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Fringe Groups and Their Beliefs in Conspiracies

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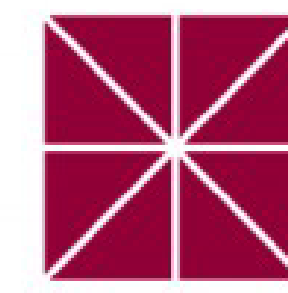
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Who believes this stuff?

An Analysis of Conspiracy Theories and Those Who Believe Them
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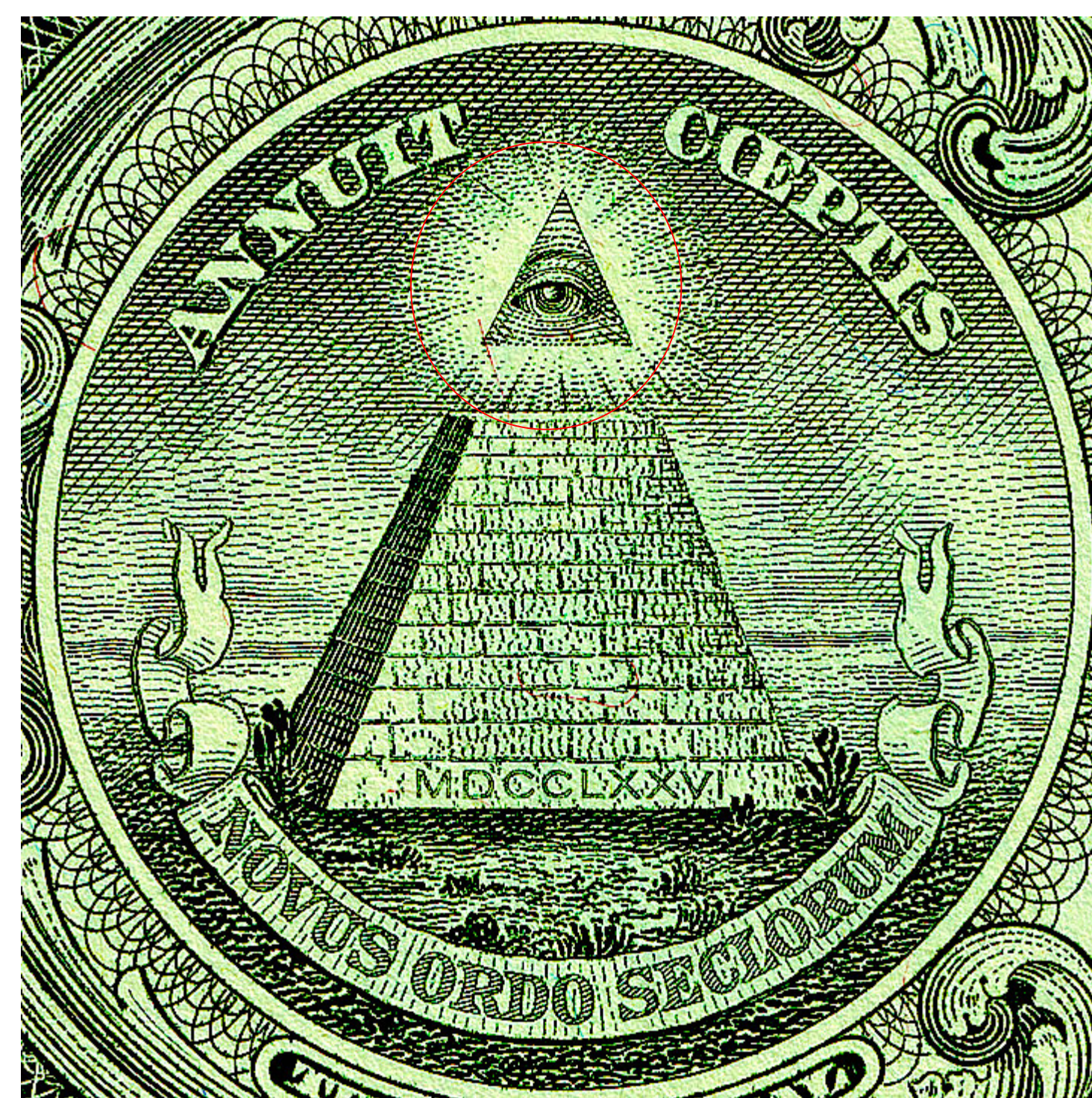
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Abstract:

Fringe Groups and Their Beliefs in Conspiracies.

