in the United States. We do so using three key variables: the population of residents living in the area, the proportion of those residents classified as living in an urban area, and the proportion of residents with a four-year college degree (out of all residents twenty five years or older). As shown below, the distribution of municipalities and counties represented in our study are modestly more populous, more urban, and more educated than the full distribution of municipalities and counties in the United States.

## Representativeness of municipalities

	Survey sample	Census population
Proportion urban: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.98	0
Proportion urban: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	1	0.85
Proportion urban: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	1	0.99
Proportion college-educated: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.19	0.11
Proportion college-educated: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.28	0.17
Proportion college-educated: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.43	0.25
Population size: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	8,229	383
Population size: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	14,934	1,557.5
Population size: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	30,494	6,663

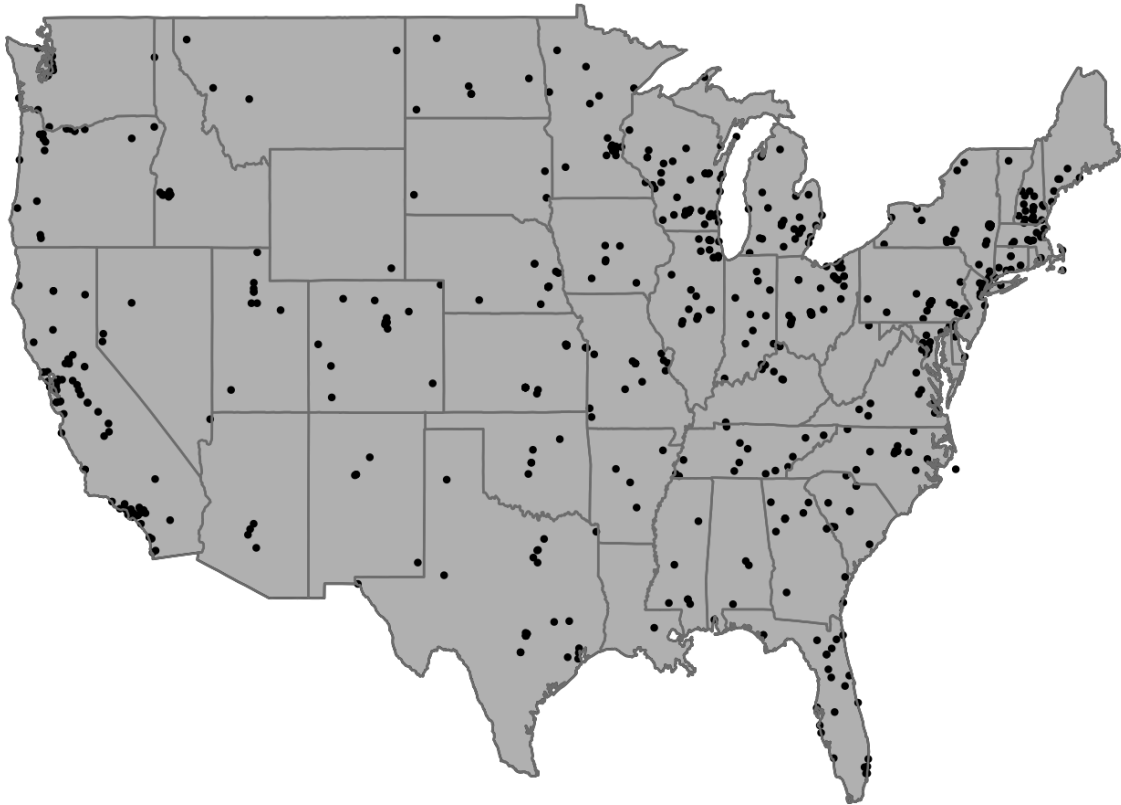
## Representativeness of counties

	Survey sample	Census population
Proportion urban: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.25	0.14
Proportion urban: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.55	0.41
Proportion urban: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.80	0.68
Proportion college-educated: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.17	0.14
Proportion college-educated: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.22	0.18
Proportion college-educated: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.29	0.24
Population size: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	16,422	7,762
Population size: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	36,522	17,776
Population size: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	108,916	44,506

## Representativeness of state legislative districts

	Survey sample	Census population
Proportion urban: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.71	0.49
Proportion urban: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.97	0.87
Proportion urban: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	1	1
Proportion college-educated: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.21	0.19
Proportion college-educated: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.31	0.26
Proportion college-educated: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	0.43	0.37
Population size: 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile	17,020	20,622
Population size: 50 <sup>th</sup> percentile	40,650	38,482
Population size: 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile	120,736	79,722

Figure B1: Map of government officials who took the CivicPulse survey



This map shows the approximate geographic location of each of the government officials who participated in the CivicPulse survey (to protect anonymity, we do not show the exact location or provide replication data on respondent location). The government officials who participated in the CivicPulse survey represent all regions in the country.

