CONSEQUENCES OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES

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ABSTRACT

Although a growing body of studies has explored the antecedents of people's adoption of conspiracy beliefs, the behavioral and attitudinal consequences of conspiracy theories—particularly regarding political engagement and policy stances—have been less explored. Research has looked at conspiracy beliefs, exposure to specific conspiracy theories, conspiracy thinking, and the communication of conspiracy theories as predictor variables. To date, the findings are mixed due to conceptual differences and the selection of predictors with different functions and aspects. I offer new evidence. First, I explore whether conspiracy beliefs translate into political engagement. Having analyzed the 2012 American National Election Study, I find a positive association between conspiracy beliefs and political activities. Second, by manipulating exposure to a nascent conspiracy theory that emerged during the 2016 presidential primary elections, I examine whether exposure to conspiracy theories drives intention to engage in politics. Across two original survey experiments, the results indicate that conspiracy theories may encourage people to get involved in politics. Third, by analyzing data from an original survey, I demonstrate that contemporary conspiracy beliefs substantively affect believers' policy stances and might potentially distort policy debate and policy implementation. Findings suggest that consequences of conspiracy theories are substantial. The acceptance of CTs impacts citizens' support for government actions to address the problems alluded to by such claims, which in turn distort policy debates and affect legislation. At the same time, however, the findings demonstrate that the spread of conspiracy theories is not

uniformly detrimental to society in that conspiracy theories stimulate political

engagement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

Chapter 1. Introduction

Belief in conspiracy theories is widespread and has formed part of politics for a long time. For instance, Goertzel's (1994) survey conducted in 1992 indicated that 69% of Americans believed that an organized conspiracy was responsible for the death of John F. Kennedy, while 55% believed that "Ronald Reagan and George Bush conspired with the Iranians so that the American hostages would not be released until after the 1980 elections" (733). Survey evidence also demonstrates that the public believes in conspiracy theories about recent political events. For instance, 36% stated believing that the George W. Bush administration knew about the 9/11 plot before it happened, while 33% believed that the health-care law passed in 2010 authorized government panels to make end-of-life decisions for people on Medicare (American National Election Studies, 2012). Taken together, these and other examples demonstrate that "far from being an aberrant expression of some political extreme or a product of gross misinformation, a conspiratorial view of politics is a widespread tendency across the entire ideological spectrum" (Oliver and Wood, 2014, 964).

There is a great deal of work that probes the psychological (and ideological) antecedents of conspiracy theory endorsement, but far less that examines the consequences of conspiracy theories. In particular, the linkage between conspiracy theories and political engagement, especially regarding conventional political activities and policy attitudes, has been insufficiently studied in political science. To date, the findings are mixed due to conceptual differences and the selection of predictors with different functions and aspects. Some research finds that conspiracy theories lead to negative inaction causing citizens to disengage from politics (Butler et al. 1995; Jolley

and Douglas 2014a). On the contrary, other research finds evidence that conspiracy theories cause citizens to take action against elites (Imhoff and Bruder 2014). Furthermore, it is puzzling that elites that are out of power oftentimes promote conspiracy theories, especially if they might demobilize their supporters. Moreover, we know little about whether prevalent conspiracy beliefs substantively affect believers' policy stances.

In this dissertation, I theorize about the mobilizing effect of conspiracy theories and I offer new evidence. By focusing on political consequences of conspiracy theories, I aim to contribute to the literature. In chapter 3, I examine whether conspiracy beliefs translate into political engagement. Having analyzed the 2012 American National Election Study, I find a positive association between conspiracy beliefs and political activities. As conspiracy beliefs increase, political engagement increases, even after controlling for resource-based factors that affect political participation. In chapter 4, by manipulating exposure to a nascent conspiracy theory that emerged during the 2016 presidential primary elections, I examine whether exposure to conspiracy theories drives intention to engage in politics. Across two original survey experiments, the results indicate that conspiracy theories may stimulate people to increase involvement. In chapter 5, I explore whether beliefs in conspiracy theories affect policy stances by analyzing data from an original survey. I demonstrate that contemporary conspiracy beliefs substantively shape believers' policy stances and might potentially distort policy debate and policy implementation.

These findings shed light on the substantial consequences of conspiracy theories. Acceptance impacts citizens' support for government actions to address the problems

alluded to by such claims, which in turn distort policy debates and affect legislation. At the same time, however, the findings demonstrate that the spread of conspiracy theories is not uniformly detrimental to society in that conspiracy theories stimulate political engagement. These findings also help to explain why elites within losing political organizations are more likely to spread conspiracy theories: they are a means for mobilizing disenfranchised citizens.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

Terminology

Conspiracy theories are a subset of political misperceptions. Flynn et al. (2017) defined misperceptions "as factual beliefs that are false or contradict the best available evidence in the public domain" (128). Conspiracy theories are distinct from other types of political misperceptions, such as interpretations and rumors, "insofar as they focus on the behavior of powerful people," in that the theory should have powerful people acting secretly and malevolently (Flynn et al. 2017, 129). Scholarly attention to conspiracy theories has been rapidly increasing (Berinsky 2017; Edelson et al. 2017; Einstein and Glick 2015; Flynn et al. 2017; Miller et al. 2016; Nyhan and Reifler 2010; Oliver and Wood 2014; Saunders 2017; Smallpage et al. 2017; Tingley and Wagner (2017); Uscinski and Parent 2014; Uscinski and Olivella 2017).

Zonis and Joseph (1994) proposed a classical definition of a <u>conspiracy</u> by identifying four components: (1) "A number of actors joining together," (2) "in a secret agreement," (3) "to achieve a hidden goal," (4) "which is perceived to be unlawful or malevolent" (448). Most recently, Uscinski and Parent (2014) proposed the concept of conspiracy as "a secret arrangement between two or more actors to usurp political or economic power, violate established rights, hoard vital secrets, or unlawfully alter government institutions" (31).

Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) defined a conspiracy theory as "an effort to explain some event or practice by reference to the machinations of powerful people, who attempt to conceal their role" (205). Uscinski et al. (2016) defined conspiracy theory as "a proposed explanation of events that cites as a main causal factor a small group of persons

(the conspirators) acting in secret for their own benefit, against the common good" (58).

Considering these interchangeable components, at least, there is unanimity among

scholars in defining conspiracy theories. Taken together, I use Uscinski et al.'s (2016)

definition of conspiracy theory as it reflects comprehensive components of political

conspiracy.

Thus, the Uscinski and Parent's (2014) index measurement of conspiratorial

predisposition included narratives like, "Even though we live in a democracy, a few

people will always run things anyway," and "The people who really 'run' the country are

not known to the voters" (79). Similarly, Oliver and Wood's (2014) "conspiracism"

included what they called a *Secret Cabal* as one of its components, which assess how

much respondents agree with the statement, "Much of what happens in the world today is

decided by a small and secretive group of individuals" (959).

The types of conspirators are broad and include scientists, politicians,

governments, industries, the media, foreigners and even paranormal subjects like UFOs

and aliens (e.g., the Roswell UFO incident, Area 51). However, considering that the

prevailing conspiracy theories in the United States are closely related to politics and

policy, they have potential to directly affect peoples' political behavior.

Who Believes Conspiracy Theories and Why?

Researchers have identified psychological factors that predispose individuals to

adopt conspiracy beliefs. For instance, van Prooijen and Jostmann (2013) found that

under conditions of uncertainty, conspiracy beliefs increase. Also, people who believe in

paranormal and supernatural phenomena are more likely to believe conspiracy theories

(Bruder et al. 2013; Oliver and Wood, 2014, 2018). Cichocka et al. (2016) found that the acceptance of conspiracy theories is associated with narcissism. Similarly, other scholars have reported an association between conspiracy beliefs and the need to feel unique (Imhoff and Lamberty, 2017; Lantian et al. 2017). Lower levels of analytical thinking predict conspiracy beliefs (Swami et al. 2014; Ståhl and van Prooijen, 2018), leading to acceptance of conspiracy theories. In extreme cases, scholars have found that conspiracy beliefs are linked to schizotypy (Barron et al. 2014; Bruder et al. 2013; Darwin et al. 2011; Swami et al. 2013; van der Tempel and Alcock, 2015). The need for cognitive closure, which is an aversion to ambiguity and a tendency to desire a firm answer to any question, predicts conspiracy beliefs (Marchlewska et al. 2018; Leman and Cinnirella, 2013). Conspiracy beliefs are associated with feelings of powerlessness (Abalakina-Paap et al. 1999; Pratt 2003; Zarefsky 2014) and anxiety (Grzesiak-Feldman, 2013; Radnitz and Underwood, 2017). Bruder et al. (2013) found an association between conspiracy thinking and low feelings of control in the sociopolitical domain (van Prooijen and Acker 2015; Uscinski and Parent 2014). By this logic, van Prooijen and Acker (2015) found that experimentally strengthening the respondent's sense of control reduces conspiracy beliefs.

In terms of contextual factors, people tend to endorse conspiracy theories when dramatic events such as 9/11 or Kennedy's assassination lack a clear official explanation as to their cause. In terms of socioeconomic status, Uscinski and Parent (2014) found that lower levels of education and income are associated with higher levels of conspiracy thinking (see Goertzel 1994; Oliver and Wood 2014). Similarly, Uscinski and Parent (2014) found an association between area of employment and conspiracy thinking. For

instance, people who work in the financial industry, government, or military are less prone to conspiracy thinking.

In the context of politics, conspiracy beliefs are correlated with alienation from the political system (Abalakina-Paap et al. 1999; Bruder et al. 2013; Goertzel 1994). Uscinski and Parent (2014) argued that when people think their group (e.g., political party) is underprivileged or under threat, conspiracy beliefs increase due to thinking others are conspiring against their group. Einstein and Glick (2015) demonstrated that exposure to government conspiracy theories diminishes trust in government, which in turn leads to higher levels of conspiracy beliefs.

Hofstadter (1964) contended that pervasive conspiratorial explanations are derived from the political right. Galliford and Furnham (2017) and Miller et al. (2016) found evidence that supports Hofstadter's argument. In a similar vein, Bruder et al. (2013) found an association between conspiracy beliefs and right-wing authoritarianism. Van Prooijen et al. (2015) found that conspiracy beliefs are most prevalent at the political extremes. In contrast, Uscinski and Parent (2014) and Uscinski et al. (2016) found that levels of conspiracy thinking are stronger among independents or third-party voters.

In the U.S. context, motivated reasoning has played a significant role in conspiracy beliefs, especially with respect to partisanship and political ideology (Duran et al. 2017; Edelson et al. 2017; Enders et al. 2018; Hartman and Newmark, 2012; Miller et al. 2016; Nyhan 2010; Oliver and Wood 2014; Pasek et al. 2014; Saunders 2017; Uscinski et al. 2016; Uscinski and Parent 2014).

Uscinski and Parent (2014) posited that conspiracy theories are for "losers" and tend to accuse those in power and their coalitions. Similarly, Edelson et al. (2017) found

that electoral losers were more likely than winners to believe in the existence of election fraud. Also, there is some evidence that people endorse conspiracy theories when they lack power or control, or when they are political losers (Douglas et al. 2017). Smallpage et al. (2017) posited that conspiracy beliefs function similar to partisan attitudes such that people endorse conspiracy theories that malign out-partisans to bolster co-partisans.

By analyzing letters to the editor of the New York Times (1890–2010), Uscinski and Parent (2014) found that when a Republican president is in office, the resonant conspiracy theories tend to denigrate Republicans and their coalitions, but, when a Democrat president is in office, the conspiracy theories tend to denigrate Democrats and their coalitions. Put simply, in American politics, political power shifts between two parties, especially with respect to presidential elections. The communication of conspiracy theories is driven by shifts in power (i.e., the party in the White House) and as a means of countermobilizing out-of-power groups (Uscinski and Parent 2014, ch. 6). Thus, Uscinski and Parent (2014) argue that conspiracy theories are part of countermobilization by groups out of political power (i.e., losers).

From the senders' side, as Douglas et al. (2019) put it, "One assumption of the 'loser's' idea is that conspiracy theories communicate information to generate collective action in the face of threat" (13). In the receivers' side, Miller et al. (2016) found that conspiracy theories that impugn the group in power are more likely to be endorsed by an out-of-power group. Therefore, this line of research implies that conspiracy theories can be used as part of a partisan strategy.

What Are the Consequences of Conspiracy Theories?

Extant literature has identified possible consequences of conspiracy theories on political engagement, yet, conceptual differences and the selection of predictors with different functions and aspects (e.g. conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy thinking, exposure to conspiracy theories, and the communication of conspiracy theories) has resulted in many contradictory conclusions. Moreover, although each is concerned with the implications of conspiracy theories, extant literature does not discuss one another in an integrated way.

To date, research has emphasized the ways in which conspiracy theories have detrimental effects on society. Jolley et al. (2018) posited two possible behavioral responses to conspiracy theories: inaction and negative action. The former has been demonstrated by findings that exposure to antivaccine conspiracy theories reduces vaccination intentions (Jolley and Douglas 2014b, 2017), exposure to climate change conspiracy theories reduces willingness to engage in climate-friendly behaviors (Jolley and Douglas 2014a, Van der Linden 2015), and exposure to workplace conspiracy theories leads to higher turnover intentions (Douglas and Leite 2017). Negative action has been demonstrated by findings that exposure to government conspiracy theories increases intentions to engage in everyday crime in the future (Jolley et al. 2018). With this logic, there are few ways for ordinary citizens to play a role in such conspiratorial plots and their aftermaths. Once they encounter such conspiracy theories, people might feel that their individual actions do not count, and this may diminish their desire to engage in political activities such as voting.

There also exists research that emphasizes the ways in which conspiracy theories have beneficial effects on society. As mentioned earlier, Imhoff and Bruder (2014) found

that conspiracy thinking is positively correlated with a changing status quo (induce normative and nonnormative collective actions in the context of a government cover-up regarding a nuclear plant). Conceptually, Franks et al. (2013) contended that conspiracy theories function as prognoses; thus, the communication of conspiracy theories calls for specific actions with regard to the identified culprits (e.g., A conspiracy theory narrating that the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis was caused by the Wall Street lead to the Occupy Movements). When conspirators (perpetrators) are not omnipotent and insurmountable, and when the target is known, people may act to undermine the conspirators' influence. For instance, Imhoff (2015) speculates that when people are exposed to a conspiracy theory saying global warming is hoax, they will be more likely to protest against a UN climate summit because this form of engagement has the potential to undermine the influence of liars.

Finally, there exists research that emphasizes how conspiracy theories may not have effects at all. Franks et al. (2013) speculated on why many conspiracy theories fail to engender action: "there are no sustainable social movements dedicated to revealing the truth about Princess Diana's demise, for example, or to making the purportedly faked moon landings a high-profile public issue" (8). Additionally, conspiracy theories about the death of JFK "fail to relate the diagnosis to a prognosis and motivation–perhaps because no obvious action is relevant" (Franks et al. 2013, 9). Also, Franks et al. (2013) contended that other conspiracy theories may fail to mobilize collective action due to a lack of sufficient resonance–credibility or salience (e.g., White U.S. college students are less likely than Black students to believe in conspiracy theories narrating that the U.S. government is conspiring against Blacks).

Gaps in the Literature

However, the linkage between conspiracy theories and political engagement remains relatively unexplored, and many contradictory conclusions exist. Among previous studies that examine institutionally involved outcome variables, research has looked at conspiracy beliefs, conspiracy thinking, exposure to conspiracy theories, and the communication of conspiracy theories as explanatory variables. However, each of these are conceptually different and are discussed differently in the literature. Thus, findings suggest that conspiracy theories can have both negative and potentially positive consequences on political engagement.

Chapter 3. The Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Political Engagement

Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to explore whether a correlation exists between conspiracy belief and political engagement with a nationally representative sample. Having analyzed the 2012 American National Election Study, I find a positive association between conspiracy beliefs and political activities. As conspiracy beliefs increase, political engagement increases, even after controlling for resource-based factors that affect political participation. These findings shed light on the consequences of conspiracy theories to mobilize citizens. The findings demonstrate that the spread of conspiracy theories is not uniformly detrimental to society.

Theory and Hypotheses

Research focusing on the effects of conspiracy thinking—which is "the generalized attitude that some sinister-minded conspirators determine the fate of the world" (Imhoff 2015, 125)—suggests mixed findings. Although there has not been empirical evidence, as mentioned earlier, Franks et al. (2013) provide insights as to why many conspiracy theories (e.g. the death of Princess Diana, JFK, and faked moon landings) fail to engender action. It is because these conspiracy theories lack sufficient credibility and salience to make people feel desire to reveal the underlying truth about corresponding conspiracies.

H0: Beliefs in conspiracy theories do not affect actual political behaviors.

Imhoff and Bruder (2014) posited that conspiracy thinking motivates people to change the status quo, rather than become lethargic with respect to the elite. Imhoff and Bruder (2014) found that conspiracy thinking is positively associated with political engagement. For instance, in Study 5, in the context of the 2011 Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster, conspiracy mentality predicted respondents' intention to engage individually (e.g., sign an online petition) and their willingness to participate in both normative (e.g., organize a protest or join a demonstration) and nonnormative (e.g., join civil disobedience such as blocking) collective action. With a nationally representative sample, Imhoff (2015) replicated the finding that conspiracy thinking is positively correlated with willingness to take political action.

The message of conspiracy theories is that the government is making "a secret arrangement between a small group of actors to usurp political or economic power, violate established rights, hide vital secrets, or illicitly cause widespread harm" (Uscinski et al. 2016). Once people believe the government is doing nefarious things against them, they might feel urged to counteract and correct the government's misdemeanor. At the very least, they will try to do some feasible things; of course, they cannot directly organize protests, but they can do something that can fix the problem, such as contacting members of Congress. In a similar vein, conspiracy thinking increases intention to take action against elites. For instance, Uscinski and Parent (2014) found that people higher in conspiracy thinking are more likely to accept violence against the government.