My topic centers around the series of questions asked in the Chapman University Survey of American Fears on conspiracy theories and the degree to which Americans believe in them. The claims of such theories can range from strange, but ultimately harmless, such as the belief that the United States faked the Apollo 11 Moon Landing in 1969, to accusations with much serious implications such as the belief that the government is hiding information on the Las Vegas and/or Sandy Hook mass shootings. The latter recently made news with the biggest advocate of the “false flag shootings” belief, none other than living-meme, Alex Jones, being banned on nearly every media outlet within 24 hours. Though he had not encouraged such threats, some believers of the conspiracy harassed the parents of Newtown victims, and others.

I want to find out what changes in the belief in conspiracy theories has occurred in the last few years, and hopefully create a hypothesis on why a change may have occurred. I will be using the Chapman University Survey of American Fears for my base data, along with books on the psychology behind belief in conspiracy theories. Ultimately, I want to see if there is a relationship between party affiliation/fringe groups and the belief in conspiracy theories. Finding which specific conspiracies certain groups believe will also give us insight into the mindset and ideas of that particular group. Fear of unemployment and fear of running out of money may also have a secondary effect on belief in such theories. My research paper will find and analyzes the data sets to support or not support my hypotheses.



Hypotheses and Methods used

H1: Fringe Right-wing/libertarians have a greater belief in conspiracies that imply government corruption and lies.

H2: Strong democrats are more likely to agree/strongly agree with questions 25d and 25g as these are mainstream liberal beliefs.

H3: People who fear unemployment or running out of money will be more likely to agree with question 25a-i.

Recoding variable was possible to avoid by using qualitative questions on income and employment as opposed to quantitative.

- I expect to find a strong correlation between fringe right-wing/libertarians and the belief in anti-government conspiracies. Conspiracies that specifically imply government corruption and government lies likely will attract fringe libertarians as even mainstream libertarians tend to believe such ideas on a basic level.
- In the media the idea of the Trump/Russian Collusion is reported on heavily by all outlets. It easily is the most mainstream conspiracy theory asked on the FEAR survey. Liberals who likely already disliked Trump will likely believe this conspiracy over others as it directly supports their own opinions and ideology. If a theory negatively impacting Hillary Clinton was asked, one could expect similar results for conservatives.
- For this question I used two qualitative income/employment questions to see if there was a correlation between poverty/uncertainty and the belief in a conspiracy. I believe that the higher your fears of unemployment and of running out of money in the future are, the more likely you will be to believe conspiracy theories, especially if a certain theory blames others for a problem you have.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Ann Gordon and the entire Chapman University Survey of American Fears research team.

