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Covid 19 & Qanon: Enter the World of Conspiracies

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Covid-19 and Qanon: Enter the World of Conspiracies

An Analysis of COVID19-related Conspiracy Theories and Qanon Belief
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Abstract:

From Covid-19 to Qanon to a global warming hoax, we live in a world drowning in misinformation spread on the internet. Q-anonymous, a purported government “leaker” is an alleged high-level government informant, according to Qanon followers, who posted cryptic messages about a satanic government on the now-defunct forum website, 8chan. This project will examine the possible relationship between a belief in various conspiracy theories associated with Qanon and how the Coronavirus affected rates of belief, utilizing the Chapman Survey of American Fears, a national study using a representative sample of U.S. adults. I expect to find that partisanship will play a large role in predicting rates of belief in Qanon. I believe I will find this relationship to be dependent on the nature of the conspiracy theories themselves. Conspiracy theories that stress governmental lies and secret groups of great control likely will likely have gained support in light of the Coronavirus outbreak and subsequent shutdowns. In this project, Questions on partisanship, Qanon and two COVID19 related conspiracy theories will be used to test for the aforementioned ideas. I expect believers in COVID19 related conspiracy theories to have a higher belief in the notion the government is hiding information about Qanon. With this project, I hope to identify the links between conspiracy theory belief, Qanon, and the Covid-19 virus in order to better understand public attitudes on the subject.



Qanon believers in AZ, 2020

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Hypotheses

H1: Respondents who believe the government is hiding information about Qanon will be more likely to believe the Coronavirus response was a pretext to microchip the population with RFID chips.

Expected findings for H1:

I believe Qanon believers will be more likely to believe the conspiracy that the Coronavirus was released a pretext to microchip the population. I came to this hypothesis because microchipping the population is a popular element within the Qanon conspiracy belief trend. Many within the Qanon sphere believe these rfid (Radio-frequency identification) microchips will be used to restrict commerce and travel.

H2: Partisanship will be a key factor in predicting a respondent's belief or disbelief in the conspiracy theory that the Coronavirus crisis was exaggerated to undermine the Trump Presidency.

Expected Findings for H2:

I believe Republicans will be more likely to be sympathetic towards the notion that the Coronavirus was exaggerated to undermine the Trump Presidency. Throughout the Trump Presidency, President Trump led during a strong stock market rally, a key point that consistently was one of his most popular areas on policy. In March of 2020, a massive stock market crash occurred as a result of national lockdowns due to the Coronavirus.

H3: Republicans will be more likely than Democrats to agree with the notion that the government is hiding information on Qanon.

Expected findings for H3:

I believe Republicans will be more likely to agree with the idea that the government may be hiding information about Qanon. I chose this hypothesis because of the partisan nature of many of the conspiracies falling under the Qanon belief system. Based upon this phenomenon, I believe Republicans will have higher rates of belief in Qanon. For this crosstab, I combined all three Republican positions and all three Democrat positions respectively for ease of interpretation.

The Results and Data

Hypothesis 1

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about.... Qanon? * Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the coronavirus (COVID-19). The coronavirus (COVID-19) is a pretext to insert microchips into people to track them. Crosstabulation

		Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the coronavirus (COVID-19). The coronavirus (COVID-19) is a pretext to insert microchips into people to track them.					
		Web Blank	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about.... Qanon?	Web Blank	0	1	0	1	1	3
	Strongly Agree	1	11	13	17	49	91
	Agree	3	8	47	119	163	340
	Disagree	1	7	41	124	228	401
	Strongly Disagree	0	5	4	27	164	200
Total		5	32	105	288	605	1035

Hypothesis 2

		Correlation	
		Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the coronavirus (COVID-19). The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was exaggerated in order to undermine President Trump.	Do you think of yourself as Republican, Democrat or Independent?
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements about the coronavirus (COVID-19). The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic was exaggerated in order to undermine President Trump.	Pearson Correlation		.587**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		<.001
		N	1035
Do you think of yourself as Republican, Democrat or Independent?	Pearson Correlation	.587**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<.001	
		N	1035

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Hypothesis 3:

New Party Preference Question * Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about.... Qanon? Crosstabulation

		Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about.... Qanon?					
		Web Blank	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Total
Do you think of yourself as a Republican, Independent, or Democrat	Republicans	1	22	103	121	46	293
	Independents	2	25	100	143	65	335
	Democrats	0	44	137	137	89	407
Total		3	91	340	401	200	1035

Conclusions

Hypothesis 1 Analysis:

Only a small section of respondents agreed/strongly with both the notion that the government is concealing information about Qanon and the idea that the coronavirus was used a pretext to microchip the population. This may be due to the fact the Qanon question asked if respondents believed the government was hiding information on Qanon as opposed to asking if respondents believed Qanon.

Hypothesis 2 Analysis:

The p value of .587 indicates a moderate correlation between party preference and the belief that the Coronavirus was exaggerated in order to undermine President Trump. This correlation model is meant to show the effect of partisanship on this belief. Once again, we see partisanship as being a strong predictor of belief on politically charged issues. I believe the divisive nature of the Trump Presidency helped lead to such a phenomenon.

Hypothesis 3 Analysis:

The biggest standout in this data set is the similarity in belief rates between Republicans and Democrats. Around 42% of Republicans of all levels either believe or strongly believe the government is hiding information on Qanon. Compare that with the fact that around 44% of Democrats of all levels believe or strongly believe the government is hiding information on Qanon.

Key Takeaways:

An issue with both Hypotheses 1 & 3 was that the Qanon question asks respondents whether the government is hiding information about Qanon, not if the respondents believed Qanon. In future surveys, I hope the Qanon question specifically is rewritten to better assess actual belief in the Qanon conspiracy. This caused the findings for Hypotheses 1 & 3 to be inconclusive. The correlation conducted for Hypothesis 2 revealed partisanship correlates moderately with the belief that the Coronavirus was exaggerated to undermine the Trump Presidency. I believe this finding to be especially useful for public health policy making as areas with large support margins for the Trump Presidency may view the Coronavirus as a tool to hurt Donald Trump instead of a dangerous and deadly virus.

References

“The Chapman University Survey on American Fears.” Chapman University, Chapman University, 2020, www.chapman.edu/wilkinson/research-centers/babbie-center/survey-american-fears.aspx.
 Bader, C., Day, L. E., & Gordon, A. (2020, March 3). Chapman Survey of American Fears, Wave 7 (2020).