

Longwood University

Digital Commons @ Longwood University

Spring Showcase for Research and Creative Inquiry

Office of Student Research

Spring 4-14-2021

Conspiracy Theories and Political Affiliation

Amanda Palmer

Tyler Duffer

Shannon Wilms

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.longwood.edu/rci_spring



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Palmer, Amanda; Duffer, Tyler; and Wilms, Shannon, "Conspiracy Theories and Political Affiliation" (2021). *Spring Showcase for Research and Creative Inquiry*. 81.
https://digitalcommons.longwood.edu/rci_spring/81

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Office of Student Research at Digital Commons @ Longwood University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spring Showcase for Research and Creative Inquiry by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Longwood University. For more information, please contact hamiltonma@longwood.edu, alwinehd@longwood.edu.

Conspiracy Theories and Political Affiliation

Amanda Palmer, Tyler Duffer, Shannon Wilms
PSYC 461-01, Longwood University

Introduction

- Political affiliation in the United States has become a way of defining who someone is and what they believe in (Dagnall et. al, 2015)
- Political extremists have been found to be more confident in their beliefs and less tolerant of opposing views which can be problematic in society as they express their beliefs (Van Prooijen et al, 2019)
- Research on conspiracy theories indicates that belief in one conspiracy theory increases the likelihood to believe in another (Van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013)
- Research has shown that those who identify as extremists have a distrust towards those with different views. This lack of control suggests that belief in conspiracy theories is associated with political extremism (Prooijen et al, 2015)
- Most research has covered specific conspiracy theories about various politically charged events
- This focus of this study is the connection between political extremism and conspiracy theory beliefs

Research Question

Does affiliation with extreme political parties lead to a higher likelihood of belief in conspiracy theories?

H: Individuals with more extreme political affiliations, would consequently have a higher susceptibility to conspiracy mindset, suggesting a strong and positive correlation.

Method

Participants

- Sixty-four Longwood University Psychology students (34 females, 30 men) between the ages of 18 and 23 (M age = 20, SD = 1.56)
- Participants were recruited via Longwood University's Psychology department on SONA systems

Procedure

- Participants took a thirty minute online survey with ten questions from the ICMQ, 15 from the GCB scale, and five demographic questions

Measures

Political Affiliation

- Ten question Ideological Consistency Measure Questionnaire (ICMQ); 10 (Consistently Extremist) to 0 (Fully Moderate)

Conspiracy Theories

- Fifteen Question Generic Conspiracist Belief (GCB) scale; 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree); scores were combined: 5-15 (No Conspiracy Mindset) to 60-75 (Strongest Conspiracy Mindset)

Items in the Ideological Consistency Scale

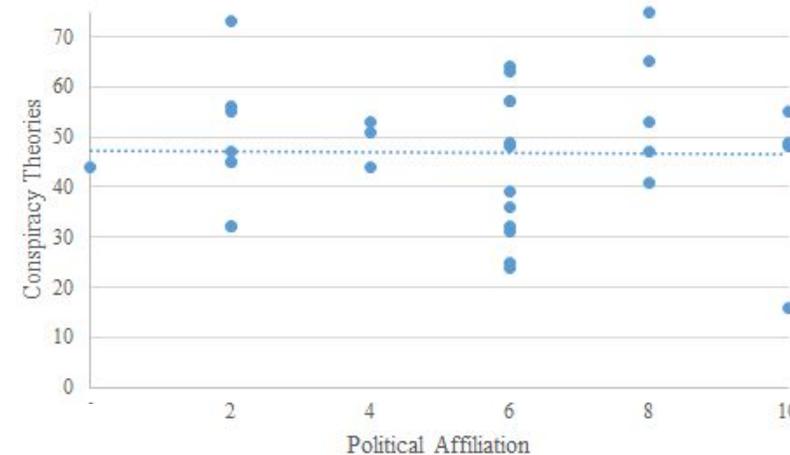
Question #	Conservative Position	[OR]	Liberal Position
Q25a	Government is almost always wasteful and inefficient		Government often does a better job than people give it credit for
Q25b	Government regulation of business usually does more harm than good		Government regulation of business is necessary to protect the public interest
Q25c	Poor people today have it easy because they can get government benefits without doing anything in return		Poor people have hard lives because government benefits don't go far enough to help them live decently
Q25d	The government today can't afford to do much more to help the needy		The government should do more to help needy Americans, even if it means going deeper into debt

Conspiracist Beliefs scale

12. The government fakes evidence relating to significant world events to deceive citizens
30. Evidence of alien contact is being concealed from the public
53. Evidence of alien presence on earth is being covered up

Results

- Political affiliation ($M = 5.45$; $SD = 2.80$) and conspiracy theories ($M = 47.00$; $SD = 13.68$) showed a small and weak correlation
- There was no significant relationship between political affiliation and conspiracy theories, $r(32) = -0.016$, $p = 0.928$.



Discussion

- Our results show that there is no connection between someone's political party extremism and their susceptibility to conspiracy beliefs
- Previous research suggested a connection between extremism and belief in conspiracies inconsistent with this study's findings (Prooijen et al, 2015)
- Limitations include number of participants, the research pool, political affiliation measurement, and no possible causation.
- Future research directions:
 - Higher conspiracy belief related to violent and irrational thoughts in society
 - Personality as a factor of political affiliation and conspiracy ideology

References

- Dagnall, N., Drinkwater, K., Parker, A., Denovan, A., Parton, M. (2015). Conspiracy theory and cognitive style: a worldview. *Frontiers in Psychology* 6. doi:10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00206
- Prooijen, J. V., Krouwel, A. P., & Pollet, T. V. (2015). Political Extremism Predicts Belief in Conspiracy Theories. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 6(5), 570-578. doi:10.1177/1948550614567356
- Van Prooijen, J., & Acker, M. (2015). The influence of control on belief in conspiracy THEORIES: Conceptual and APPLIED Extensions. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 29(5), 753-761. doi:10.1002/acp.3161
- Van Prooijen, J.-W., & Krouwel, A. P. M. (2019). Psychological Features of Extreme Political Ideologies. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 28(2), 159-163. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721418817755