The Results and Data

Hypothesis 1

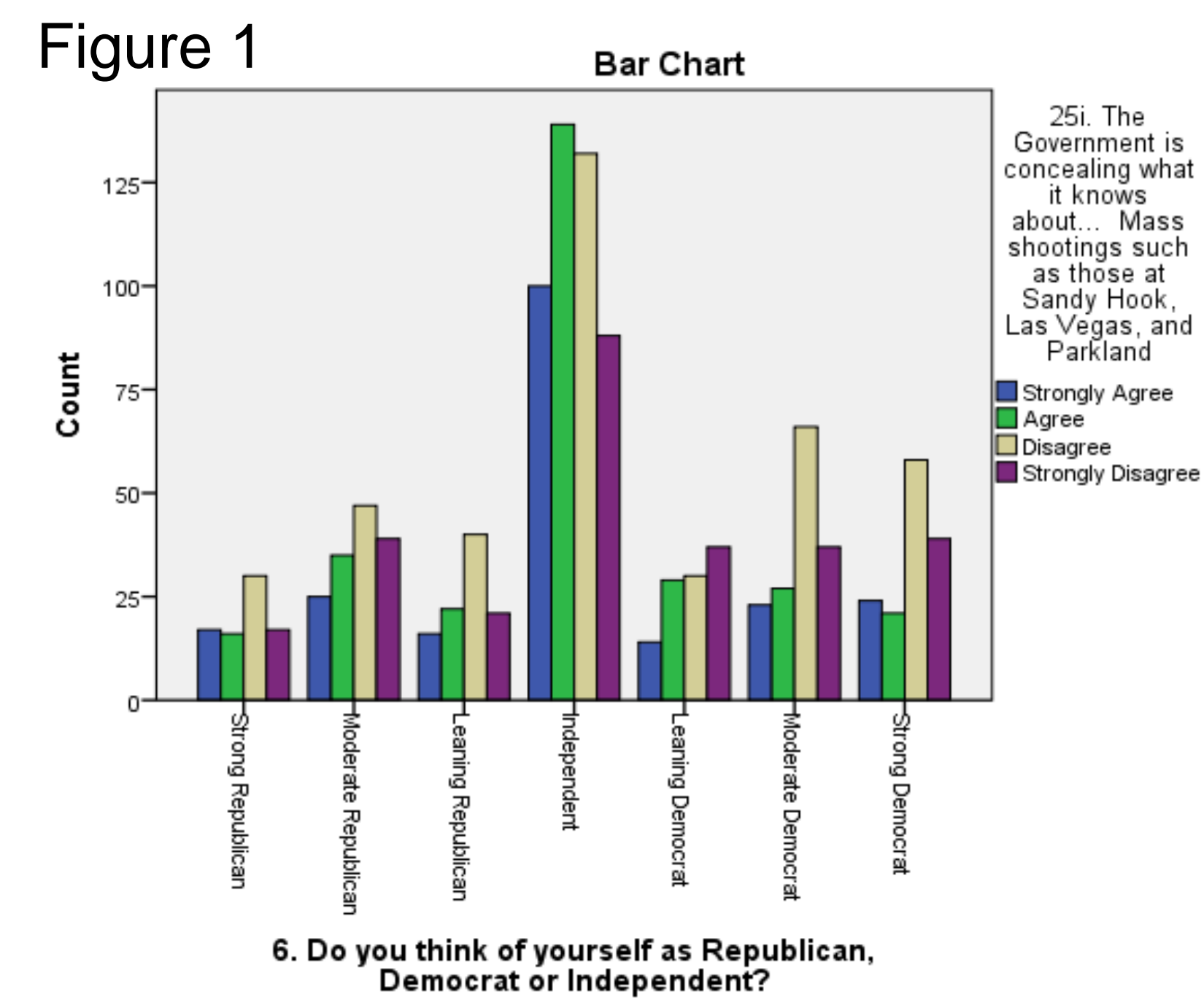