HA1: As people's belief in a government conspiracy theory increases, their engagement in political activities will increase.

Other previous studies have shown that belief in conspiracy theories has negative effects on society (e.g., vaccine conspiracy theory—vaccination intention, global warming hoax conspiracy theory—low willingness to reduce one's own carbon footprint). Uscinski and Parent (2014, ch. 4) found that conspiracy thinking decreases intention to participate in politics. With this logic, there are few ways for ordinary citizens to play a role in such conspiratorial schemes and their aftermaths. Thus, exposure to conspiracy theories will trigger citizens' perceptions of their own inefficacy, breeding a sense of distrust toward politics and the government. This may convince citizens of their "political impotence to influence the system by their personal political actions" (Butler et al. 1995, 251). Therefore, the potential effect of political conspiracy theories would be a demobilization of citizens' political participation—discouraging them from voting and taking part in other forms of political engagement. These assumptions lead to my third hypothesis.

HA2: As people's belief in a government conspiracy theory increases, their engagement in political activities will decrease.

Data and Methods

To test the mobilization hypothesis, I analyzed the 2012 American National Election Study (ANES) time-series survey, a random sample of the national U.S. electorate. I explore whether conspiracy beliefs translate into political activities. I expected respondents who strongly endorse government conspiracy theories are more likely to get involved in political activities, implying a positive regression coefficient for the conspiracy beliefs term.

Independent Variables

My main independent variables are four government conspiracy theories assessed by the 2012 ANES: Barack Obama was not born in the U.S. (Birther); the 2010 ACA authorizes death panels (Death Panel); the government intentionally breached flood levees during Hurricane Katrina (Katrina); and the government knew about 9/11 before it happened (Truther). These four conspiracy questions had four response options (see Question Wording in the Appendix for details), which were recoded to range from 0 to 1 so that higher values indicate stronger endorsement. The means and standard deviations of conspiracy beliefs are displayed in Table 3.1 below. This clearly suggests that Republicans are more likely to believe the two conspiracy theories that malign the Obama administration, whereas Democrats are more likely to believe the other two conspiracy theories that impugn the Bush administration. These results buttress the notion that conspiracy theories can be used as part of a partisan strategy to malign out-partisans and bolster co-partisans.

Table 3.1 Means and Standard Deviations of Conspiracy Beliefs

	All		Democrats		Republicans	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Birther	0.25	0.31	0.13	0.24	0.43	0.31
Death Panel	0.39	0.33	0.30	0.33	0.53	0.32
9/11	0.42	0.30	0.44	0.31	0.39	0.30
Katrina	0.25	0.26	0.28	0.28	0.19	0.24

Dependent Variables

My primary dependent variable is an index comprised by seventeen political activities. These are as follows: (1) talk to anyone about voting for or against a candidate

or party; (2) go to any political meetings, rallies, or speeches; (3) wear campaign buttons or post signs or bumper stickers; (4) do any other work for a party or candidate; (5) contribute money to a specific candidate's campaign; (6) contribute money to a political party; (7) contribute to any other group that is for or against a candidate; (8) join a protest march; (9) attend a city council meeting or school board meeting; (10) sign a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue; (11) sign a petition on paper about a political or social issue; (12) give money to social or political organization; (13) call a radio or television program about a political issue; (14) send a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue; (15) write a letter to a newspaper or magazine about a political issue; (16) contact a congress member or senator; (17) vote in the 2012 presidential election. If respondents chose *yes*, the response was coded as 1; otherwise, the response was coded as 0. These seventeen political participation variables were combined into an index (M= 0.19, SD=0.17, α = .79) named political activity.

I controlled for partisan identification and ideology. For party identification, I recoded the standard 7-point measure to range from 0 (strong Democrat) to 1 (strong Republican). I also recoded the standard 7-point measure of ideology with values from 0 (extremely liberal) to 1 (extremely conservative).

I also controlled for political knowledge, political interest, government trust, and efficacy. These are positively correlated with political activities (Brady et al. 1995; Galston 2001; Peterson 1992; Reichert 2016). The political knowledge index was formed by averaging responses to seven questions about politics. Each answer was coded 1 for correct and 0 for incorrect (α = .61). Political interest was coded to range from 0 to 1 with the least interested individuals coded as 0 and the most interested individuals coded as 1.

Government trust and efficacy variables were coded from 0 to 1, so that a higher value indicates individuals who are more trusting of government, and more efficacious.

I also controlled for two mobilization variables (Rosenstone and Hansen, 1993): whether anyone from one of the political parties had called the respondents or come and talked to them about the campaign this year (1 for yes, 0 for no) and whether anyone talked to the respondents about registering to vote or getting out to vote during the campaign this year (1 for yes, 0 for no).

Additionally, I controlled for age, gender, education, and income. To control for age, gender, education, income, and race, corresponding variables were coded from 0 to 1 for continuous variables, and 0 or 1 for nominal variables. Higher values indicate individuals who are older, more educated, and wealthier. Male is a binary variable, coded 1 for male, and 0 otherwise. Race is a binary variable, coded 1 for White respondents and 0 otherwise.

I was agnostic about forms of political participation in the combined scale, it is necessary to examine whether conspiracy beliefs positively predict a specific political activity. Under the circumstances of people believing the government is doing nefarious conspiratorial schemes against citizens, what activities are the most doable among ordinary citizens for deterring such conspiratorial schemes? Voting and persuading voters in an upcoming election are apparent popular responses that do not have excessive costs and burdens. Additionally, a person could maximize his or her influence by donating money to the desired candidates or parties. More actively, people can directly contact members of Congress to inform them of an issue the constituents encountered. In the era of the Internet, people can easily sign up for an online petition.

First, I assessed the associations between conspiracy beliefs and each political activity by running logistic regressions (see Table A3.1 in the Appendix for details). Conspiracy beliefs are positively associated with 13 of the 17 political activities, and this relationship is statistically significant for 8 activities. The results indicate that conspiracy beliefs positively predict engaging in the following 8 of 17 political activities, which are listed from low to high effort: talking to others about voting for or against a candidate or party; signing a petition on the Internet regarding a political or social issue; contacting a congress member or senator; wearing campaign buttons or displaying signs or bumper stickers; joining a protest march; going to political meetings, rallies, or speeches; doing any other work for a party or candidate; and calling a radio or television program about a political issue.

Factor Analysis: What Dimensions of Political Engagement Are Most Relevant for Conspiracy Beliefs?

Findings from Table A3.1 indicate that conspiracy beliefs positively predict engagement in 8 political activities. These findings raise further question about how many meaningful political engagement factors exist. These results, however, do not identify how many meaningful dimensions of political engagement exist. To assess how many dimensions of political activities exist, I first conducted a principal components analysis and then assessed how conspiracy beliefs predict the extracted dimensions of political engagement from the factor analysis results.

I conducted principal components analysis using the R psych package. Figure 3.1 and Table 3.2 present the results of factor analysis. First, the eigenvalues suggest that the number of factors is six. I used an oblique rotating solution using the R GPArotation

package. However, with six factors, some had major loading from only one or two items,

and the results were not interpretable, suggesting an overextraction.

Figure 3.1 Confirmatory Factor Estimators of Political Activities Dimensions

Components Analysis
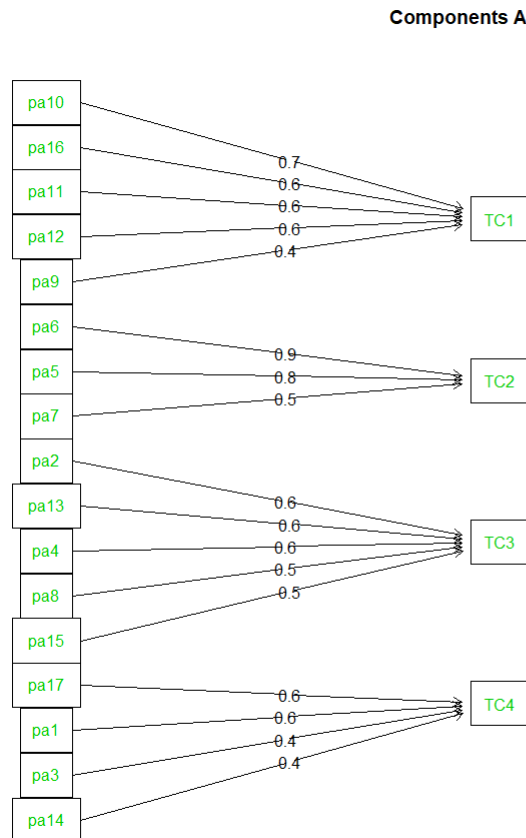
Table 3.2 Confirmatory Factor Estimators of Political Activities Dimensions

Factors	Political Activities	Loadings
Petition Activities	(10) sign internet petition;	0.657
	(16) Contact Congressman or Senator.	0.583
	(11) signed paper petition online;	0.575
	(12) gave money to social/political org;	0.566
	(9) attend a city council meeting or school board meeting	0.356
Monetary Activities	(6) contribute money to political party;	0.856
	(5) contribute money to specific candidate campaign;	0.824
	(7) contribute to any other group for/against a candidate;	0.484
Direct Physical Activities	(2) go to any political meetings, rallies, speeches;	0.590
	(13) called radio/TV about political issue;	0.574
	(4) do any (other) work for party or candidate;	0.568
	(8) joined a protest march;	0.539
	(15) written a letter to newspaper/mag about polit issue;	0.513
Electoral Activities	(17) Vote in 2012 presidential election	0.598
	(1) talk to anyone about voting for or against candidate or party;	0.566
	(3) wear campaign button or post sign or bumper sticker;	0.439
	(14) sent a message on Facebook/Twitter about polit issue;	0.391

Because my primary interest was not identifying the latent variables, I used the principal components analysis to reduce a set of variables to a smaller set of factors. When I ran this with a four-factor solution, it was more interpretable, and the factor structure looked even. Factor1 has five variables loading on it, Factor 2 has three variables loading on it, Factor3 has five variables loading on it, and Factor4 has four variables loading on it. With this result, I derived four factors of political activities, which I called petition activities, monetary activities, direct physical activities, and electoral activities. With these four factors, I ran a regression to explore whether the effects of conspiracy belief differ across these four dimensions.

Regarding petition activities, as Table A3.2 shows, Birtherism is positively correlated with petition activities. However, this is not statistically significant. Belief in death panels is negatively correlated with petition activities, and this is statistically significant at the 95% level. Trutherism is positively correlated with petition activities, but this is not statistically significant. Belief in conspiracy theories related to Hurricane Katrina is positively correlated with petition activities, but this is not statistically significant.

As Table A3.3 shows, all four conspiracy beliefs are positively correlated with monetary activities. However, none of them are statistically significant. Regarding physical activities, as Table A3.4 shows, Birtherism is negatively correlated with direct physical activities, but this is not statistically significant. Belief in death panels is positively correlated with direct physical activities, but this is not statistically significant. Trutherism is positively correlated with direct physical activities, and this is statistically significant at the 95% level. Belief in conspiracy theories related to Hurricane Katrina is

positively correlated with direct physical activities, and this is statistically significant at the 99% level.

Finally, as Table A3.5 shows, Birtherism is positively correlated with electoral activities, and this is statistically significant at the 95% level. Belief in death panels is positively correlated with electoral activities, and this is statistically significant at the 95% level. Trutherism is positively correlated with electoral activities, but this is not statistically significant. Belief in conspiracy theories related to Hurricane Katrina is positively correlated with electoral activities, but this is not statistically significant.

Overall, with the exception that belief in death panels is negatively correlated with petition activities, the direction between conspiracy beliefs and political activities is positive. In summary, four conspiracy beliefs are consistently positively associated with electoral and monetary activities. This suggests that mobilization through conspiracy narratives might have significant effects on electoral politics.

Findings

To make interpreting the magnitudes of the effects easy, I employed standardized regression coefficients so that all of the coefficients range from 0 to 1, by using the QuantPsyc package for R. Thus, any pair of coefficients can be compared to each other to determine which one has a relatively larger impact on the dependent variable.

As the standardized OLS results presented in Table 3.3 show, all else being equal, a 1-SD increase in beliefs in the Birther theory leads to a 0.028-SD increase in political activity, which is statistically significant at the 90% level. A 1-SD increase in beliefs in the death panel theory leads to a 0.003-SD increase in political activity, but this is not

statistically significant at the conventional level. A 1-*SD* increase in beliefs in the Truther

conspiracy leads to a 0.028-*SD* increase in political activities, which is statistically

significant at the 95% level. A 1-*SD* increase in beliefs in the Katrina conspiracy leads to

a 0.029-*SD* increase in political activities, which is statistically significant at the 95%

level.

Table 3.3 Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Political Activities Index

	Dependent variable:			
	Political Activities Index			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Birther	0.028[*]			
	(0.015)			
Death Panel		0.003		
		(0.015)		
Truther			0.028[**]	
			(0.014)	
Katrina				0.029[**]
				(0.014)
Constant	0.011	0.009	0.010	0.008
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Observations	4,319	4,176	4,356	4,329
R^2	0.309	0.307	0.309	0.310

Note: Models control for partisan identification, ideology, political knowledge, political
interest, contacted by a party, get out the vote, government trust, efficacy, age, gender,
education, income, and race. (see Table A3.6 in the Appendix for details)
[*]$p<0.10$; [**]$p<0.05$; [***]$p<0.01$

Compared to resource-based predictors of political participation, beliefs in Birther

have one-third of the effects of education. Beliefs in Truther have one-quarter of the

effects of education, while beliefs in Katrina have one-quarter of the effects of education.

Compared to income, beliefs in Birther, Truther, and Katrina have about one-half the size of the effect of income on participation. Overall, the mobilizing effects of conspiracy theories range from one-quarter to one-sixth that of traditional forms of mobilization efforts (get out the vote, contacted by a party). Gerber and Green's (2017) meta-analysis of direct mail experiments in the United States (1998–2014) suggested the estimated effect of mobilization to be 0.759 percentage points. Considering this is all candidates and parties do to boost the vote share in elections, the impact of beliefs in conspiracy theories is not inconsiderable.

Considering the 2012 ANES survey was conducted during the Obama presidency, it is not surprising that beliefs in two conspiracy theories that directly implicated Obama positively predicted political activities. However, the results also indicate that beliefs in conspiracy theories that implicated former President Bush positively predict political activities. This implies that beliefs in specific conspiracy theories might drive citizens' political activities if culpable perpetrators are discernable.

In contrast with commonly held stereotypes that conspiracy theorists wear tin foil hats and live in basements, beliefs in conspiracy theories are positively correlated with conventional forms of political engagement, involving signing Internet petitions; contacting congress members or senators; contributing to any other group for or against a candidate; going to any political meetings, rallies, or speeches; calling radio or television programs about political issues; doing any other work for a party or candidate; joining a protest march; talking to anyone about voting for or against a candidate or party; and wearing campaign buttons or posting signs or bumper stickers.

In summary, I found a positive association between conspiracy beliefs and political activity. Beliefs in Birtherism, in Trutherism, and in a conspiracy theory that the federal government intentionally breached flood levees during Hurricane Katrina positively predict political activities.

Discussion

My study using the 2012 ANES, which assessed Americans' beliefs in four government conspiracy theories, demonstrates that beliefs are associated with actions. If conspiracy theories insinuate that an audience is a target of conspiracies but then imply that the conspiracies are not overwhelming, and if the culpable elites are identifiable with reference to their institution (e.g., the president), then that audience may think that they can play a role in countering nefarious plots through conventional political activities, by contacting members of Congress, talking to friends about voting for or against a candidate or party, or carrying out some other actions. My findings are in line with those of Imhoff and Bruder (2014), Imhoff (2015), and Jolley et al. (2018), suggesting that conspiracy theories may induce action rather than inaction. However, my findings suggest that citizens may engage in politics through conventional activities.

The current study mainly discusses partisan conspiracy theories that frame losers/winners and victims/perpetrators. Thus, less partisan or nonpartisan conspiracy theories may not have a mobilizing effect, considering Smallpage et al.'s (2017) argument that conspiracy theories play a role as "calling cards that send clear signals to co-partisans" (1).

As I did not find a clean split by partisan identification (see Tables A3.2–A3.6 in the Appendix for details), this implies regardless of whether conspiracy theories explicitly implicate the presidency, beliefs in government conspiracy theories are positively correlated with political activities. This indicates that beliefs in government conspiracy theories may drive citizens' political activities as long as conspiracy theories implicate the federal government. However, it is worth noting that the wording of the 2012 ANES question on conspiracy beliefs is not completely parallel as two conspiracy theories implicating the Obama presidency explicitly mention the word "Obama," whereas two old conspiracy theories implicating the Bush presidency do not explicitly mention the word "Bush."

In summary, my findings reveal that conspiracy beliefs translate into political activities, and this suggests a potentially optimistic role of conspiracy beliefs. In a later chapter, I will explore whether this increased political participation is undermined by being associated with misperceptions. First, conspiracy beliefs are positively associated with the index of 17 conventional political activities (Table 3.3). Second, conspiracy beliefs positively predict the probability of conducting 8 common political activities among the 17 activities that do not accrue a lot of costs and efforts (Table A3.1). The results, however, indicate that voting is not statistically significant as an individual item. Third, results from a factor analysis suggest that four dimensions of political engagement exist, namely petitionary, monetary, direct physical, and electoral engagement. Four conspiracy beliefs are consistently positively associated with electoral and monetary activities. This suggests that mobilization through conspiracy narratives might have significant effects on electoral politics.