## Online Appendix C: Additional results

Table C1: Issue belief accuracy by partisanship and elite status (ordered probit)

	Health care spending	Tax share from 1%	GMO safety	Voter fraud	Climate change	Needle exchanges
Democrat	-0.18** (0.08)	-0.13* (0.08)	0.28 (0.21)	0.13 (0.08)	0.28** (0.11)	0.29 (0.18)
Republican	0.37*** (0.08)	0.41*** (0.08)	-0.08 (0.23)	-0.42*** (0.08)	-0.37*** (0.11)	-0.38** (0.19)
Govt. official	0.17 (0.20)	-0.02 (0.21)	0.65** (0.32)	0.44** (0.19)	1.08** (0.43)	0.11 (0.32)
Democrat $\times$ official	-0.01 (0.22)	0.26 (0.22)	-0.66* (0.34)	0.45** (0.21)	-0.10 (0.47)	0.24 (0.34)
Republican $\times$ official	-0.02 (0.22)	0.31 (0.22)	-0.12 (0.35)	-0.39** (0.20)	-0.74* (0.44)	0.21 (0.34)
Control variables	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	2591	2592	465	2591	2590	510

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$  (two-sided). Cell entries are ordered probit coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables are measured on a 0–1 scale where 1 is the most accurate response. Control variables are indicators for sex, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. Partisanship was measured using self-placement on a seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans) for the public. We code public officials as partisans if they reported running for office as a partisan or identified as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners).



Table C2: Issue belief accuracy by partisanship and elite status

	Health care spending	Tax share from 1%	GMO safety	Voter fraud	Climate change	Needle exchanges	Foreign-born natl. rate	Unemploy. natl. rate
Democrat	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	0.10 (0.07)	0.02 (0.02)	0.06** (0.03)	0.09 (0.06)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Republican	0.14*** (0.03)	0.14*** (0.03)	-0.03 (0.08)	-0.12*** (0.02)	-0.11*** (0.03)	-0.13* (0.07)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.01)
Govt. official	0.07 (0.07)	-0.00 (0.06)	0.24** (0.06)	0.11** (0.04)	0.15*** (0.03)	0.05 (0.10)	0.05** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)
Democrat × official	-0.02 (0.08)	0.09 (0.07)	-0.23** (0.07)	0.08* (0.05)	-0.06 (0.04)	0.04 (0.11)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Republican × official	-0.01 (0.08)	0.10 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.11)	-0.08* (0.05)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.06 (0.11)	0.02 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)
Female	-0.08*** (0.02)	-0.09*** (0.01)	-0.13*** (0.04)	0.11*** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.02 (0.03)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
College	-0.01 (0.02)	0.03** (0.01)	0.09** (0.04)	0.02 (0.01)	0.03** (0.02)	0.10*** (0.04)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)
Nonwhite	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.05)	0.00 (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.11** (0.05)	-0.03*** (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Age 30–44	0.05* (0.03)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.10 (0.07)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.06 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.02)
Age 45–64	0.01 (0.03)	-0.11*** (0.02)	-0.12* (0.07)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.02)	-0.06 (0.07)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.11*** (0.01)
Age 65+	0.07** (0.03)	-0.08*** (0.03)	-0.15** (0.07)	0.10*** (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.07)	0.06*** (0.01)	0.13*** (0.01)
Constant	0.32*** (0.04)	0.46*** (0.03)	0.65*** (0.09)	0.58*** (0.03)	0.77*** (0.03)	0.63*** (0.08)	0.77*** (0.02)	0.77*** (0.02)
Partisan belief differences (R-D): Govt. officials	0.20*** (0.04)	0.19*** (0.03)	0.06 (0.05)	-0.30*** (0.02)	-0.16*** (0.02)	-0.20*** (0.04)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Partisan belief differences (R-D): Public	0.19*** (0.02)	0.18*** (0.02)	-0.12** (0.06)	-0.14*** (0.02)	-0.17*** (0.02)	-0.22*** (0.04)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Officials/public difference in belief polarization	0.01 (0.04)	0.01 (0.03)	0.18** (0.08)	-0.16*** (0.02)	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.07)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
N	2591	2592	465	2591	2590	510	2578	2470

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$  (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses. Dependent variables are measured on a 0–1 scale where 1 is the most accurate response. Control variables are indicators for sex, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. Partisanship was measured using self-placement on a seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans) for the public. We code public officials as partisans if they reported running for office as a partisan or identified as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners).