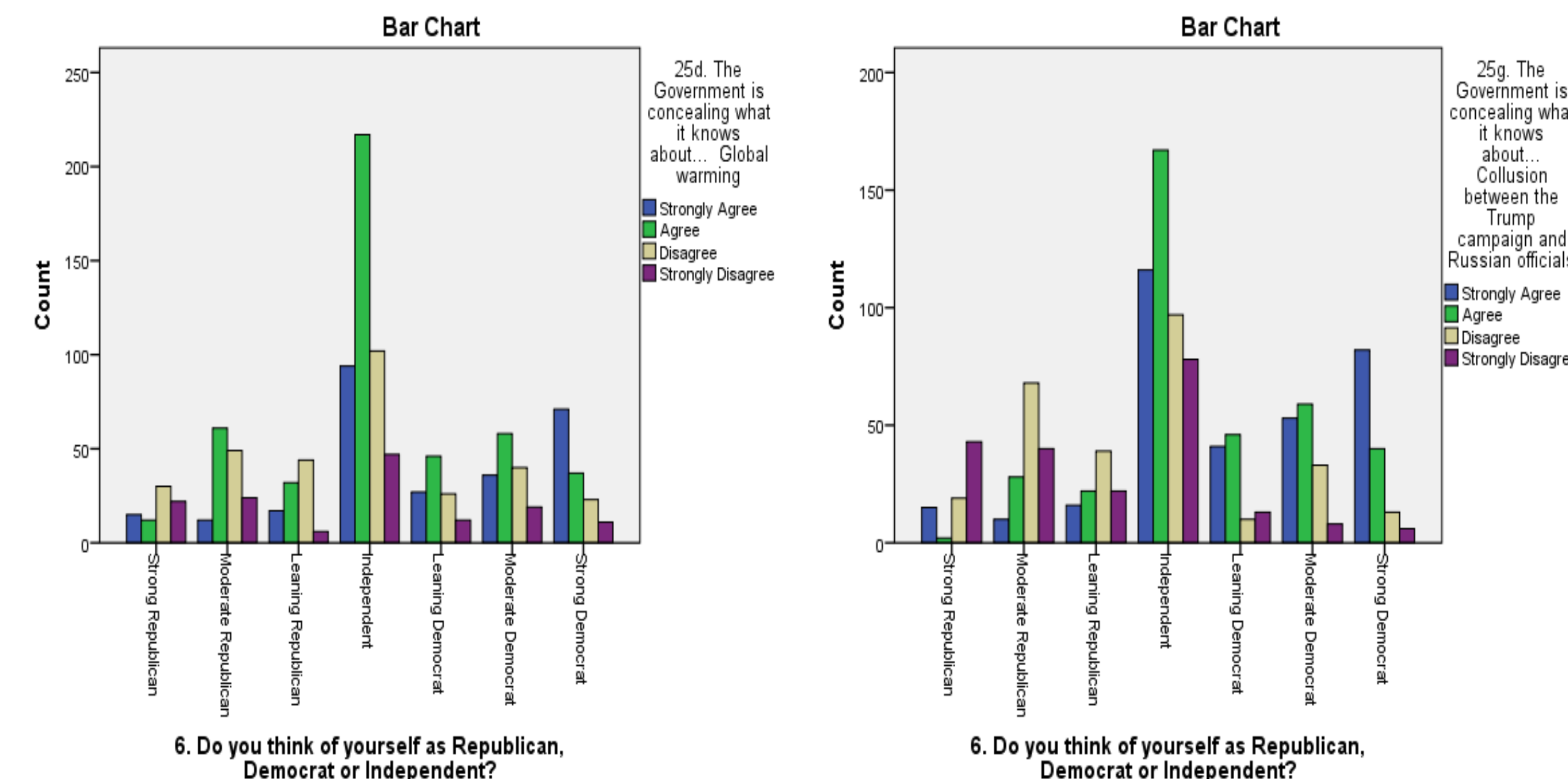


