Who Believes in COVID-19 Conspiracies?

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What are Conspiracy Theories?

Attempts to explain the ultimate causes of significant events and complex circumstances as a result of the workings of secret plots by two or more powerful actors.

1. They are fused with everyday lives.
2. They are universal.
3. They are consequential.
COVID-19 Conspiracies
Research Questions:

1. How prevalent are COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs in Canada and the United States?

2. Who believes in COVID-19 conspiracies?
Why do people embrace conspiracy theories?

Conspiracy Beliefs

- Psychological Factors
- Demographic Factors
- Political Factors
COVID-19-Specific Expectations

• Uncertainty, worry, fear, sense of powerlessness and isolation → embrace conspiracies to explain circumstances and regain control, while also projecting these feelings on social out-groups (i.e., Asian communities).

• Historically disadvantaged and low status groups most impacted by pandemic → might believe that dominant groups are conspiring against them.

• Pandemic sparks uncertainty, fear, powerless, etc. for those on the right → motivation on the right to embrace theories → narratives that the virus is a ”hoax”, officials as “working for China”
## Model Specification: Main Predictors

### Demographic Variables
- Sex
- Race
- Education
- Marital Status
- Income
- Employment Status
- Age

### Psychological Variables
- Trust
- Influence
- Life Satisfaction
- Community Connection
- Financial Worry
- Worry Contracting COVID
- Attitudes on Asian Immigration

### Political Variables
- Party Affiliation
- Political Ideology
- Political Ideology (Quadratic)
- Political Knowledge
Dependent Variable: Origin of COVID-19

Q: Every country in the world is currently confronted with the coronavirus, also known as COVID-19. In your opinion, the coronavirus is:

1. A virus that originated in a live-animal market in Wuhan, China, that ended up accidentally getting spread throughout the world.

2. A virus that was created on purpose in a Chinese laboratory to increase China’s economic power.

3. I don’t know which of the options is true.
How Prevalent are COVID-19 Conspiracy Beliefs?
Demographic Predictors

Demographic Results - Conspiracy Belief - Canada

Demographic Results - Conspiracy Belief - USA

Western Social Science
Psychological Predictors

Psychological Factors - Conspiracy Belief - Canada

- Trust: 0.09 **
- Influence: 0.00
- Life Satisfaction: -0.08 **
- Community: 0.05 *
- Financial Worry: 0.08 *
- Asian Immigration: -0.06 *

Psychological Factors - Conspiracy Belief - USA

- Trust: 0.06 *
- Influence: 0.00
- Life Satisfaction: -0.03 **
- Community: 0.04 *
- Financial Worry: 0.01
- Asian Immigration: -0.07 **
Political Predictors

Political Factors - Conspiracy Belief - Canada

- LPC: -0.02
- CPC: 0.07
- NDP: -0.04
- BQ: -0.05
- PK_Score: 0.00

Political Factors - Conspiracy Belief - USA

- Democrat: -0.07
- Republican: 0.05
- PK_Score: 0.00
Political Extremes

Canada

United States

Conspiracy Belief as a Quadratic Function of Ideology

Conspiracy Belief as a Quadratic Function of Ideology
Summary and Future Research

• Conspiracy beliefs are prevalent in both countries, though more so in the United States.

• A mixture of demographic, psychological, and political factors explain COVID-19 conspiracy beliefs, though not the same in each country.

Next steps: Assessing the effect of each “block” of factors, more predictors.