## Online Appendix D: Issue expertise and local experience

While we expected greater belief polarization among elites, we also consider two preregistered hypotheses in this appendix about factors that may mitigate belief polarization: issue expertise and local experience. These results follow the outcome measure coding reported in the main text. (Parallel results following the preregistered coding are reported in Online Appendix E.)

### Theory

First, we test whether partisan factual polarization is lower among officials with relevant issue expertise compared with officials who lack such experience. Previous research has shown, for instance, that lawyers and judges are less likely to be engaged in biased patterns of reasoning on legal matters compared to other controversial issues (Kahan et al. 2015). Similarly, while middle and high school curricula about evolution and climate change in the U.S. do not fully reflect the scientific consensus, science teachers are more likely than the public to express views consistent with the consensus (e.g., Plutzer et al. 2016). We thus hypothesized that partisan factual polarization will be lower among elites who have relevant issue expertise than among those who do not.

Second, we assess whether factual perceptions are less polarized by party at the local level, where both government officials and the public may observe objective conditions more accurately as a result of direct experience. People who drive more, for instance, more accurately perceive the price of gas (Ansolabehere, Meredith, and Snowberg 2013). Personal experience can also affect politicized factual questions on issues like the state of the economy (e.g., Healy, Persson, and Snowberg 2017). We thus hypothesized that partisan factual polarization will be lower for perceptions of local conditions compared to perceptions of the same issue at the national level.

### Methods

To test the issue expertise hypothesis, we examine issues where some of the government officials have relevant issue expertise (local unemployment and voter fraud). For unemployment, we consider whether partisan factual polarization is lower among mayors, city council members, and city managers than among other officials. For voter fraud, we conduct two tests. First, we compare partisan factual polarization between state and local officials who ran for elected office and state and local officials who did not run for state and local office (i.e., were appointed to office or hired as staff). Second, we compare partisan factual polarization across local government officials who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes to local government officials who report that their job does not involve these functions.

We instead test the local experience hypothesis using models of perceptions of the proportion of unemployed or foreign born residents at the national and local level. For our local measure of unemployment, we use county-level estimates from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (BLS) as our measure of ground truth. The

local proportion of foreign born residents are county-level values drawn from the 2015 American Community Survey 5-year estimate.

Our tables below report the key quantities of interest necessary to test our hypotheses in a bottom panel. These thus compare quantities for expert versus non-expert government officials in our test of the issue expertise hypothesis (Table D1) and for local versus national conditions in our the local experience hypothesis (Table D2).

## Results

Table D1 reports the results of models testing whether issue expertise can reduce partisan belief polarization among government officials. In this table, the outcome measures are factual perceptions where higher values indicate greater accuracy. We consider two dependent variables. For local unemployment, we define relevant experience as respondents who are mayors, city council members, and city managers. For accuracy of voter fraud perceptions, we define relevant issue expertise as respondents who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes or elected officials.

We find no support for this hypothesis. Looking first at perceived local unemployment, we find no measurable partisan factual polarization among non-expert or expert government officials nor a significant difference between them. Similarly, though perceptions of voter fraud are highly polarized among government officials, we find no measurable difference between those with expertise in election administration and those who lack it. Moreover, officials who are elected are *more*, not less, polarized in their beliefs about the issue.

Next, we test whether partisan factual belief polarization will be lower for local conditions than national ones. This hypothesis is tested in Table D2, where again the outcome measures are factual perceptions where higher values indicate greater accuracy. However, we find no measurable difference in the partisan belief accuracy gap between local and national estimates of those populations.

Table D1: Factual belief accuracy by issue expertise

	Local unemployment	Voter fraud (model 1)	Voter fraud (model 2)
Democrat	-0.02** (0.01)	0.17*** (0.07)	0.08* (0.04)
Republican	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.06 (0.07)	-0.24*** (0.04)
Economic expertise	-0.01 (0.01)		
Democrat × economic expertise	0.03* (0.01)		
Republican × economic expertise	0.01 (0.01)		
Elected official		0.14* (0.08)	
Elected official × Democrat		-0.13* (0.08)	
Elected official × Republican		-0.23*** (0.08)	
Elections expertise			-0.07 (0.11)
Elections expertise × Democrat			0.10 (0.11)
Elections expertise × Republican			0.14 (0.12)
Control variables	✓	✓	✓
Partisan accuracy differences (D-R): Experts	-0.01** (0.01)	-0.33** (0.04)	-0.28*** (0.04)
Partisan accuracy differences (D-R): Non-experts	0.00 (0.01)	-0.23*** (0.02)	-0.31*** (0.02)
Expert/non-expert difference in belief polarization	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.10** (0.04)	0.04 (0.05)
N	448	638	638