Based on these results, in Chapter 4's experimental studies I mainly focus on voting; persuading; wearing a campaign sticker; contributing money to a candidate; volunteering to work for a candidate; posting a political message on Facebook or Twitter; contacting a member of Congress; joining a protest march, rally, or demonstration; and signing an online petition about a political or social issue.

Chapter 4. How Conspiracy Theories Can Mobilize the Electorate

Introduction

In this study, I aim to offer new evidence of the behavioral consequences of conspiracy theories that are particularly relevant to electoral politics, a topic on which previous studies have not focused. By employing two experimental studies manipulating a nascent voter-suppression conspiracy theory that emerged during the 2016 presidential primary elections, I explore whether exposure to a conspiracy theory drives intention to participate in politics. Across two experimental studies, I explore the impact of exposure to a nascent voter suppression conspiracy theory that was raised during the 2016 presidential primary elections. Contrary to the demobilizing hypothesis, both experiments show that exposure to a conspiracy theory involving voter suppression increases respondents' intention to engage in politics. The findings imply that exposure to contemporary conspiracy theories can have a mobilizing effect but can also mean that the mobilized people will be less informed. This signifies that exposure to a conspiracy theory derived from a contemporaneous event that directly affects citizens' lives promotes people's desire to act.

Theory and Hypotheses

Previous research has suggested that exposure to specific conspiracy theories discourages people from getting involved in politics when institutions were involved in the alleged conspiracy. Einstein and Glick (2015) found that exposure to a conspiracy theory that the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) has manipulated unemployment data

decreased trust in government. Butler et al. (1995) suggested that subjects who watched the film "JFK", which addresses conspiracy theories behind the assassination of President Kennedy, reported significantly decreased intentions to vote and make political donations. However, it should be noted that participants self-selected to watch the film JFK. Thus, some caution regarding the conclusions is necessary. Additionally, the study used a pre–post design, in which examines interviews of different participants entering the movie theater versus those exiting it.

Jolley and Douglas (2014a) found evidence that exposure to conspiracy theories regarding the British government's involvement in the death of Princess Diana and the 7/7 London terrorist attacks, along with the U.S. government's involvement in the 9/11 attacks on the Twin Towers, reduced participants' intentions to engage in politics. This may be because conspiracy theories posit that significant political events are orchestrated by a small group of powerful individuals, implying that ordinary citizens do not have any influence on such events. Thus, the conclusions drawn from these studies suggest that the potential effects of political conspiracy theories discourage citizens from taking part in political activities.

As Butler et al. (1995) put it, "Oliver Stone's JFK presents a cynical, if not overwhelming, vision of a degree of governmental corruption and intrigue that even the president of the United States could not combat" (252). If the nature of conspiracy is almighty and insurmountable, such conspiracy theories are less likely to lead to an effective behavior response. Similarly, the conspiracy theory behind the death of Princess Diana is less likely to signal collective action because the conspiracy's victim was privileged but could not combat against it. According to this logic, conspiracy theories

could fuel citizens' feelings of political powerlessness (Jolley and Douglas 2014a), making them less likely to participate in political activities. This leads to the inaction (demobilizing) hypothesis.

H0: Conspiracy theories have a negative effect on political participation.

However, I contend that contradictory findings result from conceptual differences and the selection of predictors with differing functions and aspects. To better understand the consequences of conspiracy theories, I theorize that specific conspiracy theories may stimulate specific political actions as instrumental to undermine the specific conspiracies when such conspiracy theories signal that audiences are the victims of the conspiracies, that such conspiracies are not insurmountable, and that culpable elites are identifiable with regard to their institution.

Although little is known about why elites promote conspiracy theories or how elites exploit them for political purposes, a rationale for promoting conspiracy theories can be identified that builds on the work of Uscinski and Parent (2014). If conspiracy theories lead to nonnormative political action against elites or demobilize citizens from turning out to vote in favor, why would American political elites promote them? Put another way, why would elites who are out of power (Sarah Palin) say that the Affordable Care Act has death panels, rather than say that it significantly increases health-care costs? Why does a candidate from a party that is out of power (Trump) and a seemingly non-viable candidate (Sanders) say the "election is rigged against me," rather than say that the polls show that the party is going to lose the upcoming election? More importantly, how might the impacts of such conspiracy claims be estimated?

Derived from evidence suggesting conspiracy theories may stimulate people to act, although in a nonnormative way (Imhoff 2015; Imhoff and Bruder 2014; Jolley et al. 2018; Uscinski and Parent 2014), I hypothesize that positive effects of conspiracy theories exist. Rather than making people uniformly lethargic, differences in the nature of conspiracies can lead to different popular responses. I contend that conspiracy theories can mobilize conventional forms of political activities if the conspiracy theory identifies an audience that is the target of the conspiracy, if it identifies culpable institutional perpetrators (e.g., the president, a legislative body), and if the conspiracy are not insurmountable, such that they can be overcome with specific political actions. Many nascent conspiracy theories have impugned Donald Trump's legitimacy, such as the allegation that Trump colluded with Russia during the 2016 presidential campaign. Similar types of conspiracy theories—the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) lying about Ebola, the federal government intentionally breaching the flood levees in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina to save middle-class neighborhoods, and so forth—are expected to lead to positive action.

Similarly, if people encounter conspiracy theories narrating a deliberate government cover-up or a shady event that directly target an audience and thus makes them victims, then citizens may think they need to influence undesirable conspiratorial outcomes by actively engaging in politics through conventional political activities, thereby changing the political outcome. These assumptions lead to the positive action (mobilizing) hypothesis.

HA: Conspiracy theories has a positive effect on political participation

Data and Methods

To test these two competing hypotheses, I analyzed two sets of data: an original survey carried out on Amazon.com's Mechanical Turk, and an original survey carried out on a student sample from a large public university in the southern United States.

My primary goal was to evaluate the causal effects of exposure to conspiracy theories on political participation. Following Jolley and Douglas's (2014a, b) paradigm, the independent variable was whether respondents were exposed to a conspiracy theory, and the dependent variable was their intention to engage in politics. In two experiments, both the control and treatment groups were presented with one of two versions of an article describing a recent political event. Both articles described the same event but included different explanations as to the causes of the event.

While neither sample is nationally representative, Druckman and Kam (2011) argue that external validity should be regarded as to "whether 'conceptually equivalent' (Anderson and Bushman 1997) relationships can be detected across people, places, times, and operationalizations" (43). As Shadish et al. (2002) argue, making inferences based on a narrow sample of the population could lead to either overestimation or underestimation of the findings drawn from experiments. In this regard, the use of two very different samples bolsters the external validity of the findings. The MTurk sample is more diverse than typical convenience samples (e.g., Berinsky et al. 2012) and, with some exceptions, researchers have defended credible and generalizable inferences using MTurk surveys (Berinsky et al. 2012; Clifford et al. 2015; Mullinix et al. 2015). Potential drawbacks include the possibility of nonnaïveté and cross talk (Chandler et al. 2014; Krupnikov and Levine 2014). The student sample, on the other hand, is limited by lack of diversity in

age, education, and geographical location. However, the student respondents are not

professional survey takers, minimizing concerns about non-naiveté. Thus, the differences

between these two samples help establish the external validity of my findings.

Study 1

Description of Study and Measures

The MTurk sample consists of 607 U.S. adults recruited June 16-17, 2016.

Participants were paid $0.30 for completing the survey task. Prior to exposure to the

stimulus, respondents were asked about their political and campaign interests and

whether they were registered voters. The respondents were randomly assigned to either a

control group or a treatment group. After being exposed to the stimulus, the subjects were

asked how likely they would be to adopt seven forms of political activities in the

forthcoming November 2016 presidential election. After that, the respondents completed

a manipulation check that assessed whether the manipulation was successful, and they

completed an attention check that assessed whether they paid enough attention to the

experimental stimuli. The details of the survey experiment procedures are stated below.

Experimental Stimuli

The context of the explanatory variable is a nascent conspiracy theory raised

during the 2016 presidential primary election in Arizona. The recent Arizona electoral

conspiracy theory offers an ideal opportunity to explore the effect of exposure to

conspiracy theories on people's political engagement in conjunction with a particular

type of conspiracy theory. According to the media, the long lines at Arizona polling sites

during the 2016 primaries were the result of indirect and intentional voter suppression by

state government officials[1]. Voters in Arizona had recently accused the state of suppressing turnout after the number of available polling places was cut by 70%, which caused massive lines on Election Day. Similarly, the state of Rhode Island closed 66% of its polling places to cut election costs, but no conspiracy theories have been alleged[2].

To manipulate exposure to the conspiracy theories, I presented one of two articles to the subjects. Right before the stimulus, the respondents were told, "Before we ask some questions regarding voting, we want you to read a news article about others' experiences voting on Super Tuesday." The control group read an article describing long lines in polling places that recently occurred as a result of election cost-cutting measures (full text shown in the Appendix). The treatment group read a very similar news article that asserted that the long lines were due to state government officials' suppressing voter turnout (full text shown in the Appendix). Both conditions explained that everyone experienced difficulty in voting, noting that people waited until 10 p.m. due to the massive reduction of polling places. One woman complained that she had to wait nearly three hours to cast her ballot. However, the articles differed in their explanations: budget-cutting measures or a conspiratorial plot by the state government. The term "conspiracy theory" was not used at all to ensure that the manipulation was as neutral as possible. Since the primary interest is to assess the effect of exposure to conspiracy, not the effect of the difficulty of voting per se, I did not include a pure control group.

In addition, because my experimental stimuli held all other conditions constant and only differed in my explanations about the causes of long lines. Had I included a pure

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[1] Christie and Van Velzer (2016); Vicens (2016).

[2] Edwards (2016).

control group condition that presented the stimuli without providing the event's cause, it would only help distinguish whether the political event of long lines at polling places itself resulted in actions or the conspiracy theory triggered such actions. Thus, a pure control condition is unnecessary in this study.

Dependent Variables

To assess respondents' intentions to engage in politics, I adapted political activities questions from the 2012 ANES by rephrasing them in the future tense. The questions asked about the likelihood of performing each of the seven political activities within the next six months, which encompasses the time leading up to the 2016 presidential election. These activities are as follows: (1) vote in the presidential election, (2) persuade a friend to vote, (3) wear a campaign sticker, (4) contribute money to a candidate, (5) volunteer to work for a candidate, (6) post a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue, and (7) try to contact a member of Congress. Responses to these seven political activities were measured on a 5-point scale (0 = *extremely unlikely*, 4 = *extremely likely*). The political participation variables were combined into an index (α =.82).

Manipulation Check

Right after the dependent variable measures, the manipulation check assessed whether participants' judgments as to why long lines occurred differed between the groups. The question was worded as follows: "Based on the article you have just read, why do you think there were long lines in polling places?" The response options were "Because state governments' budgets were not sufficient to accommodate an adequate number of polling places" and "Because state government officials intentionally slashed

the number of polling places to suppress the number of voters." Following this question, I included three questions asking about details from the reading as an attention check.

Covariates

Covariates are conventional demographics including age, race, gender, income, education, party identification, and ideology. Additionally, the respondents answered a set of political knowledge questions.

Randomization Check

If randomization was successful, then there should have been no difference between the control and treatment groups regarding their political and campaign interest and whether they were registered voters. This allowed me to confirm the randomization check and assess the effect of pretreatment variables on political engagement.

There was no significant difference between the control group (M = 0.65, SD = 0.26) and the treatment group (M = 0.68, SD = 0.27) in terms of interest in politics, which is an index of both campaign and political interest (t = -1.10, p =.27). Additionally, there was no significant difference between the control group and the treatment group in terms of voter registration status ($\chi^2(1)$ =0.72, p=.39). This result confirmed that the randomization was successful.

Findings

Manipulation Check

Regarding the cause (budget cuts vs. state government conspiracy) of the long lines reported in the articles, only 24% of the control group attributed the long lines to a state government conspiracy, whereas 67% of the treatment group attributed the long

lines to the conspiracy. Therefore, the manipulation was successful. Furthermore,

regarding the three attention-check questions, 71% of respondents correctly recalled the

name of the person who had to wait in line for nearly three hours to vote, 93% of

respondents correctly recalled the name of the county mentioned in the news article, and

95% of respondents complied with the direction to "Select 'very likely' to show you are

paying attention." Thus, these responses indicate that the respondents paid close attention

while taking the survey.

According to the null hypothesis (H0), respondents in the treatment group should

be less likely than those in the control group to intend to engage in politics. Contrarily,

according to the alternative hypothesis (HA), respondents in the treatment group should

be more likely than those in the control group to intend to engage in politics. The results

show that respondents in the treatment group indicated greater intention to participate in

politics (M = 1.68, SD = 0.85) than those in the control group (M = 1.48, SD = 0.86), and

this difference was statistically significant ($t = -2.80, p < .05$). The results based on the

individual item analyses are constant: Across seven items, the respondents in the

treatment group indicated greater intention to engage in respective activity than the

control group and, thus, the ATE is not driven by responses on any particular item (see

Table A4.1 in the Appendix for details).

Therefore, the results support the alternative hypothesis predicting the mobilizing

effect of conspiracy theories. To test the robustness of this effect, I conducted an

additional test while controlling for pretreatment measures of political engagement. As

column 2 in Table 4.1 shows, the effect of the treatment (i.e., conspiracy) is statistically

significant at the 95% level after controlling for pretreatment variables of political

interest and voter registration status.

Table 4.1 Effect of Exposure to Conspiracy Theory (Study 1)

	Dependent Variable: Political Participation				
	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2	(3) Model 2-a Democrats Only	(4) Model 2-b Republicans Only	(5) Model 3 Interaction
Treatment (Conspiracy)	0.193** (0.069)	0.147* (0.059)	0.179* (0.076)	0.249* (0.108)	0.139* (0.061)
Registered to Vote	-	0.580*** (0.093)	0.414** (0.128)	0.643** (0.201)	0.577*** (0.092)
Political Interest	-	1.349*** (0.115)	1.574*** (0.154)	0.824*** (0.210)	1.334*** (0.114)
PID	-	-	-	-	-0.066*** (0.020)
Treatment*PID	-	-	-	-	0.015 (0.028)
Constant	1.483*** (0.049)	0.100 (0.103)	0.181 (0.138)	0.262 (0.214)	0.080 (0.102)
Observations	607	607	359	186	607
R^2	0.013	0.286	0.305	0.195	0.306

Note: *$p<0.05$; **$p<0.01$; ***$p<0.001$, party identification is coded to range from -3 to 3

In the current study, I did not include a partisan cue—whether the perpetrator is

Democratic or Republican—in the experimental stimuli because my primary interest was

not assessing the partisan differences of reaction to exposure to conspiracy theories.

Studies have shown that voter suppression, such as restrictive voter identification laws,

target Democrats and have been implemented in states with Republican legislative majorities and Republican governors (Biggers and Hanmer 2017). Voter suppression, especially a stringent voter identification law, is alleged to cause disenfranchisement among Democrats because it builds obstacles for racial minorities (Hershey 2009; Sobel and Smith 2009). In a similar vein, Valentino and Neuner (2017) hypothesized that Democrats may "believe the laws are really just an unfair attempt to disenfranchise their group" (334). In this regard, despite the absence of party cue, the large proportion of Democrats might have indicated greater intention to engage in politics than Republicans if they believe that slashing the number of polling places targeted them. To rule out this possibility, I assessed if subjects were reading partisan cues into the treatment and, thus, led to heterogeneous effects. I performed a subsample analysis across Democrats and Republicans.

Among respondents who identified themselves as Democrats, subjects in the treatment group indicated more intention to participate in politics (M = 1.79, SD = 0.80) than those in the control group (M = 1.61, SD = 0.90), and this difference was statistically significant ($t = -2.03$, $p < .05$). Similarly, among respondents who identified themselves as Republicans, subjects in the treatment group indicated more intention to participate in politics (M = 1.74, SD = 0.84) than those in the control group (M = 1.37, SD = 0.72), and this difference was statistically significant ($t = -3.16$, $p < .05$). Thus, exposure to the conspiracy caused a mobilization effect among both Democratic and Republican respondents. I ran OLS models for the robustness check, controlling for the two pretreatment variables across the Democrat and Republican identifiers. As columns 3

and 4 in Table 2 show, after controlling for the pretreatment variables, the treatment

effect is similar across party affiliation.

Further, I ran a model to assess whether the treatment effects vary by party

identification. As column 5 in Table 4.1 show, in study 1, the interaction between the

treatment effects and party identification is small and not statistically significant, thereby

indicating that there were no heterogeneous treatment effects across party identifications.

In summary, the results drawn from study 1 support the mobilizing hypothesis.

Study 2

Description of Study and Measures

To bolster the generalizability of the mobilizing effect found in study 1 and to

explore the causal mechanism of the mobilization effect, I designed and conducted a

second experiment with a student sample. To assess the causal mechanism of the

mobilization effect, in study 2 I examined whether a potential mediator variable related to

emotions might play a role in exposure to an electoral conspiracy theory as presented in

this study. Recent research has suggested that emotions play a significant role in political

participation (Brader 2006; Marcus et al. 2000; Valentino et al. 2008; Valentino et al.

2011). Valentino and Neuner (2017) found evidence that voter suppression triggers anger

and leads to a mobilizing effect to counterbalance the sense of disenfranchisement. In this

regard, my conjecture was that anger plays a role in increasing participation after

exposure to a voter suppression conspiracy theory. Accordingly, the second study

incorporated potential political and psychological mechanisms that implicate emotional

reactions in response to political conspiracy theories. Thus, to assess the effect of anger,

related political activities such as protest marches, rallies, or demonstrations, which are somewhat radical and extreme forms of participation but normative collective action, were examined.