Figure 1 shows a distribution of the number of individuals who strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, and strongly disagreed with q25i. Those who identified as moderate to strong democrat had the highest rates of disagreement. Highest number of believers were those who identified as independent. No large belief rate among far right.

Hypothesis 2



Figures 2 and 3 show a distribution of the number of individuals who strongly agreed, agreed, disagreed, and strongly disagreed with q25d and q25g. The number of individuals who identified as strong democrat had the highest rates of agreement with Russia collusion and global warming conspiracies. Republicans had the lowest rates of agreement.

Hypothesis 3

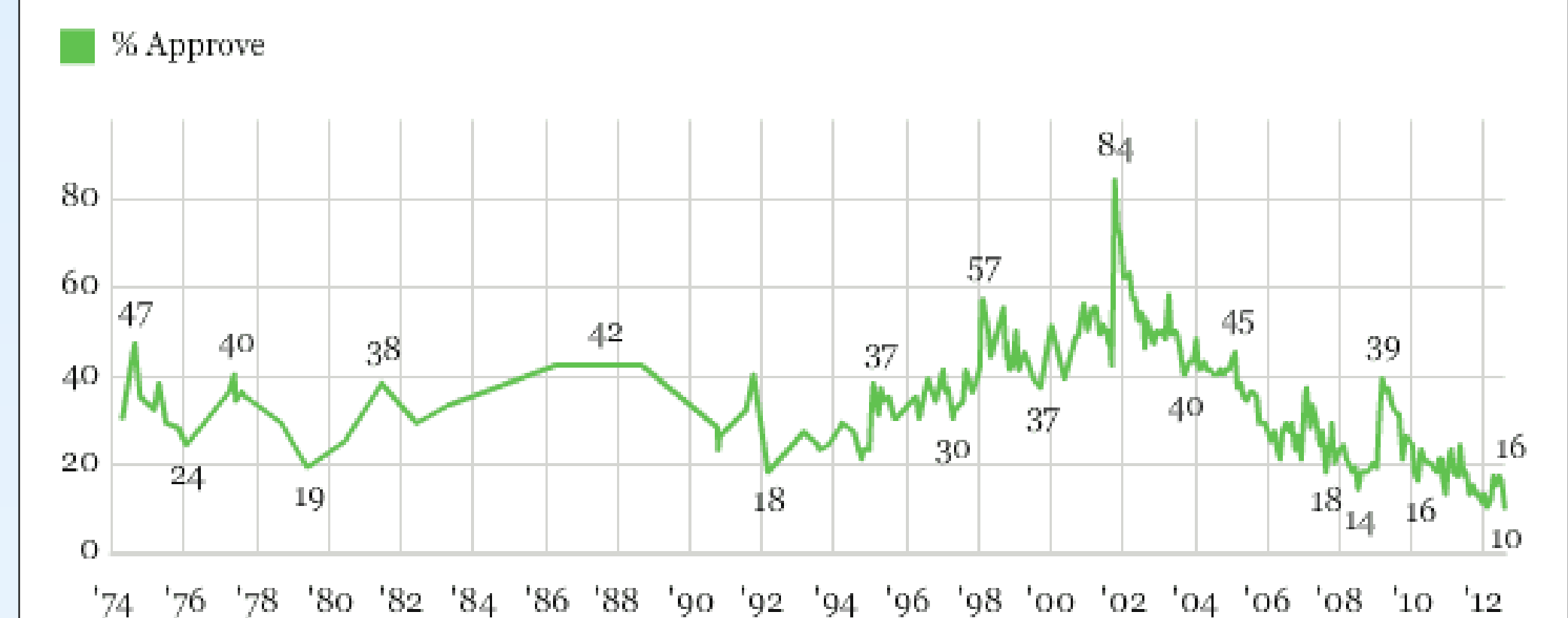


For my third hypothesis, I ran a crosstabs of q11a-b against q25a-i. High levels of fear of running out of money and high levels of fear of unemployment correlated to higher rates of belief in the conspiracies generally. The correlation to the rates of belief on this crosstab experiment were some of the strongest I found during the entire study.

Conclusions

People who classify themselves as independents have the highest rates of belief in governmental conspiracy theories. This may have something to do with the reason they are independent in the first place. Being an independent typically means you disagree with both the Democrats and the Republicans in government. With the overwhelming majority of public servants falling somewhere between those two parties, Independents likely will view the government itself as representative of mainstream Democrats/Republicans and their respective ideals. Therefore, when asked questions on their fear of the government hiding information on conspiracies, Independents likely are going into the question with negative feelings towards the government. Additionally, Americans have always held a generally negative view towards the government in recent years. According to Gallup's polling on the public's approval of congress since 1974, rarely did a majority of Americans approve of Congress.

Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?



GALLUP

Only when the given conspiracy was highly partisan and politized, did the results swing towards strong Democrat or Republican. The experiments did not support my thesis that fringe political groups would have very high rates of belief in governmental conspiracies. Those who fear running out of money and unemployment, however, did display a higher likelihood of believing conspiracy theories. This may have to do with lower education levels or general anxiety caused by their primary fears.

References

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