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$  (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the respondent level in the pooled model). Dependent variables are measured on a 0–1 scale where higher responses indicate greater accuracy. (See Online Appendix A for question wording.) All independent variables are binary. We define mayors, city council members, and city managers as officials with economic expertise because their job responsibilities involve some aspect of the local economy. We define government officials who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes as having elections expertise. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For elites, we include both public officials who reported running for office as partisans or who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Table D2: Factual belief accuracy about local versus national quantities

	Unemployment (national or county)	Foreign born (national or county)
Democrat	-0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Republican	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Local perception	0.02*** (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Democrat $\times$ local	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Republican $\times$ local	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Government official	0.06*** (0.01)	0.06*** (0.01)
Respondent random effects	✓	✓
Control variables	✓	✓
Partisan accuracy differences: Local	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)
Partisan accuracy differences: National	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Local/national difference in belief polarization	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
N	4812	4992

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$  (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the respondent level). Dependent variables range from 0–100 with higher values indicating greater accuracy (see Online Appendix A for question wording). All independent variables are binary. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For elites, we include both public officials who reported running for office as partisans or who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

## Online Appendix E: Issue expertise and local experience (preregistered outcome measures)

Table E1 contains the preregistered test of the issue expertise hypothesis for the population belief measures at the local level. The outcome measure is factual perceptions of the local unemployment rate where higher values indicate higher perceived levels of unemployment. The partisan gap in beliefs is marginally greater among experts than non-experts ( $p < .10$ ).

Table E1: Perceptions of local unemployment rate

Democrat	0.01 (0.01)
Republican	0.00 (0.01)
Economic expertise	-0.01 (0.02)
Democrat $\times$ economic expertise	-0.02 (0.02)
Republican $\times$ economic expertise	0.01 (0.02)
Control variables	✓
Partisan belief differences: Experts	0.02** (0.01)
Partisan belief differences: Non-experts	-0.01 (0.01)
Expert/non-expert difference in belief polarization	0.03* (0.02)
N	448

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$  (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the respondent level in the pooled model). Dependent variable is the estimated unemployment rate at the county level (recoded from 0–100 to 0–1; see Online Appendix A for question wording). All independent variables are binary. We define mayors, city council members, and city managers as officials with economic expertise because their job responsibilities involve some aspect of the local economy. We define government officials who report that their job involves the implementation of elections and/or the tallying of votes as having elections expertise. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For elites, we include both public officials who reported running for office as partisans or who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

Finally, Table E2 estimates the local/national difference in factual belief polarization using the preregistered outcome measure of perceptions of unemployment and the foreign born population. Though we find in Table D2 that the partisan accuracy gap is not reduced measurably for foreign born populations for local versus national quantities, we do find that the gap in perceptions of the population itself are less polarized at the local level ( $p < .05$ ). This finding is not replicated for perceptions of local employment, however.

Table E2: Factual belief accuracy about local versus national quantities

	Unemployment (national or county)	Foreign born (national or county)
Democrat	0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.02)
Republican	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)
Local perception	-0.02** (0.01)	-0.05*** (0.01)
Democrat $\times$ local	-0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Republican $\times$ local	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Government official	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.06*** (0.01)
Respondent random effects	✓	✓
Control variables	✓	✓
Partisan accuracy differences: Local	0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Partisan accuracy differences: National	0.01 (0.01)	0.02 (0.01)
Local/national difference in belief polarization	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01* (0.01)
N	4812	4992

\*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*\*  $p < .01$  (two-sided). Cell entries are OLS coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses (clustered at the respondent level). Dependent variables range from 0–100 with higher values indicating greater accuracy (see Online Appendix A for question wording). All independent variables are binary. Control variables are indicators for gender, college degree, nonwhite, and age ranges 30–44, 45–64, and 65 and older and the true values of unemployment or the foreign born population at the county level. Partisanship was measured as follows: for the mass public, we use respondent self-placement on a standard seven-point party ID measure (with leaners treated as partisans). For elites, we include both public officials who reported running for office as partisans or who identify as Democrats or Republicans (including leaners). The omitted reference group for partisanship is independent.

## References

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