I recruited approximately 900 students from the University of Houston , and my analysis focuses on the 737 respondents who identified themselves as eligible voters. With the screening question, the respondents who identified that they were not eligible voters completed an alternative task. The participants received extra credit in exchange for completing the survey task. The survey was launched on October 25 and was completed on November 7.

All materials and procedures are the same as study 1, except that the second study includes a potential mediator: anger. The mediator variable was measured right after the dependent variable. Respondents were told, "Think about the long lines in the article you just read. To what extent did you feel each of the following emotions?" The emotional variables were: (1) Angry and (2) Mad. Responses to this emotion were measured on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *an extreme amount*). The anger measurements were combined into an index (α =.88). I also added two additional political engagement variables that might be related to anger. In addition to the seven activities used in study 1, the two political activities were as follows: (1) Join in a protest march, rally, or demonstration; and (2) Sign a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue. Thus, these nine political participation variables were combined into an index (α =.80).

Randomization Check

Similar to study 1, there was no significant difference between the control group (M = 0.56, SD = 0.25) and the treatment group (M = 0.58, SD = 0.24) in terms of pre-

treatment interest in politics ($t = -0.89$, $p = .37$). Also, there was no significant difference between the control group and the treatment group in terms of pre-treatment voter registration status ($\chi^2(1) = 3.30$, $p = .07$). These results suggest that the randomization was successful.

Findings

Manipulation Check

Concerning the cause of the long lines reported in the articles (budget cuts vs. state government conspiracy), 36% of the control group attributed the long lines to the state government conspiracy, and 59% of the treatment group attributed the long lines to government officials' conspiracy scheme rather than the budget cuts. Therefore, the manipulation was successful. Regarding the two attention-check questions, 64% of the respondents correctly recalled the name of the person who had to wait in line for nearly three hours to vote, and 73% of the respondents correctly recalled the name of the county mentioned in the news article. Thus, these findings indicate that the respondents paid close enough attention in taking the survey, although they scored lower than their MTurk counterparts.

group.

Study 2 replicates the findings from study 1: Participants in the treatment group indicated greater intention to engage in politics (M = 1.42, SD = 0.70) than those in the control group (M = 1.28, SD = 0.68), and this difference was statistically significant ($t = -2.72$, $p < .05$). Similar to Study 1, the results based on the individual item analyses are constant: Across nine items, the respondents in the treatment group indicated greater

intention to engage in respective activity than the control group. This indicates that the ATE is not driven by responses on any particular item (see Table A4.2 in the Appendix for details). Again, the results support the mobilization hypothesis. Further, I did a follow-up analysis that added pretreatment variables as control variables to assess whether the treatment effect was robust.

Table 4.2 Effect of Exposure to Conspiracy Theory (Study 2)

	Dependent Variable: Political Participation				
	(1) Model 1	(2) Model 2	(3) Model 2-a Democrats Only	(4) Model 2-b Republicans Only	(5) Model 3 Interaction
Treatment (Conspiracy)	0.138** (0.051)	0.097* (0.044)	0.095 † (0.052)	0.237** (0.091)	0.110* (0.048)
Registered to Vote	-	0.430*** (0.058)	0.516*** (0.069)	0.379** (0.123)	0.426*** (0.058)
Political Interest	-	1.053*** (0.093)	1.116*** (0.115)	0.889*** (0.183)	1.042*** (0.093)
PID	-	-	-	-	-0.046** (0.016)
Treatment*PID	-	-	-	-	0.015 (0.024)
Constant	1.282*** (0.036)	0.355*** (0.068)	0.303*** (0.084)	0.351** (0.130)	0.325*** (0.068)
Observations	737	737	492	181	737
R^2	0.010	0.251	0.287	0.256	0.263

Note: †p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***<0.001, party identification is coded to range from -3 to 3.

As column 2 in Table 4.2 shows, the effect of the treatment (i.e., conspiracy) is statistically significant at the 95% level after controlling for the pretreatment variables of political interest and voter registration status. Also, I did a subsample analysis across Democrats and Republicans. Similar to study 1, among respondents who identified themselves as Democrats, subjects in the treatment group indicated a greater intention to participate in politics (M = 1.47, SD = 0.69) than those in the control group (M = 1.35, SD = 0.66), and this difference was statistically significant ($t = -1.94, p = .05$) at the 90% level. Again, among respondents who identified themselves as Republicans, subjects in the treatment group indicated greater intention to participate in politics (M = 1.45, SD = 0.66) than those in the control group (M = 1.12, SD = 0.69), and this difference was statistically significant ($t = -3.26, p < .05$).

For the robustness check, I ran the same OLS model that was used in study 1, controlling for two pretreatment variables with two subsamples. As columns 3 and 4 in Table 4.2 show, the treatment effect is similar across party affiliation. Additionally, I ran a model to assess whether the treatment effects vary by party identification. Similar to Study 1, the interaction between the treatment effects and party identification is small and not statistically significant, suggesting there were no heterogeneous treatment effects across party identifications.

In short, study 2 successfully replicated the average treatment effects that were found in study 1 by using the same design.

Figure 4.1 Effect of Exposure to Conspiracy Theory (Study 1 and 2)
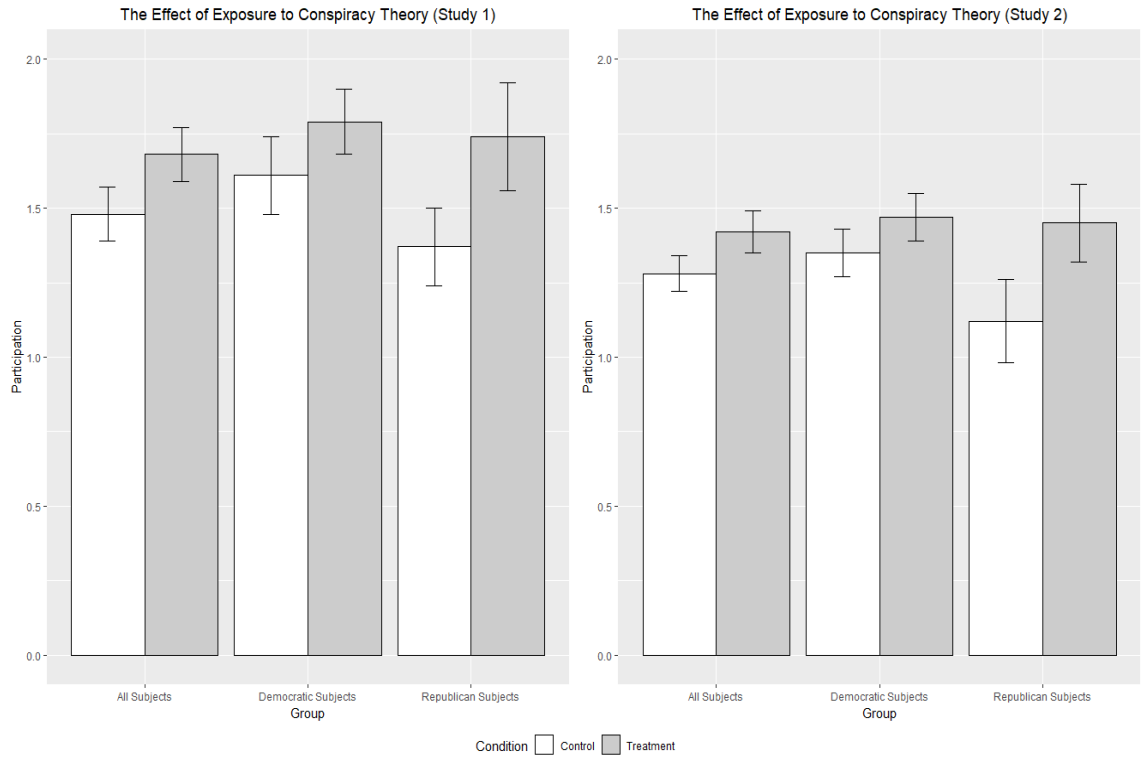
Column height represents the mean levels of intention to engage in politics by party identification. Bars represent 95% intervals. The results are based on models 2, 2-a, and 2-b in Tables 4.1 and 4.2.

Findings from experimental studies 1 and 2 suggest that mere exposure to conspiracy theories leads to a behavioral intention to participate in politics. In studies 1 and 2, it also appears that the positive effect of exposure to conspiracy theories is robust across partisan groups. This implies that if people encounter a voter-suppression conspiracy theory in the absence of a party cue, no behavioral difference exists in how people will react to the implications of their disenfranchisement. However, this raises a question about how people interpret and react to the exposed conspiracy theory. In particular, does accepting conspiracy theories and emotions like anger act as a stepping stone that connects exposure to conspiracy theories and behavioral intention?

Unpacking the Mobilizing Effect: Does Acceptance of Conspiracy Theories and Anger Act as a Mediator?

To understand what mechanism might drive this mobilizing effect, I conducted mediation analyses to identify potential mediating variables that might show how people interpret and react to prevalent conspiracy theories. I propose two potential mechanisms: the role of anger and the role of belief. To tease out a causal mechanism, I ran a series of mediation analyses. To do so, I used the R mediation package, version 4.4.5 (2015), for causal mediation analysis provided by Tingley et al. (2015). The mediation package estimates average causal mediation effect (ACME) and average direct effect (ADE). Total effect is the sum of ACME and ADE. The mediation package also estimates the proportion of the causal effect of the treatment that is mediated by the mediator (Prop. Mediated), and this is calculated as ACME divided by the total effect. Thus, the total effect is an estimated average change in the dependent variable, due to the treatment effect. ACME is the estimated average change in the dependent variable that is caused by the mediator rather than directly from the treatment. That said, an estimated ACME is the consequence of mediator change caused by the treatment effect. On the other hand, ADE is the remaining estimated average change caused by the treatment effect that does not depend on the mediator.

First, I began by exploring whether anger mediated the treatment effect in study 2. If anger plays a role, then exposure to conspiracy theories should increase the respondents' feelings of anger, which in turn increase their needs to participate in politics. To begin, there was no significant difference between the control group ($M = 0.397$, $SD = 0.263$) and the treatment group ($M = 0.405$, $SD = 0.263$) in the mean levels of anger, which is an index of both angry and mad ($t = -0.39$, $p = .69$). As the results in

Table A6 show, anger mediates the effect of the treatment on political participation in a positive direction. However, as the value of ACME (0.004) indicates, this effect is substantively small and is not statistically significant at the 95% level. Conversely, the average direct effect is statistically significant at the 95% level. The analysis indicates the non-significant effect of anger as a mediator; figure 4.2 illustrates this null effect on mediation. The results, therefore, suggest that anger did not play a role as a mediator in study 2.

Table 4.3 Anger as Mediator (Study 2)[3]

Causal Mediation Analysis: Quasi-Bayesian Confidence Intervals

Anger	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME	0.00412	-0.01377	0.02111	**0.64**
ADE	0.09343	0.01338	0.17919	0.03
Total Effect	0.09755	0.00657	0.18713	0.03
Prop.Mediated	0.04123	-0.40776	0.36003	0.65

Simulations: 500
Sample Size Used 737

Figure 4.2 Mediation by Anger (Study 2)
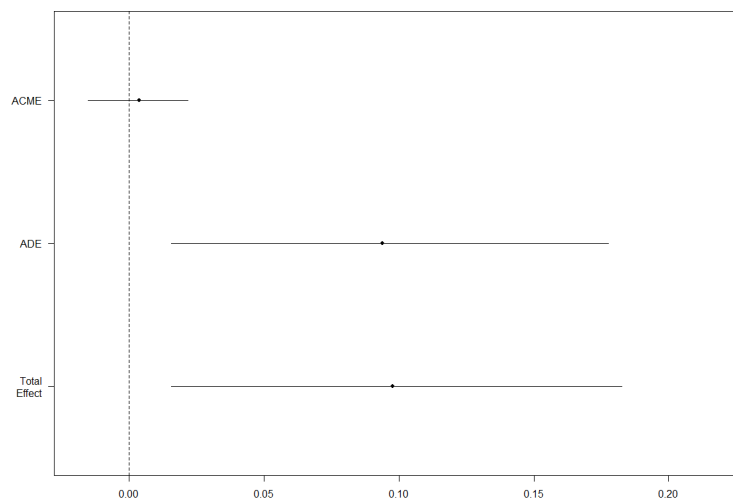
The point estimates, with 95% confidence intervals for the average causal mediation effect (ACME), average direct effect (ADE), and total effect.

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[3] The model controls for the pretreatment variables: voter registration status and political interest.

Moving on to belief, I assessed whether acceptance mediates the treatment effect.

Recall that in both study 1 and study 2, my manipulation check question was a measure

of the acceptance of the presented conspiracy theory. In study 1, as Table 4.4 shows

below, acceptance mediates the effect of treatment on political participation in a positive

direction. The value of ACME is .081 and is statistically significant at the 95% level, but

the average direct effect is not statistically significant. The result also indicates that

acceptance mediates about 53% of the treatment effects. Figure 4.3 illustrates this

mediation effect. The analysis, therefore, clearly demonstrates the significance of

acceptance as a potential mediator: exposure to the conspiracy theory increased

acceptance, which in turn increased intention to get involved in politics. Additionally,

Table 4.5 echoes the mediation effect of acceptance of conspiracy theories on

participation. As Table 4.5 shows, when the potential mediator variable (i.e., acceptance)

is included in the model, the coefficient of treatment is no longer statistically significant.

Table 4.4 Acceptance of Conspiracy as a Mediator (Study 1)[4]

Causal Mediation Analysis: Quasi-Bayesian Confidence Intervals

Acceptance	Estimate	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper	p-value
ACME	0.0814	0.0219	0.1428	**0.01**
ADE	0.0676	-0.0698	0.2043	0.33
Total Effect	0.1477	0.0211	0.2727	0.03
Prop.Mediated	0.5280	0.0913	2.5275	0.04

Simulations: 500
Sample Size Used 607

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[4] The model controls for the pretreatment variables: voter registration status and political interest.

Figure 4.3 Mediation by Acceptance of Conspiracy (Study 1)
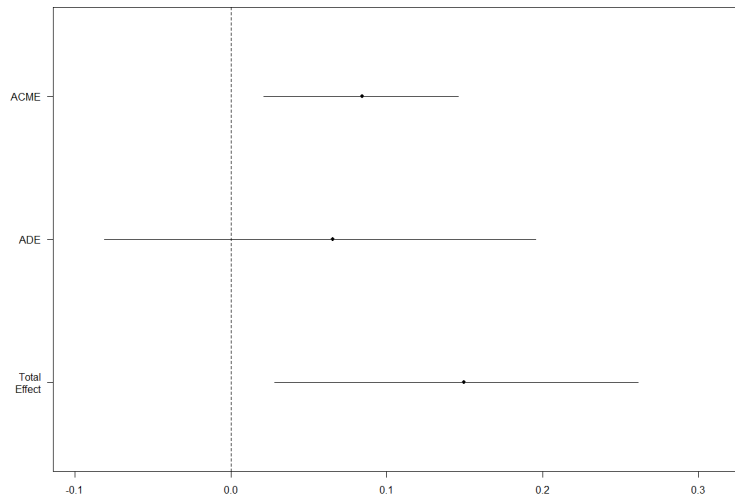
The point estimates, with 95% confidence intervals for the average causal mediation effect (ACME), average direct effect (ADE), and total effect.

Table 4.5 Effect of Accepting Conspiracy Theory on Political Participation (Study 1)

	Dependent Variable: Political Participation
	(1)
	Model 1
Treatment (Conspiracy)	0.064
	(0.065)
Acceptance	0.195**
	(0.066)
Registered to Vote	0.572***
	(0.093)
Political Interest	1.301***
	(0.116)
Constant	0.091
	(0.103)
Observations	607
R^2	0.296

Note: *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***<0.001

Figure 4.4 Sensitivity Analyses, Mediation by Acceptance (Study 1)
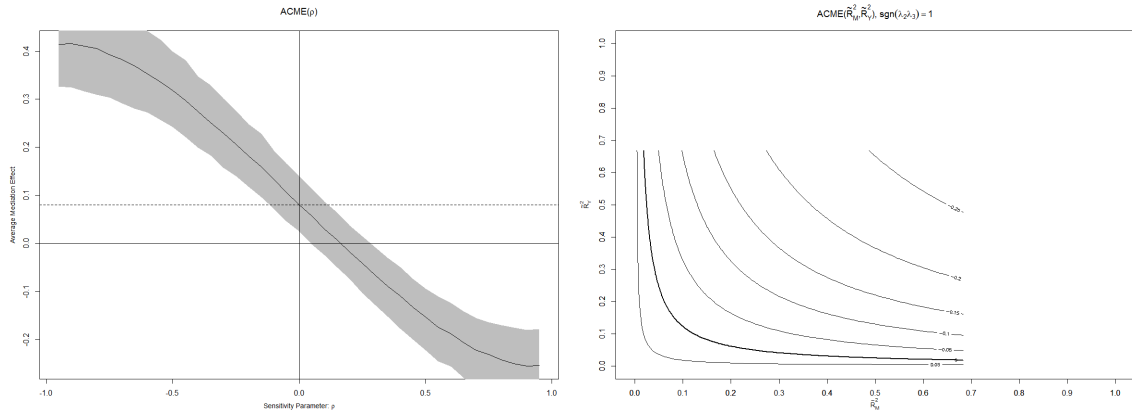
To assess whether the ACME is robust in relation to the sequential ignorability violations, I conducted a sensitivity analysis. In the left panel of figure 4.4, the dashed line indicates the estimated ACME under the sequential ignorability assumption, and the solid line displays the mediation effect at each value of ρ. The grey area indicates the 95% confidence intervals. The results indicate that the ACME is zero when ρ, or the error correlation between the mediator and the outcome models, equals .15. Hence, I cannot completely rule out the existence of unobserved confound.

