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Conspiracy Beliefs

A Threat to Political Stability

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Introduction

A Review of the Literature

This study will analyze the origins and reasons why people choose to believe in conspiracy theories.

- Research suggests that nearly half of all Americans believe in at least one conspiracy (Oliver).
- The ways that conspiracies touch the emotions and fears of believers are what drives their spreading onto other people.
- Out of a survey of 156 New Mexico State University students, those who believed in conspiracies reported feelings of hostility, powerlessness, and an overall pessimistic view of life (Abalakina-Paap).
- Four nationally representative surveys conducted by the Cooperative Congressional Elections Studies found that people believing in multiple conspiracies believe that unseen and unintentional forces exist to create chaos (Oliver).
- Research shows that counterarguments and debunking conspiracies surprisingly have little to no effect on changing the minds of conspiracy believers (O'Mahony).
- Education can prevent the spread of conspiracies through promoting better social cohesion during an exchange of ideas.

The New World Order Conspiracy

The core beliefs of this theory hold that there is a secret plot by billionaires and politicians to destroy the United States not militaristically but from within. Believers of this conspiracy hold multiple beliefs as to how the United States would be destroyed from within. Some of these beliefs include the gradual subordination of the United States government through the United Nations, the creation of new sinister military and para-military groups, and the implementation of microchips and other technology for mind control and surveillance (Barkun). Once the United States is destroyed, these billionaires and politicians will establish a one-world authoritarian government that will oppress everyone who is not a member of the elite class.

Hypotheses and Methods

H1: People who believe in one conspiracy theory are likelier to believe in another.

H2: People who suffer from feelings of sadness and depression are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories.

H3: People with lower education levels are more likely to believe in conspiracies.

To measure the first hypothesis, this study ran regressions on one dependent variable and multiple independent variables. In this case, the dependent variable is the government concealing what it knows about the New World Order Conspiracy. Testing involved comparing beliefs in the New World Order conspiracy to five other conspiracy theories. The five other conspiracies included the government concealing what it knows about: Q'Anon, the South Dakota Crash (a fake conspiracy), the JFK assassination, mass shootings such as Sandy Hook, and the 9/11 attacks.

The second hypothesis was also measured using regressions. As usual, the dependent variable asked respondents if the government is concealing what it knows about the New World Order. Unlike testing the first hypothesis, testing this hypothesis only required one independent variable. That independent variable asked respondents if they had felt sadness or depression within the last thirty days.

Like the second hypothesis, the third hypothesis only required one independent variable to test. This time, the independent variable asked the respondents what their highest level of schooling or degree they have completed. This study ran regressions of both variables to test the relationship between levels of education and conspiratorial thinking.

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Results

Table 1: Predictors of Belief in the New World Order

	B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	-.267	.087		-3.070	.002
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about... Q'Anon?	.230	.030	.203	7.579	<.001
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about... The South Dakota Crash?	.321	.037	.266	8.682	<.001
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about... The JFK assassination?	.187	.032	.175	5.864	<.001
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about... Mass shootings such as those at Sandy Hook, Las Vegas, and Parkland?	.054	.033	.051	1.629	.104
How many days during the past 30 days would you say... You felt sad, blue, or depressed?	.007	.002	.059	2.796	.005
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about... The 9/11 attacks?	.169	.032	.175	5.328	<.001
What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?	.054	.011	.105	4.727	<.001

Dependent Variable: Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements. The government is concealing what it knows about... The Illuminati/New World Order?

Table 2: Variance of Possible Predictors Covered in Table 1

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.746	.557	.554	.654

Overall Results

The linear regression had an R Square value of .567. Thus, the independent variables accounted for 56.7% of the variance in the dependent variable.

Hypothesis 1

All the conspiracies used to compare to the New World Order conspiracy, except for one, were statistically significant having a value of <.001. The only conspiracy that was not statistically significant was the government hiding mass shootings conspiracy with a value of .104. Out of the five conspiracies compared to beliefs in the New World Order conspiracy, the South Dakota Crash conspiracy had the highest Beta value of .266.

Hypothesis 2

The results from the variable measuring feelings of depression were statistically significant with a significance value of .005. This variable also yielded results of a Beta value of .059.

Hypothesis 3

The education variable had statistical significance with a significance value of <.001. The Beta value measuring this variable came out to be .105.

Conclusions

Hypothesis 1

Not surprisingly, the results from the data support the hypothesis that people who believe in one conspiracy are more likely to believe in another. Out of all the conspiracies measured, the South Dakota Crash had the most impact because it had the highest Beta value out of the five conspiracies measured. Interestingly, the South Dakota Crash is a fake conspiracy, meaning that many respondents were gullible in agreeing to believe in this theory. These results could suggest that there is a certain conspiratorial mindset that conspiracy believers share in common.

Hypothesis 2

Unexpectedly, this regression reveals the influential role that mental health has in spreading conspiracies. People who feel depressed often report feelings of guilt, powerlessness, hostility, and a lack of self-esteem. This may make some people comfortable with conspiracies that minimize their pain and sad feelings. Compared to all the other variables, its impact was more minimal than the other hypotheses.

Hypothesis 3

Education had one of the highest impact values among all the variables measured. This suggests that education plays a critical role in preventing conspiracies. As people gain higher levels of education, they can better discern facts from false ideas.

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