Additionally, the right panel in figure 4.4 represents "the estimated true ACME as contour lines with respect to the $\tilde{R}^2_M$ and $\tilde{R}^2_Y$ parameters, the proportions of the total variance in the mediator and the outcome variables, respectively, which would be explained by an unobserved pretreatment confounder" (Imai and Yamamoto 2013, 152). In this case, I assumed that the unobserved confounder affects the mediator and outcome in the same direction. The result indicates that the true ACME changes sign if the product of $\tilde{R}^2_M$ and $\tilde{R}^2_Y$ is greater than 0.0114.

Likewise, in study 2, acceptance mediates the effect of exposure to a conspiracy theory on participation. As shown in Table 4.6, the value of ACME is 0.020. This effect is statistically significant at the 95% level, but the average direct effect is not significant. Figure 4.5 displays this mediation effect. Additionally, acceptance mediates about 21% of the treatment effect. Hence, this result replicates findings from study 1, in which acceptance mediates the effect of exposure to a conspiracy theory on participation. Further, Table 4.7 reflects the partial mediation effects of acceptance as a mediator, presented in Table 4.6. As Table 4.7 shows, when the potential mediator variable (i.e., acceptance) is included in the model, the coefficient of treatment is no longer statistically significant. Thus, the mediation effect of acceptance of the effect of exposure to conspiracy theory demonstrates that not only does mere exposure to conspiracy theories have a significant behavioral consequence, but acceptance of such conspiracy theories also influences the increasing intention to engage in politics. The results suggest that belief is a partial mediator, but it appears that exposure still matters a lot.

Table 4.6 Acceptance of Conspiracy as a Mediator (Study 2)[5]

*Causal Mediation Analysis: Quasi-Bayesian Confidence Intervals*

Acceptance	*Estimate*	*95% CI Lower*	*95% CI Upper*	*p-value*
ACME	0.020512	0.000862	0.044218	**0.04**
ADE	0.073953	-0.019058	0.164273	0.11
Total Effect	0.094465	0.005529	0.183776	0.04
Prop.Mediated	0.208395	-0.016611	1.208568	0.07

Simulations: 500
Sample Size Used 736

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[5] The model controls for the pretreatment variables: voter registration status and political interest.

**Figure 4.5 Mediation by Acceptance of Conspiracy (Study 2)**
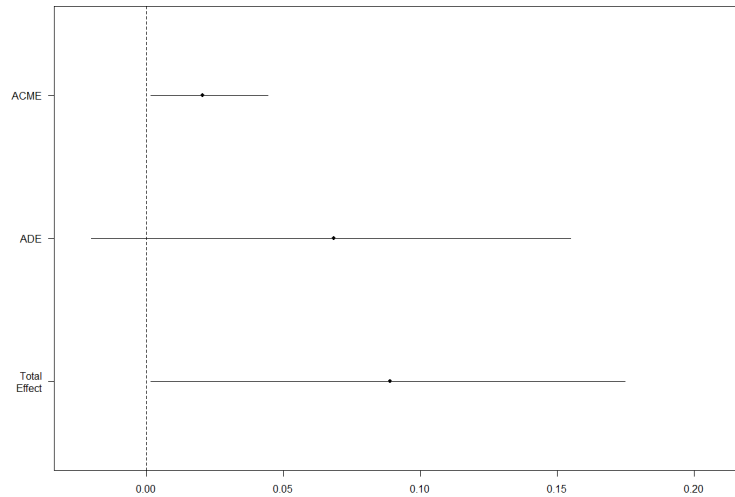
The point estimates, with 95% confidence intervals for the average causal mediation effect (ACME), average direct effect (ADE), and total effect.

Table 4.7 Effect of Accepting Conspiracy Theory on Political Participation (Study 2)

	Dependent Variable: Political Participation
	(1)
	Model 1
Treatment (Conspiracy)	0.072
	(0.045)
Acceptance	0.085†
	(0.045)
Registered to Vote	0.441**
	(0.058)
Political Interest	1.060**
	(0.093)
Constant	0.316 ***
	(0.070)
Observations	736
R^2	0.261

Note: †p<0.10; *p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***<0.001

Likewise, I conducted a sensitivity analysis. The result indicates that when $\rho = .1$, the ACME is exactly zero as illustrated in Figure 4.6. Additionally, the result indicates that the true ACME changes sign if the product of $\tilde{R}^2_M$ and $\tilde{R}^2_Y$ is greater than 0.0067.

Figure 4.6 Sensitivity Analyses, Mediation by Acceptance (Study 2)
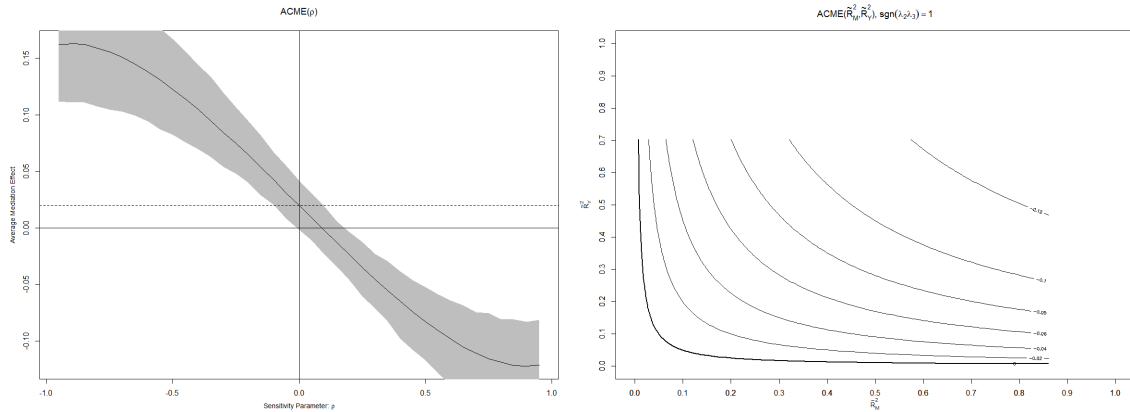
In summary, both study 1 and study 2 suggest that acceptance of conspiracy theories mediates the effects of exposure to conspiracy theories on political engagement. This denotes that belief is a partial mediator, but mere exposure of conspiracy theory has a significant effect on behavioral consequence. This is in line with previous studies' hypotheses (Butler et al. 1995 and Jolley and Douglas 2014a), arguing that exposure to conspiracy theories may have a societal impact.

Discussion

The findings drawn from two different samples demonstrate that exposure to a conspiracy theory translates into intentions to engage in politics. My findings suggest a linkage between exposure and acceptance of conspiracy theories, as Einstein and Glick

(2015) posited. In addition, my findings demonstrate that mere exposure to conspiracy theories may have a significant impact on behavioral intention, as Jolley and Douglas (2014a, b) suggested. This suggests that mere exposure, even without acceptance, can increase political participation. In other words, this implies that the effect of conspiracy theories' dissemination by the elite may have a significant effect on citizens' actual turnout to vote and other political activities. Future studies should examine the linkage between dissemination of conspiracy theories and acceptance of them.

Furthermore, my experimental studies demonstrate that the positive effect of conspiracy theories is robust across partisan groups. This signifies that when people encounter a voter-suppression conspiracy theory in the absence of a party cue, no behavioral differences exist in how people will react when faced with the implications of their disenfranchisement.

Nonetheless, the current experimental studies have limitations in that they focused on one conspiracy theory (voter suppression) that is peculiar to one context imminent to an upcoming election for which electoral activities are apparently possible responses.

Future studies can be designed to vary whether the response is under people's control (surmountable) or not (insurmountable), to try to test the theory more directly. This will illustrate inaction and positive action effects versus a pure control condition within one study. Future research may find response options, as Imhoff (2015) suggests examining more direct responses that might undermine the influence of the conspirators.

While the mobilizing effect was robust across two different populations, it raises further questions as to the mechanism driving this positive effect. In current study, anger did not serve as a stepping stone to behavioral intentions. This may have been caused by

the respondents being less attentive to the treatment in Study 2 than their Study 1 counterparts. It should be also noted that the reason that belief might have played a role only as a partial mediator because the wording for the question about the respondents' acceptance of the conspiracy theory was designed primarily to check attention, not to measure mediator variables. Thus, the question's wording ("Based on the article you have just read, why do you think there were long lines at polling places?") may have not measured the participants' degree of belief in the conspiracy theory accurately. Future studies may delve into mediator variables that play a role as a stepping stone from exposure and conspiracy beliefs to behavioral intention.

In conclusion, the consequences of conspiracy theories have broader implications for politics—exposure to and belief in conspiracy theories can encourage political participation, which partially explains why elites who are out of power promote misperceptions that would otherwise demobilize their supporters.

Chapter 5. The Effect of Conspiracy Theories on Policy Stances

Introduction

Findings from Chapter 3 demonstrate that conspiracy beliefs translated into actual behavior. Findings from Chapter 4 demonstrate that exposure to conspiracy theories drives behavioral intention. Moreover, findings from Chapter 4 demonstrate that acceptance (i.e., belief) mediates the behavioral effect of exposure to conspiracy theories. Linking exposure, acceptance, and actual behavior, this chapter aims to find whether conspiracy beliefs drive believers' policy stances.

Research has shown prevalent misperceptions involving conspiracy beliefs bound to policy issues. Many people falsely believe that vaccines cause autism in children (Freed et al. 2010) and that genetically modified foods are unsafe and cause brain damage (Entine 2015). A number of Americans also reject the widespread evidence of global warming (McCright and Dunlap 2011). The so-called death panel conspiracy publicized by Sarah Palin and others during the debate over the Obama administration's health care reform has persisted (Nyhan 2014). While much work probes the psychological (and ideological) antecedents of conspiracy theory endorsement (Miller et al. 2016, Oliver and Wood 2014; Radnitz and Underwood 2017), far less examines the consequences of conspiracy theories, especially those with implications on policy attitudes.

By analyzing data from an original survey carried out by MTurk, I demonstrate that contemporary conspiracy beliefs—beliefs that more than 3,000,000 noncitizens voted in the 2016 presidential election, that Russian hackers infiltrated states'

computerized voter registration and election administration systems, and so forth—have not merely ended up being fringe beliefs but potentially affect believers' policy stances and might potentially distort policy debate and policy implementation. Thus, conspiracy theories can potentially undermine democratic competence by distorting citizens' policy attitudes. If the acceptance of conspiracy theories impacts citizens' support for government actions to address the problems alluded to by such claims, this may distort policy debates and affect legislation.

Theory and Hypotheses

Considering that many Americans endorse false conspiratorial claims, do these false beliefs affect their policy stances, or are they devoid of substantive consequences and merely fringe beliefs that do not affect policy attitudes? Findings from chapters 3 and 4 suggest that exposure to conspiracy theories leads to acceptance, and acceptance leads to behavioral intention and/or actual political behavior. Thus, I hypothesize that conspiracy theory beliefs connected to policy debates may affect citizens' corresponding policy stances in a way that distorts policy views. Specifically, I propose two competing hypotheses:

H0: Beliefs in conspiracy theories have no impact on corresponding policy stances.

This first hypothesis is a null hypothesis, positing that regardless of the veracity (or proof of falsity) of conspiracy theories, endorsing conspiracy theories will not predict policy attitudes. My second hypothesis posits the opposite. I have broken it into separate hypotheses for distinct policy areas, but all of HA1-HA4 make the same basic claim that

beliefs in conspiracy theories are negatively associated with corresponding policy stances.

HA1. Respondents who accept that more than 3,000,000 noncitizens voted in the 2016 presidential election and were responsible for Hillary Clinton winning the popular vote are more likely to support Trump's executive order on creating an election integrity commission.

HA2. Respondents who deny that Russian hackers infiltrated the computer systems of Hillary Clinton's campaign and then revealed confidential information through WikiLeaks are more likely view the Mueller investigation as unnecessary.

HA3. Respondents who deny that Russian hackers infiltrated states' computerized voter registration and election administration systems are more likely view the Mueller investigation as unnecessary.

HA4. Respondents who deny that people associated with Donald Trump's campaign, such as Campaign Chairman Paul Manafort, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, had contact with suspected Russian operatives during last year's campaign are more likely view the Mueller investigation as unnecessary.

Beliefs in conspiracy theories that are connected with a specific policy may hinder citizens from having objective policy stances. Respondents who endorse conspiracy theories narrating that the government is a conspirator will be less likely to support government action in addressing policy issues. This may distort policy attitudes and cause policy prescriptions to be rejected that might resolve the underlying policy issues.

Data and Methods

To test my hypotheses, I analyzed an original survey administered in November 2018 via Amazon's Mechanical Turk. I recruited approximately 550 adult residents of the United States. Participants were paid $0.75 for completing the survey. By asking the policy positions at the beginning of the survey and asking about conspiracy beliefs questions at the end of the survey, the current study minimized the potentially overestimated association between conspiracy beliefs and policy stances. Although this chapter's goal is to identify the association between conspiracy beliefs and policy attitudes, the current study cannot establish causal direction and thus cannot rule out possibility that reverse causality inclines people to endorse conspiracy theories to justify their policy preferences. In addition, there may exist a simultaneity between conspiracy beliefs and policy stances, and some other factors, such as watching slanted media (e.g., Fox News), might shape both conspiratorial beliefs and policy attitudes.

Dependent Variables

To assess policy attitudes, I selected two policy questions related to prevalent conspiracy theories. I selected contemporary policy issues that have controversies with regard to the policy prescriptions with which to address issues; simultaneously, such policy issues are inseparably bound together in prevalent conspiracy theories.

Two sets of policies were chosen: Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity (2017) and the House Intelligence Committee, Senate Intelligence Committee, and the Mueller Special Council Investigation (2017-2019). In particular, President Trump advocates for election integrity policy (whether or not to investigate rampant noncitizen votes) to address his concern that millions of illegal aliens voted against him

in the 2016 election, without which he would have won the popular vote. Additionally, nascent conspiracy theories alluding to Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections and the suspicious links between Trump associates and Russian officials mandated whether or not to investigate these allegations.

Election Integrity Policy

Election integrity commission. To assess respondents' policy opinions on issues of voter fraud and election integrity, I presented a brief context about President Trump's establishment of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Electoral Integrity. One of the commission's first official actions was to seek voter registration data (including names, birthdays, party affiliations, voting history, felony conviction records, and partial Social Security numbers) from every state by executive order on May 11, 2017. Then, the respondents were asked whether the federal government should be doing more to investigate voter fraud. This question had seven response options, which were coded from 1 to 7 so that a higher value would indicate that less government action was desired.

Mueller/House/Senate investigation. To assess the respondents' policy opinions about Russian interference during the 2016 presidential election and the suspicious plot between Trump associates and Russian officials, I presented a synopsis about the joint investigation conducted by the House Intelligence Committee, Senate Intelligence Committee, and Special Counsel Robert Mueller to investigate Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election, including collusion between campaigns and the Russian government. The respondents were asked whether the federal government should be doing more to investigate Russian influence in the 2016 presidential election. This

question had seven response options, which were coded from 1 to 7 so that a higher value would indicate that less government action was desired.

Independent Variables

My key explanatory variables are endorsements of particular conspiracy that are connected with substantive policy preferences over federal government action in two areas: election integrity commission and Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Details of the questions' wording and response categories are presented below.

Voter fraud. One conspiracy belief was measured to test association between policy stances about President Trump's executive order about investigating voter fraud through the executive order Establishment of Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity (EO13799).

1. More than 3,000,000 noncitizens voted in the 2016 presidential election and were responsible for Hillary Clinton winning the popular vote.

Respondents were given five response options, coded to range from 1 to 5 so that a higher value would indicate stronger conspiracy beliefs.

Mueller/House/Senate investigation. The following three conspiracy theories impugning Trump–Russian connections were employed to test the association between policy stances about the special counsel investigation conducted by special prosecutor Robert Mueller that investigated Russian interference in the 2016 United States elections and suspicious links between Trump associates and Russian officials.

1. People associated with Donald Trump's campaign, such as Campaign Chairman Paul Manafort, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, and National Security Adviser Michael Flynn, had contact with suspected Russian operatives during last year's campaign.

Respondents were given five options, coded to range from 1 to 5 so that a higher value would indicate stronger denial of Trump associates conspiring with Russians.

2. Russian hackers infiltrated the computer systems of Hillary Clinton's campaign and then revealed confidential information through WikiLeaks.

3. Russian hackers infiltrated states' computerized voter registration and election administration systems.

For these two prompts respondents were given five options, coded to range from 1 to 5 so that a higher value would represent stronger rejection of Russian hackers' interference in the election. These three conspiracy beliefs variables were combined into an index ($\alpha = 0.75$) named Trump-Russia.

In the analysis that follows, all the dependent variables are coded such that a higher value indicates that the respondents desire less government action. Thus, I expect positive coefficients whether policy stances are distorted by belief in conspiracy theories.

Control Variables

I control for the following variables (full question-wording and coding details are presented in the appendix).

Party identification utilized the standard seven-point measure, with values from 1 for *strong Democrat* to 7 for *strong Republican*. Ideology used the standard seven-point measure of ideology, with values from 1 for *extremely liberal* to 7 for *extremely conservative*. Presidential vote choice had three response options and was coded so that 1 would indicate *Clinton*, 2 would indicate *third-party candidates*, and 3 would indicate *Trump*.

Government trust is an index of four ANES government trust questions coded from 0 to 1, with a higher value indicating more distrust of the government (α = .5877). Political knowledge was an index formed from averaging responses to five questions about politics. Each answer was coded 1 for correct and 0 for incorrect (α = .67).

Education was coded from 1 to 5, with higher values associated with a higher level of educational attainment.

Findings

I present the regression models' results in the following order: Trump's electoral commission and the Mueller/House/Senate investigations policy attitudes. The independent variables are conspiracy beliefs coded so that higher values indicate stronger beliefs about corresponding conspiracy theories. The dependent variables are stances on addressing policy issues, and these are coded so that higher values indicate a desire for less government action. Thus, positive coefficients suggest a desire for less government action, and respondents therefore hold distorted policy views.

Table 5.1 shows how believing in conspiracy theories is correlated with policy stances regarding governmental action to address election fraud. First, Columns 1 presents how believing the conspiracy theory that Trump did not win the 2016 election's popular vote because millions of illegal aliens voted against him is associated with support for the Election Integrity Commission.

There is no evidence that this is true (Cottrell et al. 2018). Nonetheless, according to an August 10, 2017, poll reported in the *Washington Post*, 67% of Republicans believed that millions had voted illegally.

Table 5.1 Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Policy Stances

	Dependent variable:	
	Election Integrity Commission	Mueller/House/Senate Investigation
	(1)	(2)
3 million illegal votes	-0.497***	
	(0.077)	
Trump-Russia		0.858***
		(0.079)
2016 Vote Choice	-0.149	0.521***
	(0.170)	(0.141)
Government Trust	-0.430**	0.332**
	(0.179)	(0.154)
PID	0.020	0.048
	(0.081)	(0.069)
Ideology	-0.089	0.172***
	(0.075)	(0.066)
Political Knowledge	-0.155*	0.126*
	(0.083)	(0.070)
Education	0.196**	-0.054
	(0.097)	(0.084)
Constant	5.540***	-1.702***
	(0.632)	(0.555)
Observations	418	418
R^2	0.204	0.523

Note: *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Although the Election Integrity Commission has ceased to exist, it brought immediate consequences. Following Colorado's compliance with the Election Integrity Commission's requesting voters' personal information, nearly 3,400 Colorado voters

withdraw their voter registration (CBS Denver 2017). The commission was controversial and thus brought calls for its defunding and disbandment in Congress. Consequently, the Trump administration disbanded the commission on January 2018.

Second, Columns 2 presents how resisting certifiable facts (i.e., accepting the "fake news" claims rather than denying them) is associated with policy stances about federal government investigations into Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. elections and the suspicious links between Trump associates and Russian officials. Thus, people who deny conspiracy theories that initially impugn Trump's legitimacy over the course of the campaign are considered as having crippled veracity. In other words, respondents who reject conspiracy theories impugning Trump's campaign team are misinformed.

As Column 1 in Table 5.1 shows, respondents who believe that more than 3,000,000 noncitizens voted in the 2016 presidential election are more supportive of government action to investigate voter fraud in all the states, which would be a groundless and unnecessary effort. Furthermore, endorsement of a conspiracy theory alleging that Russians conspired with Hillary Clinton to gain control of uranium deposits in the United States and that the Clinton Foundation was rewarded for Secretary of State Clinton's assistance lead to supporting the Trump administration's controversial policy as well.

As Column 2 in Table 5.1 shows, respondents who refuse to concede that Russian hackers infiltrated the computer systems of Hillary Clinton's campaign and then revealed confidential information through WikiLeaks, respondents who fail to accept the fact that Russian hackers infiltrated states' computerized voter registration and election administration systems, and, respondents who doubt that people associated with Donald

Trump's campaign had contact with suspected Russian operatives during the election campaign are less supportive of government investigation.

Moving on to control variables with regard to the stances on the government investigation, respondents who voted for Trump are more supportive of government action to investigate voter fraud in all states, but this is not statistically significant in model 1 at 95% level. Respondents who voted for Trump are less supportive of the Mueller investigation, and this is statistically significant in models 2at 99% level. As respondents' distrust toward the government increases, they are more supportive of government action to investigate voter fraud in all states. This is only statistically significant in models at 95% level. As respondents' distrust toward the government increases, they are less supportive of the Mueller investigation. The more respondents' ideologies align with conservatism, the less likely they are to support the Mueller investigation, and this is statistically significant in models 2 at 99% level. As respondents' political knowledge increases, they are more supportive of government action to investigate voter fraud in all states and this is statistically significant at 90% level. As respondents' political knowledge increases, they are less supportive of the Mueller investigation and this is statistically significant at 90% level. Education is statistically significant in model 1. As respondents' education attainment increases, they are less supportive government action to investigate voter fraud in all states.

In summary, accepting unsubstantiated conspiratorial claims leads to supporting unnecessary and flimsy policy solutions. Also, respondents who were resistant to accepting substantiated conspiracy theories held skewed policy opinions.

Key independent variables in model 1 (3 million illegal votes) and model 2 (Trump-Russia) may be endogenous as a cause of policy stances. To resolve the possibility of an endogeneity issue, I ran two-stage least squares (TSLS) to fix biases derived by the endogeneity of these two conspiracy beliefs (results are pretend in the Appendix Tables A5.1-5.3). The TSLS results indicate that instrumental variables in model 1 are sufficiently strong and the endogeneity is present, thus, the instruments are valid. Thus, in model 1, estimation yield by TSLS is consistent, whereas OLS is not. On the contrary, the results indicate that in model 2, endogeneity is not a concern.

However, these models are controversial, particularly in terms of instrumental variables. The selected sets of instrumental variables are measures of conspiracy beliefs and misperceptions, which are from entirely different contexts. However, some studies have found that conspiratorial beliefs are a monological system in which the endorsements of many individual conspiracy theories, even if contradictory, are intercorrelated with each other (Goertzel 1994; Wood et al. 2012). Therefore, the results of the two-stage regression are suggestive.

Discussion

Believing conspiracy theories (and refusing to recant false beliefs) does impact views on policies, mostly negatively. People who were persuaded by Trump's assertion that millions of noncitizens voted in the 2016 election are more supportive of the federal government investigating voter fraud, which is unnecessary given the consensus regarding the lack of evidence that voter fraud exists in contemporary U.S. elections (Cottrell et al. 2018). However, the Trump–Russia conspiracy has complicated

implications. Conspiracies can be true, and researchers do not typically use veracity as part of the definition of a conspiracy. Instead, some researchers require that the claim "fail to meet widely agreed upon standards of evidence" (Flynn et al. 2017, 128). Given the consensus among the intelligence community, regardless of whether the claim is true, the best available evidence does support the claim.

However, if people refuse to recant beliefs on substantiated conspiracy theories, then this brings distorted policy views in resolving underlying issues. Interestingly, considering the current survey was launched on November 20 and completed on November 21, right after the 2018 midterm election, and that the Mueller investigation was ongoing (May 2017–March 2019), it is possible that the respondents may have been exposed to news stories with evidence supporting the Trump–Russia connection. However, the results indicate that not all people updated their beliefs on Trump–Russia conspiracies. In light of Smallpage et al.'s (2017) findings, people who accept partisan conspiracy theories that malign out-groups do so to bolster their co-partisans. Thus, such beliefs may not necessarily require the acceptance of such conspiracy theories as true. Thus, conspiracy beliefs may reinforce people's inclination to align with policy prescriptions that bolster their in-group while accusing opposing groups.

My findings imply that elites could play a major role in shaping misperceptions and that they can strategically use misperceptions to countermobilize supporters. The in-group elites may have the persuasive power to maximize the credibility of conspiracy theories that impugn outgroup partisans, even when the theories are vicious or preposterous (e.g. Death Panels).

Future research could more directly explore whether there is a systematic difference in the embrace of conspiracy theories and elites' strategic use of conspiracy theories for political goals. Additionally, future research may directly compare the persuasive power of shaping followers' policy stances. The current findings are based on correlational analysis, which makes it hard to substantiate a causal path. An experimental approach to investigating this phenomenon might manipulating the types of elite rhetoric used to deliver policy debate. For instance, the effects of elites' conspiratorial rhetoric on citizens' policy can be examined by varying the experimental stimuli among (a) the factual, data-driven consequences of adopting a nascent policy without featuring an elite, (b) the same factual data-driven consequences of adopting a nascent policy delivered by an elite, (c) and the consequences of the same policy delivered by an elite with conspiratorial rhetoric, such as emphasizing an out-group's hidden, nefarious goals when implementing a policy. This might answer why out-of-power elites (Sarah Palin) would say that the ACA has death panels rather than saying that it significantly increases health-care costs. Similarly, when Trump buttresses the statement that vaccines cause autism, and an audience accepts it, will it also affect the receivers' health-related policy attitudes?

Although I asked the policy position questions at the beginning of the survey and the conspiracy beliefs questions at the end of the survey to minimize the potentially overestimated association between conspiracy beliefs and policy stances, I cannot completely rule out the possibility that people endorse conspiracy theories to justify their policy preferences. Future studies could directly test the effect of conspiracy beliefs on policy stances by manipulating nascent conspiracy theories.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued that conspiracy theories prompt reactions, both behavioral and attitudinal. This is especially true if they garner people's immediate attention and imply feasible actions to rectify their consequences. Taking advantage of a nationally representative sample of the American electorate, I found evidence that conspiracy beliefs translate into political activities. This contradicts much previous research, which had found that people who believe in government conspiracy theories are less likely to engage in conventional political activities. This implies that being paranoid about the government elites' conspiratorial schemes can lead to more active involvement in political activities that can possibly deter alleged conspiracies against citizens.

Second, I showed that exposure to conspiracy theories even without acceptance can mobilize an electorate. Taking advantage of a recent conspiracy theory that was raised during the 2016 presidential primary election, I found evidence that exposure to a conspiracy theory translates into intentions to engage in politics. Third, I showed that acceptance of conspiracy theory plays a role as a stepping stone to actual behavior. Far from feeling like helpless bystanders after being exposed to a conspiracy theory, citizens might be moved to address the suspicious conspiratorial scheme through political action. Thus, these results shed new light on the social consequences of conspiracy theories in terms of political engagement: the possibility of a mobilizing effect.

Finally, I showed that beliefs of conspiracy theories distort substantive policy stances. Believing conspiracy theories (and refusing to recant false beliefs) does impact views on policies, mostly negatively. People who were persuaded by Trump's assertion

that millions of noncitizens voted in the 2016 election are more supportive of the federal government investigating voter fraud, which turned out to be unnecessary after controversies and subsequent disbanding.

Taken together, the findings from Chapters 3 and 4 uncover a link between political activities and exposure to conspiracy theories beliefs. The findings from both chapters especially suggest that conspiracy theories can be potentially positive by stimulating normative political participation. However, the findings from Chapter 5 indicating that conspiracy beliefs lead citizens to support unnecessary policy remedies, such as the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, or to oppose policy remedies that correct real problems, suggest that people participate in political activities so they can oppose measures that would correct real problems. For instance, amid the COVID-19 outbreak, a lot of people who deny the risk of further community spread signed a petition to keep the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo open when they were canceled[6]. This raises the question of whether conspiracy theories can also entail an undesirable outcome. In a similar context, if some influential elites promote or endorse a nascent conspiracy theory that the COVID-19 is a hoax perpetrated by the Deep State to encourage their supporters to join protests petitions against stay-at-home orders or other COVID-19 related closures, this increased participation is not necessarily good for society.

I contribute to the literature on conspiracy theories by directly examining the behavioral and attitudinal consequences of exposure to and belief in conspiracy theories. Reflecting on my findings from the experimental study, I explored whether the same

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[6] KTRK(abc13)

political event—one that has a conspiracy plot and one that does not have a conspiracy has different effects depends on the framing—I demonstrated that it is exposure to a conspiracy theory, not exposure to the political event, that causes the behavioral outcome.

Third, with the findings drawn from two different samples, I demonstrate that the mobilizing effect of conspiracy theories is robust across partisan groups. This signifies that when people encounter a voter suppression conspiracy theory under the absence of a party cue, there is no behavioral differences in how people will react when faced with implications of their disenfranchisement.

How can these findings be reconciled with some previous literature's inaction hypotheses? One possible explanation for the result is that when citizens are exposed to a conspiracy theory that suggests a possibility for voters to take corrective action, people may think they can play a role in countering government plots by casting ballots, persuading friends to vote, or some other relatively simple actions.

Prior scholarship has tended to focus on claims that shady government actions have occurred or are occurring, but these claims are not accompanied by opportunities for citizens to address the problems themselves.

Furthermore, the mobilizing effect of exposure to conspiracy theories is in line with Uscinski and Parent's (2014) hypothesis that conspiracy theories function as a means of countermobilization among political losers. If exposure to conspiracy theories has a mobilizing effect, it is not surprising that elites lacking political power strategically promote conspiracy theories that resonate with their supporters. This implies that elites within losing political organizations can use conspiracy theories to appeal to their supporters by energizing their team from losses and bolstering common fates.

Due to the limitation of a nonrepresentative sample, I did not frame political parties or party cues in this study, but the results suggested the treatment effect is statistically similar across two party identifiers. Nevertheless, as political conspiracy theories tend to be highly partisan (e.g., President Obama was not born in the United States; the federal government intentionally breached flood levees in New Orleans to protect middle-class areas), future research needs to include partisan cues with a nationally representative sample design for better assessment. Future research could more directly explore whether there is a systematic difference in the embrace of conspiracy theories and the elites' strategic use of conspiracy theories for political goals. Additionally, future research may directly compare the persuasive power of shaping followers' policy stances through communication of conspiracy theories versus factual conventional policy debate.

In conclusion, conspiracy beliefs are not merely fringe beliefs. Rather conspiracy theories may directly shape policy stances when policy debate is closely connected to specific conspiracy theory. At the same time, conspiracy theories are not uniformly harmful to society. Rather conspiracy theories can potentially have a positive effect to stimulate conventional political activities. My findings are equivocal about the ultimate consequences of conspiracy theories. On the one hand, the mobilization effect of conspiracy theories may have benefits in terms of higher participation. On the other hand, the people who participate may be worse informed. This implies that conspiracy theories may function as a double-edged sword.

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Appendix A. Appendices for Chapter 3

Table A3.1 Dependent Variables

(pa1) talk to anyone about voting for or against a candidate or party
(pa2) go to any political meetings, rallies, or speeches
(pa3) wear campaign buttons or post signs or bumper stickers
(pa4) do any other work for a party or candidate
(pa5) contribute money to a specific candidate's campaign
(pa6) contribute money to a political party
(pa7) contribute to any other group that is for or against a candidate
(pa8) join a protest march
(pa9) attend a city council meeting or school board meeting
(pa10) sign a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue
(pa11) sign a petition on paper about a political or social issue
(pa12) give money to social or political organization
(pa13) call a radio or television program about a political issue
(pa14) send a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue
(pa15) write a letter to a newspaper or magazine about a political issue
(pa16) contact a congress member or senator
(pa17) vote in the 2012 presidential election

Table A3.1 Logistic Regression Results of Conspiracy Beliefs on Political Activities

	Dependent variable:																
	pa1	pa2	pa3	pa4	pa5	pa6	pa7	pa8	pa9	pa10	pa11	pa12	pa13	pa14	pa15	pa16	pa17
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)	(15)	(16)	(17)
Conspiracy	0.732***	0.756*	0.836***	1.274***	0.411	0.179	0.730	0.763**	-0.368	0.432*	0.146	-0.346	1.040**	0.002	-0.097	0.399*	-0.067
	(0.207)	(0.392)	(0.262)	(0.475)	(0.305)	(0.340)	(0.461)	(0.389)	(0.245)	(0.221)	(0.221)	(0.226)	(0.510)	(0.239)	(0.450)	(0.241)	(0.269)
Contacted by Party	0.299***	0.976***	0.580***	0.843***	0.492***	0.629***	0.555***	0.608***	0.407***	0.259***	0.449***	0.272***	0.794***	0.073	0.734***	0.383***	0.561***
	(0.076)	(0.163)	(0.100)	(0.200)	(0.114)	(0.131)	(0.180)	(0.150)	(0.091)	(0.082)	(0.082)	(0.083)	(0.206)	(0.090)	(0.178)	(0.089)	(0.106)
Get out the vote	0.541***	1.042***	0.523***	1.100***	0.483***	0.498***	0.419**	0.409***	0.440***	0.401***	0.430***	0.304***	0.200	0.392***	0.268*	0.330***	0.141
	(0.074)	(0.161)	(0.097)	(0.203)	(0.109)	(0.123)	(0.167)	(0.145)	(0.088)	(0.080)	(0.079)	(0.080)	(0.194)	(0.087)	(0.162)	(0.086)	(0.099)
PID	0.002	-0.013	-0.084***	-0.117**	-0.050	-0.049	-0.022	-0.035	-0.021	-0.023	-0.031	0.064**	0.123**	-0.053**	0.064	-0.026	-0.069**
	(0.023)	(0.043)	(0.029)	(0.052)	(0.034)	(0.038)	(0.052)	(0.044)	(0.027)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.056)	(0.027)	(0.051)	(0.027)	(0.029)
Ideology	0.034	-0.066	-0.027	-0.093	-0.119***	-0.080	-0.047	-0.222***	-0.021	-0.086**	-0.108***	-0.147***	-0.112	-0.076**	-0.166**	0.007	0.053
	(0.031)	(0.056)	(0.038)	(0.066)	(0.045)	(0.049)	(0.070)	(0.057)	(0.037)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.074)	(0.036)	(0.067)	(0.037)	(0.040)
Age	0.089	-0.436	-0.129	0.693*	1.732***	1.841***	0.206	-1.155***	-0.408**	-0.953***	0.178	0.588***	-1.025**	-2.863***	0.347	0.178	1.412***
	(0.174)	(0.324)	(0.220)	(0.399)	(0.265)	(0.296)	(0.388)	(0.323)	(0.205)	(0.186)	(0.186)	(0.189)	(0.428)	(0.208)	(0.373)	(0.203)	(0.226)
Education	-0.028	0.223***	-0.089**	0.295***	0.150***	0.130**	0.209***	0.227***	0.254***	0.271***	0.208***	0.344***	0.145*	0.133***	0.294***	0.319***	0.298***
	(0.035)	(0.065)	(0.044)	(0.078)	(0.049)	(0.054)	(0.077)	(0.066)	(0.041)	(0.037)	(0.037)	(0.038)	(0.087)	(0.041)	(0.074)	(0.040)	(0.049)
Male	-0.061	-0.006	-0.031	-0.016	0.001	0.124	0.559***	0.292**	-0.110	-0.186**	-0.128*	-0.312***	0.664***	-0.252***	0.466***	0.100	-0.279***
	(0.071)	(0.133)	(0.090)	(0.160)	(0.102)	(0.114)	(0.163)	(0.135)	(0.083)	(0.076)	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.189)	(0.082)	(0.156)	(0.082)	(0.095)
Income	0.008*	-0.014	-0.001	-0.023**	0.047***	0.034***	0.028**	-0.014	0.023***	0.004	0.012**	0.018***	-0.012	-0.002	-0.003	0.014**	0.034***
	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.012)	(0.006)	(0.011)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Government Trust	-0.953***	0.157	0.189	0.277	-0.318	-0.139	-0.541	-0.644*	-0.774***	-1.572***	-0.836***	-0.594***	-0.474	-1.304***	-1.196**	-1.711***	0.009
	(0.206)	(0.366)	(0.250)	(0.434)	(0.299)	(0.325)	(0.480)	(0.387)	(0.245)	(0.232)	(0.224)	(0.227)	(0.521)	(0.242)	(0.478)	(0.260)	(0.262)
Efficacy	1.310***	1.645***	0.762***	1.527***	1.592***	1.837***	0.528	1.777***	1.134***	1.002***	0.814***	0.691***	0.702	1.510***	0.906*	0.952***	1.157***
	(0.234)	(0.423)	(0.288)	(0.513)	(0.330)	(0.366)	(0.503)	(0.427)	(0.269)	(0.246)	(0.246)	(0.250)	(0.563)	(0.266)	(0.487)	(0.268)	(0.312)
Political Knowledge	0.307	0.177	0.223	0.205	1.175***	0.560*	0.576	0.022	-0.456**	1.029***	0.299	0.313	-0.958**	0.160	-0.343	1.005***	1.325***
	(0.196)	(0.372)	(0.249)	(0.450)	(0.295)	(0.325)	(0.449)	(0.368)	(0.230)	(0.213)	(0.211)	(0.213)	(0.480)	(0.227)	(0.423)	(0.233)	(0.256)
Political Interest	2.561***	2.357***	2.310***	2.730***	2.345***	2.168***	1.970***	1.903***	1.495***	1.428***	0.857***	0.865***	3.316***	1.801***	2.381***	1.937***	1.818***
	(0.156)	(0.340)	(0.212)	(0.439)	(0.257)	(0.290)	(0.392)	(0.321)	(0.187)	(0.166)	(0.164)	(0.166)	(0.482)	(0.183)	(0.393)	(0.188)	(0.188)
White	-0.072	-0.463***	-0.452***	-0.360*	-0.547***	-0.645***	0.259	0.175	0.081	0.262***	0.197**	0.145	-0.537**	0.387***	0.007	0.353***	-0.176
	(0.092)	(0.157)	(0.109)	(0.186)	(0.128)	(0.139)	(0.217)	(0.168)	(0.109)	(0.101)	(0.100)	(0.103)	(0.216)	(0.108)	(0.199)	(0.113)	(0.122)
Constant	-3.289***	-6.594***	-3.598***	-7.816***	-6.776***	-6.758***	-7.245***	-4.909***	-3.524***	-3.249***	-2.876***	-3.362***	-6.146***	-2.002***	-6.079***	-5.294***	-2.618***
	(0.244)	(0.495)	(0.309)	(0.630)	(0.387)	(0.427)	(0.581)	(0.471)	(0.285)	(0.260)	(0.258)	(0.263)	(0.649)	(0.275)	(0.552)	(0.298)	(0.319)
Observations	4,118	4,120	4,120	4,120	4,119	4,119	4,117	4,118	4,120	4,116	4,117	4,117	4,118	4,117	4,120	4,120	4,116
Log Likelihood	-2,437.595	-874.664	-1,676.691	-634.059	-1,350.524	-1,139.109	-706.574	-895.892	-1,923.213	-2,218.897	-2,230.358	-2,188.300	-547.230	-1,943.428	-731.070	-1,939.560	-1,514.325
Akaike Inf. Crit.	4,905.189	1,779.328	3,383.383	1,298.118	2,731.048	2,308.218	1,443.147	1,821.785	3,876.426	4,467.794	4,490.715	4,406.599	1,124.460	3,916.855	1,492.140	3,909.120	3,058.651

Note: *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A3.2 Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Petition Activities

	Dependent variable:			
	Petition Activities			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Birther	0.019			
	(0.016)			
Death Panel		-0.036**		
		(0.015)		
Truther			0.022	
			(0.015)	
Katrina				0.011
				(0.015)
Contacted by party	0.113***	0.110***	0.115***	0.112***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Get out the vote	0.115***	0.116***	0.114***	0.113***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
PID	-0.017	-0.004	-0.013	-0.010
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Ideology	-0.071***	-0.060***	-0.068***	-0.070***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Age	-0.009	-0.014	-0.009	-0.011
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Education	0.208***	0.200***	0.208***	0.206***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Male	-0.039***	-0.037**	-0.038***	-0.037***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Income	0.064***	0.064***	0.065***	0.064***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Government Trust	-0.114***	-0.116***	-0.115***	-0.114***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Efficacy	0.104***	0.106***	0.104***	0.102***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Political Knowledge	0.065***	0.060***	0.064***	0.064***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Political Interest	0.207***	0.208***	0.206***	0.206***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
White	0.055***	0.054***	0.056***	0.059***
	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Constant	0.011	0.007	0.011	0.010
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Observations	4,335	4,191	4,373	4,345
R^2	0.231	0.231	0.231	0.230

Note: *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A3.3 Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Monetary Activities

	Dependent variable:			
	Monetary Activities			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Birther	0.028			
	(0.018)			
Death Panel		0.008		
		(0.017)		
Truther			0.006	
			(0.016)	
Katrina				0.011
				(0.016)
Contacted by party	0.094***	0.091***	0.093***	0.093***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Get out the vote	0.082***	0.085***	0.081***	0.080***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
PID	-0.039*	-0.027	-0.028	-0.028
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Ideology	-0.059***	-0.056***	-0.057***	-0.056***
	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Age	0.107***	0.110***	0.110***	0.108***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Education	0.073***	0.068***	0.070***	0.068***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Male	0.030**	0.028*	0.032**	0.034**
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Income	0.089***	0.093***	0.087***	0.087***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Government Trust	-0.012	-0.011	-0.014	-0.013
	(0.016)	(0.017)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Efficacy	0.099***	0.100***	0.096***	0.097***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Political Knowledge	0.069***	0.065***	0.064***	0.068***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Political Interest	0.149***	0.150***	0.149***	0.149***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)
White	-0.064***	-0.061***	-0.062***	-0.062***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Constant	-0.009	-0.011	-0.007	-0.010
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Observations	4,344	4,198	4,383	4,354
R^2	0.146	0.145	0.145	0.145

Note: *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A3.4 Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Direct Physical Activities

	Dependent variable:			
	Direct Physical Activities			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Birther	-0.009			
	(0.018)			
Death Panel		0.011		
		(0.017)		
Truther			0.040**	
			(0.016)	
Katrina				0.063***
				(0.016)
Contacted by party	0.137***	0.134***	0.137***	0.137***
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Get out the vote	0.096***	0.097***	0.095***	0.093***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
PID	-0.0003	0.003	-0.003	0.0001
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Ideology	-0.069***	-0.079***	-0.067***	-0.064***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)
Age	-0.030*	-0.030*	-0.029*	-0.027
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Education	0.088***	0.094***	0.095***	0.096***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Male	0.040***	0.044***	0.041***	0.044***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Income	-0.043**	-0.044**	-0.040**	-0.038**
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Government Trust	-0.034**	-0.028*	-0.023	-0.021
	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.017)	(0.016)
Efficacy	0.086***	0.090***	0.089***	0.088***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Political Knowledge	-0.011	-0.015	-0.005	-0.003
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Political Interest	0.182***	0.181***	0.180***	0.181***
	(0.018)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.018)
White	-0.041**	-0.042**	-0.039**	-0.032*
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.018)
Constant	-0.002	-0.002	-0.002	-0.005
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Observations	4,344	4,197	4,383	4,354
R^2	0.116	0.115	0.117	0.119

Note: *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table A3.5 Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Electoral Activities

	Dependent variable:			
	Electoral Activities			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Birther	0.039**			
	(0.016)			
Death Panel		0.029**		
		(0.015)		
Truther			0.022	
			(0.014)	
Katrina				0.017
				(0.014)
Contacted by party	0.102***	0.105***	0.105***	0.106***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Get out the vote	0.118***	0.120***	0.116***	0.118***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
PID	-0.062***	-0.043**	-0.040**	-0.042**
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Ideology	-0.003	-0.011	-0.002	0.001
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Age	-0.060***	-0.061***	-0.055***	-0.057***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Education	0.042***	0.034**	0.040***	0.038**
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Male	-0.046***	-0.045***	-0.044***	-0.044***
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Income	0.032**	0.033**	0.033**	0.033**
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Government Trust	-0.068***	-0.075***	-0.071***	-0.071***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Efficacy	0.119***	0.124***	0.121***	0.118***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Political Knowledge	0.058***	0.057***	0.057***	0.058***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Political Interest	0.358***	0.354***	0.354***	0.358***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
White	-0.023	-0.024	-0.023	-0.023
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Constant	0.016	0.014	0.014	0.014
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Observations	4,338	4,191	4,376	4,348
R^2	0.253	0.253	0.254	0.255
Note:	*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

Table A3.6 Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Political Activities Index

	Dependent variable:			
	Political Activities Index			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Birther	0.028*			
	(0.015)			
Death Panel		0.003		
		(0.015)		
Truther			0.028**	
			(0.014)	
Katrina				0.029**
				(0.014)
Contacted by party	0.147***	0.147***	0.149***	0.148***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Get out the vote	0.141***	0.143***	0.139***	0.139***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.014)
PID	-0.041**	-0.025	-0.029*	-0.028
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Ideology	-0.063***	-0.063***	-0.061***	-0.060***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Age	-0.010	-0.013	-0.007	-0.008
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Education	0.141***	0.133***	0.141***	0.139***
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Male	-0.020	-0.018	-0.018	-0.017
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Income	0.054***	0.054***	0.054***	0.055***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Government Trust	-0.088***	-0.090***	-0.088***	-0.087***
	(0.014)	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.014)
Efficacy	0.134***	0.139***	0.136***	0.134***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Political Knowledge	0.064***	0.060***	0.063***	0.066***
	(0.017)	(0.018)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Political Interest	0.318***	0.316***	0.314***	0.316***
	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)	(0.016)
White	-0.016	-0.016	-0.015	-0.012
	(0.015)	(0.016)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Constant	0.011	0.009	0.010	0.008
	(0.013)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Observations	4,319	4,176	4,356	4,329
R^2	0.309	0.307	0.309	0.310

Note: *p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Survey Instrument

Question Wording for the 2012 ANES Study (*Response Options in Italics*)

Conspiracy Theory Questions

Was Barack Obama *definitely born in the United States, probably born in the United States, probably born in another country, or definitely born in another country?*

Does the health care law passed in2010 *definitely authorize government panels to make end of life decisions for people on Medicare, probably authorize government panels to make end of life decisions for people on Medicare, probably not authorize government panels to make end of life decisions for people on Medicare, or definitely not authorize government panels to make end of life decisions for people on Medicare?*

Did senior federal government officials *definitely know about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened, probably know about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened, probably not know about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened, or definitely not know about the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 before they happened?*

Some people say that when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast in the summer of 2005, the federal government intentionally breached flood levees in New Orleans so that poor neighborhoods would be flooded and middle class neighborhoods would be spared. *Do you think the federal government definitely did this, probably did this, probably did not do this, or definitely did not do this?*

Appendix B. Appendices for Chapter 4

The individual outcome item results

Table A4.1 The Individual Outcome Item Results (Study 1)

	Control	Treatment	Difference	t-scores	p-value
Vote in the presidential election	3.21	3.23	-0.02	-0.28	0.777
Try to contact a member of Congress	0.91	1.14	-0.23	-2.41	0.016
Persuade a friend to vote	2.16	2.27	-0.11	-1.07	0.283
Wear a campaign sticker	1.25	1.57	-0.32	-3.02	0.002
Contribute money to a candidate	0.74	1.00	-0.26	-2.81	0.005
Volunteer to work for a candidate	0.61	0.87	-0.26	-3.17	0.001
Post a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue	1.48	1.61	-0.13	-1.15	0.248

Table A4.2 The Individual Outcome Item Results (Study 2)

	Control	Treatment	Difference	t-scores	p-value
Vote in the presidential election	2.73	2.92	-0.19	-1.91	0.056
Try to contact a member of Congress	0.49	0.62	-0.13	-2.02	0.043
Persuade a friend to vote	2.33	2.58	-0.25	-2.73	0.006
Wear a campaign sticker	1.23	1.40	-0.17	-1.78	0.075
Contribute money to a candidate	0.39	0.48	-0.09	-1.60	0.109
Volunteer to work for a candidate	0.51	0.57	-0.06	-1.03	0.301
Post a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue	1.20	1.32	-0.12	-1.38	0.166
Join in a protest march, rally, or demonstration	0.87	1.00	-0.13	-1.64	0.100
Sign a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue	1.74	1.84	-0.10	-1.14	0.254

Survey Instrument

<center>**Control Group Article**</center>

<center>**Long Lines at Polling Locations In Buckingham On Super Tuesday**
-Voters were casting ballots late into the night at one community center in
Buckingham County-</center>

Some voters in Buckingham County complained about long lines on Super Tuesday. At one polling location, Darlington's East End, people were waiting until after 10 p.m. to cast their ballots.

Abbey Reed, a 35-year-old credit control analyst, was among those who waited in line for nearly three hours Tuesday.

She was in line to vote by 7 p.m. at the Montgomery Community Center. She left the polling location around 10:15 p.m. with her 6-year-old son, Tim, after casting her ballot.

At that time, there was still a group of about 35 people waiting to vote.

Buckingham County's number of polling places for the presidential primary was cut from 200 in 2012 to just 60 on Tuesday, although those were larger voting centers where any registered voter could cast a ballot. During the last presidential primary, in 2008, there were 400 polling places in the county of 4 million residents.

"People in this community vote, and everyone should have a right and speedy way to vote," Reed said as she exited the polling location. "Now, I understand that there are gonna be lines, but this is… It's kind of ridiculous."

Reed added that she had never thought about going home, because she wants to set an example for her son.

"I understand that the state government wants to cut the election costs due to facing a budget deficit, and that is why the line is long today," Reed said.

The state has faced significant shortfalls in the past years, forcing cuts by legislators. Elections are expensive to administer, and this is one area of the budget that has seen significant cuts. It's no surprise then that many voters waiting in line attributed the long lines to budget cuts.

Treatment Group Article

Long Lines at Polling Locations In Buckingham On Super Tuesday
-Voters were casting ballots late into the night at one community center in
Buckingham County-

Some voters in Buckingham County complained about long lines on Super Tuesday. At one polling location, Darlington's East End, people were waiting until after 10 p.m. to cast their ballots.

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"People in this community vote, and everyone should have a right and speedy way to vote," Reed said as she exited the polling location. "Now, I understand that there are gonna be lines, but this is… It's kind of ridiculous."

Reed added that she had never thought about going home, because she wants to set an example for her son.

"Well, Buckingham County has always turned out against the current governor. That's why they cut the polling sites," Reed said.

The governor has faced substantial opposition in this county in past years. He has long been unpopular in this area, and it has nearly cost him the election before. It's no surprise then that many voters waiting in line attributed the long lines to manipulation by the sitting governor.

Question Wording for Studies 1 and 2 (*Response Options in Italics*)

Screening
[Study 2] We are doing a study about the upcoming 2016 election. Before you continue, are you eligible to vote? *Yes, No*

Pretreatment
How often do you pay attention to what's going on in government and politics? *Always, Most of the time, About half the time, Some of the time, Never*

Some people don't pay much attention to political campaigns. How about you? Would you say that you have been interested in political campaigns so far this year? *Very much interested, Somewhat interested, Not much interested*

Are you registered to vote at your current address? *Registered at current address, Registered at a different address, Not currently registered*

Political Activities
How likely are you to do each of the following activities within the **next 6 months**.
[Study 1]
Vote for presidential election
Persuade a friend to vote
Wear a campaign sticker
Contribute money to a candidate
Please select "very likely"
Volunteer to work for a candidate
Send a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue
Try to contact a member of Congress
Not likely at all, Not too likely, Somewhat likely, Very likely, Extremely likely
[Study 2]
Vote for presidential election
Persuade a friend to vote
Wear a campaign sticker
Contribute money to a candidate
Please select "very likely"
Volunteer to work for a candidate
Send a message on Facebook or Twitter about a political issue
Try to contact a member of Congress
Join in a protest march, rally, or demonstration
Sign a petition on the Internet about a political or social issue
Not likely at all, Not too likely, Somewhat likely, Very likely, Extremely likely

Emotion
Think about the long lines in the article you just read. To what extent did you feel each of the following emotions?
[Randomized order] Angry, Mad

Not at all, Slightly, Moderately, Quite a bit, An extreme amount

Manipulation Check and Attention Check

Based on the article you have just read, why do you think there were long lines in polling places in Buckingham County? *Because state lawmakers intentionally slashed the number of polling places to suppress the number of voters. Because state government's budgets are not sufficient to accommodate an adequate number of polling places.*

In the news article, what was the name of the person who had to wait in line for nearly three hours to vote? *Liz Stoval, Abbey Reed, Beth Taylor, Kathy Farrell*

What county was mentioned in the news article? *Cook County, Anoka County, Buckingham County, Lake County*

PID

Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as a *Democrat, a Republican, an Independent, or what*? Democrats and Republicans branched to: Would you call yourself a *strong Democrat [Republican]* or a *not very strong Democrat [Republican]*? Independents and others branched to: Do you think of yourself as *closer to the Democratic Party* or *closer to the Republican Party*?

Ideology

We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative. Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale? *Extremely liberal, Liberal, Slightly liberal, Moderate; middle of the road, Slightly conservative, Conservative, Extremely conservative*

Age

In what year were you born?

Sex

What is your sex? *Male, Female*

Race

Which race/ethnicity best describes you? (Please choose only one) *American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian/Pacific Islander, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latino, White/Caucasian, Multiple ethnicity/Other (please specify)*

Education

What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received? *Less than 1st grade; 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th grade; 5th or 6th grade; 7th or 8th grade; 9th grade; 10th grade; 11th grade; 12th grade no diploma; High school graduate - high school diploma or equivalent (for example: GED); Some college but no degree; Associate degree (For example: Occupational/vocational program or Academic*

program); Bachelor's Degree (For example: BA, AB, BS); Master's Degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA); Professional School Degree (For example: MD, DDS, DVM, LLB, JD); Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)

Income

In which of these groups did your family's total income, from all sources, fall last year before taxes? *Under $5,000, $5,000-9,999, $10,000-12,499, $12,500-14,999, $15,000-17,499, $17,500-19,999, $20,000-22,499, $22,500-24,999, $25,000-27,499, $27,500-29,999, $30,000-34,999, $35,000-39,999, $40,000-44,999, $45,000-49,999, $50,000-54,999*
$55,000-59,999, $60,000-64,999, $65,000-69,999, $70,000-74,999, $75,000-79,999 $80,000-89,999, $90,000-99,999, $100,000-109,999, $110,000-124,999, $125,000-149,999, $150,000-174,999, $175,000-249,999, $250,000 or more.

Political Knowledge

Is the U.S. federal budget deficit -the amount by which the government's spending exceeds the amount of money it collects-now bigger, about the same, or smaller than it was during most of the 1990s? *Bigger, About the same, Smaller*

How many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator? *Please enter a numeric response.*

What is Medicare? *A program run by the U.S. Federal government to pay for old people's health care, A program run by state governments to provide health care to poor people, A private health insurance plan sold to individuals in all 50 states, A private, non-profit organization that runs free health clinics*

Who is the current Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives? *Nancy Pelosi, Marco Rubio, Paul Ryan, John Boehner*

What job or political office is held by Joe Biden? *House of Minority Leader, Vice President of the United States, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of State*

What job or political office is held by John Roberts? *Chair of the Democratic National Committee, Senate Majority Leader, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Chair of the Republican National Committee*

Which party currently has the most members in the House of Representatives in Washington, D.C.? *Democrats, Republicans*

Which party currently has the most members in the U.S. Senate? *Democrats, Republicans*

Whose responsibility is it to nominate judges to the U.S. Federal Courts? *The President, The U.S. Senate, The U.S. House of Representatives, The Supreme Court,*

Whose responsibility is it to determine if a law is constitutional or not? *The President, The U.S. Senate, The U.S. House of Representatives, The Supreme Court*

How much of majority is required for the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives to override a presidential veto? *1/2, 3/5, 2/3, 3/4*

Appendix C. Appendices for Chapter 5

To rule out the possibility that endogeneity was caused by two conspiracy beliefs in model 1 (3 million illegal votes) and model 2 (Trump-Russia), I ran two-stage least squares (TSLS) regression models. First, I identified instrumental variables for both model 1 and 2. These are gender, age, and race, as well as conspiratorial beliefs, as they have a strong effect on the endogenous variables, and they do not have an independent effect on the dependent variable.

Thus, for model 1, instrument variables are "3 million illegal votes are Barack Obama Muslim, Anthropogenic Global Warming, Chemtrails, Hillary Clinton-Uranium, Vaccines-Autism, Gender, Age, Race" (see the First Stage Estimation Results presented in Table A5.2 in the Appendix). Similarly, for model 2, instrument variables for Trump-Russia are 3 million illegal votes, Anthropogenic Global Warming, Chemtrails, Hillary Clinton-Uranium, Vaccines-Autism, Gender, Age, Race (see the First Stage Estimation Results presented in Table A5.2 in the Appendix).

The results of TSLS are presented in Table A5.1. First of all, the F-test of joint significance results of F=22.26 ($p < 0.01$) indicates that these are strong instruments. In model 1, weak instrument test statistic is 22.30 ($p < 0.01$), the Wu-Hausman statistic is 3.792 ($p = 0.0522$), and the Sargan statistic is 4.47 ($p = 0.61$). These indicate that instrumental variables in model 1 are sufficiently strong and the endogeneity is present, thus, the instruments are valid. Thus, in model 1, estimation yield by TSLS is consistent, whereas OLS is not.

Moving on to the column 2 in Table A5.1, in model 2, the F-test of joint significance of F = 10.02 ($p < 0.01$) barely exceeds 10, indicating that the instruments

are not sufficiently strong. The weak instrument test statistic is 10.02 ($p < 0.01$).

However, the Wu-Hausman test for endogeneity fails to reject the null that the worrisome

variable (Trump-Russia) is uncorrelated with the error term (Wu-Hausman statistic =

0.27, $p = 0.60$). The Sargn statistic is 28.62 ($p < 0.01$), indicating that the model is

overidentified. As in model 2, endogeneity is not a concern.

Table A5.1 Two-Stage Least Squares (2SLS) Results

	Dependent variable:	
	Election Integrity Commission	Mueller/House/Senate Investigation
	(1)	(2)
3 Million Illegal Votes	-0.738***	
	(0.147)	
Trump-Russia		0.941***
		(0.195)
2016 Vote Choice	0.019	0.496***
	(0.193)	(0.150)
Government Trust	-0.469**	0.358**
	(0.182)	(0.160)
PID	0.037	0.051
	(0.082)	(0.069)
Ideology	-0.083	0.158**
	(0.076)	(0.071)
Political Knowledge	-0.203**	0.132*
	(0.088)	(0.070)
Education	0.197**	-0.046
	(0.098)	(0.084)
Constant	5.947***	-1.929***
	(0.682)	(0.665)
Observations	417	417
R^2	0.185	0.523
Note:	*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table A5.2 First Stage Estimation Results

	Dependent variable:	
	3 Million Illegal Votes	Trump-Russia
	(1)	(2)
3 Million Illegal Votes		0.039
		(0.044)
2016 Vote Choice	0.452***	0.241***
	(0.093)	(0.085)
Government Trust	-0.244**	-0.213**
	(0.100)	(0.090)
PID	0.018	0.004
	(0.045)	(0.040)
Ideology	-0.031	0.088**
	(0.043)	(0.039)
Political Knowledge	-0.034	0.038
	(0.049)	(0.044)
Education	0.038	-0.023
	(0.055)	(0.049)
Barack Obama Muslim	0.103***	
	(0.020)	
Anthropogenic Global Warming	0.191***	0.259***
	(0.053)	(0.048)
Chemtrails	0.047	0.144***
	(0.051)	(0.045)
Hillary Clinton-Uranium		-0.173***
		(0.039)
Vaccines-Autism	0.235***	-0.113**
	(0.050)	(0.046)
Male	-0.014	-0.013
	(0.100)	(0.089)
Age	-0.770***	-0.356*
	(0.235)	(0.212)
White	-0.088	0.222**
	(0.118)	(0.106)
Constant	1.067***	1.974***
	(0.384)	(0.362)
Observations	417	417
R2	0.576	0.414
Note:	*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Table A5.3 Effect of Conspiracy Beliefs on Policy Stances

	Dependent variable:	
	Election Integrity Commission	Mueller/House/Senate Investigation
	(1)	(2)
Trump-Russia		0.831***
		(0.085)
3 million illegal votes	-0.405***	-0.027
	(0.090)	(0.075)
2016 Vote Choice	-0.103	0.445***
	(0.174)	(0.146)
Government Trust	-0.346*	0.305**
	(0.182)	(0.154)
PID	0.029	0.062
	(0.081)	(0.068)
Ideology	-0.052	0.097
	(0.079)	(0.066)
Political Knowledge	-0.191**	0.040
	(0.089)	(0.075)
Education2	0.154	-0.015
	(0.099)	(0.083)
Barack Obama Muslim	-0.055	
	(0.038)	
Anthropogenic Global Warming	-0.094	0.304***
	(0.098)	(0.085)
Chemtrails	-0.001	-0.048
	(0.093)	(0.078)
Hillary Clinton-Uranium		0.211***
		(0.068)
Vaccines-Autism	-0.108	-0.090
	(0.094)	(0.079)
Male	0.177	-0.086
	(0.181)	(0.151)
Age	-0.268	0.488
	(0.431)	(0.362)
White	-0.095	0.244
	(0.215)	(0.181)
Constant	5.848***	-2.514***
	(0.703)	(0.638)
Observations	417	417
R2	0.220	0.557
Note:	*p<0.10; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Survey Instrument

<p style="text-align:center;">Election Integrity Commission</p>

Dependent variable

On May 11, 2017, President Trump established, by Executive Order, a Presidential Advisory Commission in an Electoral Integrity. One of the commission's first official actions was to seek voter registration data (including names, birthdays, party affiliations, voting history, felony conviction records, and partial Social Security numbers) from every state.

Do you think the federal government should be doing more about voter fraud and the integrity of elections, should be doing less, or is it currently doing the right amount?

> Should do a great deal more to investigate voter fraud
> Should do a moderate amount more
> Should do a little more
> Is doing the right amount
> Should do a little less
> Should do a moderate amount less
> Should do a great deal less

Independent variable

You may have heard about the claim that millions of people voted illegally in the 2016 presidential election, and that they were responsible for Hillary Clinton winning the popular vote. Do you think that more than 3 million non-citizens voted in the 2016 presidential election?

> Definitely yes
> Probably yes
> Might or might not
> Probably not
> Definitely not

Muller Investigation

Dependent variable

The House Intelligence Committee, Senate Intelligence Committee, and Special Counsel Robert Muller all are investigating Russian involvement in the 2016 presidential election, including collusion between campaigns and the Russian government.

Do you think the federal government should be doing more to investigate Russian influence in the 2016 presidential election, should be doing less, or is it currently doing the right amount?

> Should do a great deal more to investigate Russian influence
> Should do a moderate amount more
> Should do a little more
> Is doing the right amount
> Should do a little less

Should do a moderate amount less
Should do a great deal less

Independent variables

You may have read news stories about Russian hackers infiltrating computer systems of Hillary Clinton's campaign, and then revealing confidential information through WikiLeaks. If this news is correct, do you think that would be a crisis for the United States, a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

Crisis
Major problem
Minor problem
Not a problem at all
No opinion

You may have read news stories about Russian hackers infiltrating states' computerized voter registration and election administration systems. If this news is correct, do you think that would be a crisis for the United States, a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

Crisis
Major problem
Minor problem
Not a problem at all
No opinion

How concerned are you about reports that people associated with Donald Trump's campaign such as chairman, Paul Manafort, as well as his Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, and National Security Adviser, Michael Flynn had contact with suspected Russian operatives during last year's campaign-very concerned, somewhat concerned, not too concerned, or not at all concerned?

Very concerned
Somewhat concerned
Not too concerned
Not at all concerned
No opinion

Control Variables
2016 vote choice
Did you vote in the 2016 presidential election, or not?
Yes, voted
No, did not vote
Prefer not to say
#drop "Prefer not to say", coded 0-1 so that 1 indicates voted

In 2016, did you vote for
        The Republican candidate, Donald Trump
        The Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton
        Another candidate
        Prefer not to say
#drop "Prefer not to say" coded 1=Hillary, 2=third party, 3=Trump

Government trust
How often can you trust the federal government in Washington to do what is right?
        Always
        Most of the time
        About half the time
        Sometimes
        Never
#1-5 higher value indicates distrust

Would you say the government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves,
or that the government is run for the benefit of all the people?
        Run by a few big interests
        For the benefit of all the people
#Binary so that 1 means distrust (Run by a few big interests)
Do you think that people in government waste a lot of the money we pay in taxes, waste
some of it, or don't waste very much of the money we pay in taxes?
        Waste a lot
        Waste some
        Don't waste very much
#1-3 so that 3 indicates distrust (waste a lot)

How many of the people running the government are corrupt?
All
Most
About half
A few
None
#1-5 so that 5 indicates distrust (all)

PID
Generally speaking, do you usually consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an
independent, or what?
        Democrat
        Republican
        Independent
        Other
Do you consider yourself to be a strong Democrat or not a strong Democrat?

Strong Democrat
Not strong Democrat

Do you consider yourself to be a strong Republican or not a strong Republican?
Strong Republican
Not strong Republican

Do you consider yourself closer to Democrats, closer to Republicans, or neither?
Closer to Democrats
Closer to Republicans
Neither
#1-7 so that 7 indicates strong Republican

Ideology
We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven-point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative.
Where would you place YOURSELF on this scale?
Extremely liberal
Liberal
Slightly liberal
Moderate; middle of the road
Slightly conservative
Conservative
Extremely conservative
#1-7 so that 7 indicates Extremely conservative

Political Knowledge
Do you happen to know, how many years is a United States Senator elected – that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?
coded 0 and 1 so that 1 indicates respondents gave correct answer "6"

Do you happen to know, is the U.S. federal budget deficit – the amount by which the government's spending exceeds the amount of money it collects – now bigger, about the same, or smaller than it was during most of the 1990s?
Bigger
About the same
Smaller
coded 0 and 1 so that 1 is correct

Do you happen to know, on which the following the U.S. federal government currently spends the least?
Foreign aid
Medicare
National defense

Social Security
coded 0 and 1 so that 1 is correct

Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington?
Democrats
Republicans
coded 0 and 1 so that 1 is correct

Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. Senate in Washington?
Democrats
Republicans
coded 0 and 1 so that 1 is correct

Education
What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?
Less than 1st grade
1st, 2nd, 3rd or 4th grade
5th or 6th grade
7th or 8th grade
9th grade
10th grade
11th grade
12th grade no diploma
High school graduate - high school diploma or equivalent (for example: GED)
Some college but no degree
Associate degree in college - Occupational/vocational program
Associate degree in college -- Academic program
Bachelor's degree (For example: BA, AB, BS)
Master's degree (For example: MA, MS, MEng, MEd, MSW, MBA)
Professional school degree (For example: MD,DDS,DVM,LLB,JD)
Doctorate degree (For example: PhD, EdD)
#coded 1-5 so that 5 indicates higher degree

Instrumental Variables

Vaccines-Autism
You may have heard about the idea that a common childhood vaccination for measles, mumps, and rubella causes autism. In your opinion, how likely or unlikely is it that vaccines cause autism?

Extremely likely
Moderately likely

Slightly likely
Slightly unlikely
Moderately unlikely
Extremely unlikely

Hillary Clinton-Uranium

You may have read news stories about a Russian company gaining control over "20 percent of America's uranium supply" in 2010, while Hillary Clinton was Secretary of State. In exchange, it is alleged, investors in the deal funneled millions of contributions to the Clinton Foundation. If this news is correct, do you think that would be a crisis for the United States, a major problem, a minor problem, or not a problem at all?

Crisis
Major problem
Minor problem
Not a problem at all
No opinion

Chemtrails

You may have heard about a clandestine U.S. government program to use commercial airliners to spray chemicals, with the goal of either managing solar radiation or controlling the weather.
Do you believe that the government has a secret program that uses airplanes to put harmful chemicals in the air, often called 'chemtrails'?

The statement is completely false
The statement is somewhat false
Unsure
The statement is somewhat true
The statement is completely true

Anthropogenic Global Warming

You may have heard that scientists have suppressed dissent, manipulated data, or even falsified data on global warming either for ideological reasons or for financial reasons, such as to protect their research funding.
Do you believe that the scientific community has twisted the evidence on global warming to exaggerate the human influence on global climate change?

The statement is completely false
The statement is somewhat false
Unsure
The statement is somewhat true
The statement is completely true

You may have heard that the Paris Climate Accord, Kyoto Protocol, and other such multinational agreements are part of a plan to justify greater and greater interventions into human activities.

Do you believe that the scientific consensus on global warming is cover for expanding the elites' political power and using that power to exert greater control over industries and ordinary people's lives?

> The statement is completely false
> The statement is somewhat false
> Unsure
> The statement is somewhat true
> The statement is completely true

Barack Obama Muslim

Is Barack Obama a Muslim, or is he not a Muslim?

> Muslim
> Not a Muslim

How sure are you about that Barack Obama is a Muslim?
> Extremely sure
> Very sure
> Moderately sure
> A little sure
> Not at all sure

Gender

Are you male or female?
> Female
> Male

#coded 0 and1 so that 1 indicates male

Age

In what year were you born?

#coded 0-1 so that 1 indicates older

White

Below is a list of five race categories. Please choose one or more races that you consider yourself to be:
> White
> Black or African American
> American Indian or Alaska Native
> Asian
> Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
> Decline to state

#coded 0-1 so that 1 indicates white