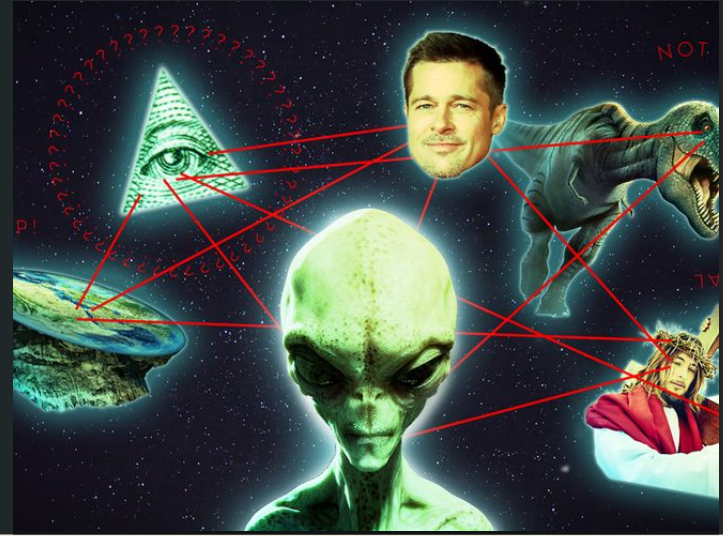


Conspiracy Theories

as a Way to
Manipulate Public
Consciousness



Political Science

Table of Contents

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

- Definition of a conspiracy theory
- Popular conspiracy theories
- How do the theories spread?
- The nature of people's beliefs in the theories
- The consequences of conspiracy theories
- The need for conspiracy theories
- How to remain conscious

Definition

A conspiracy theory

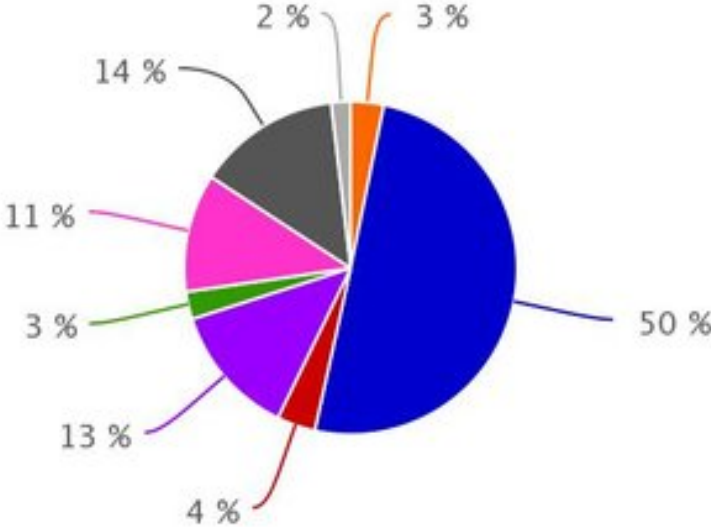
- “makes reference to hidden, malevolent forces seeking to advance some nefarious aim”
- is not necessarily untrue
- contradicts “a commonly accepted explanation for the same phenomenon”
- ceases over time and becomes history or a well-known fact (The Washington Post)



Popular conspiracy theories

Conspiracy Theories

- Apollo
- JFK Assassination
- Elvis
- 9/11
- CIA and AIDS
- Princess Diana
- None of them
- Not sure



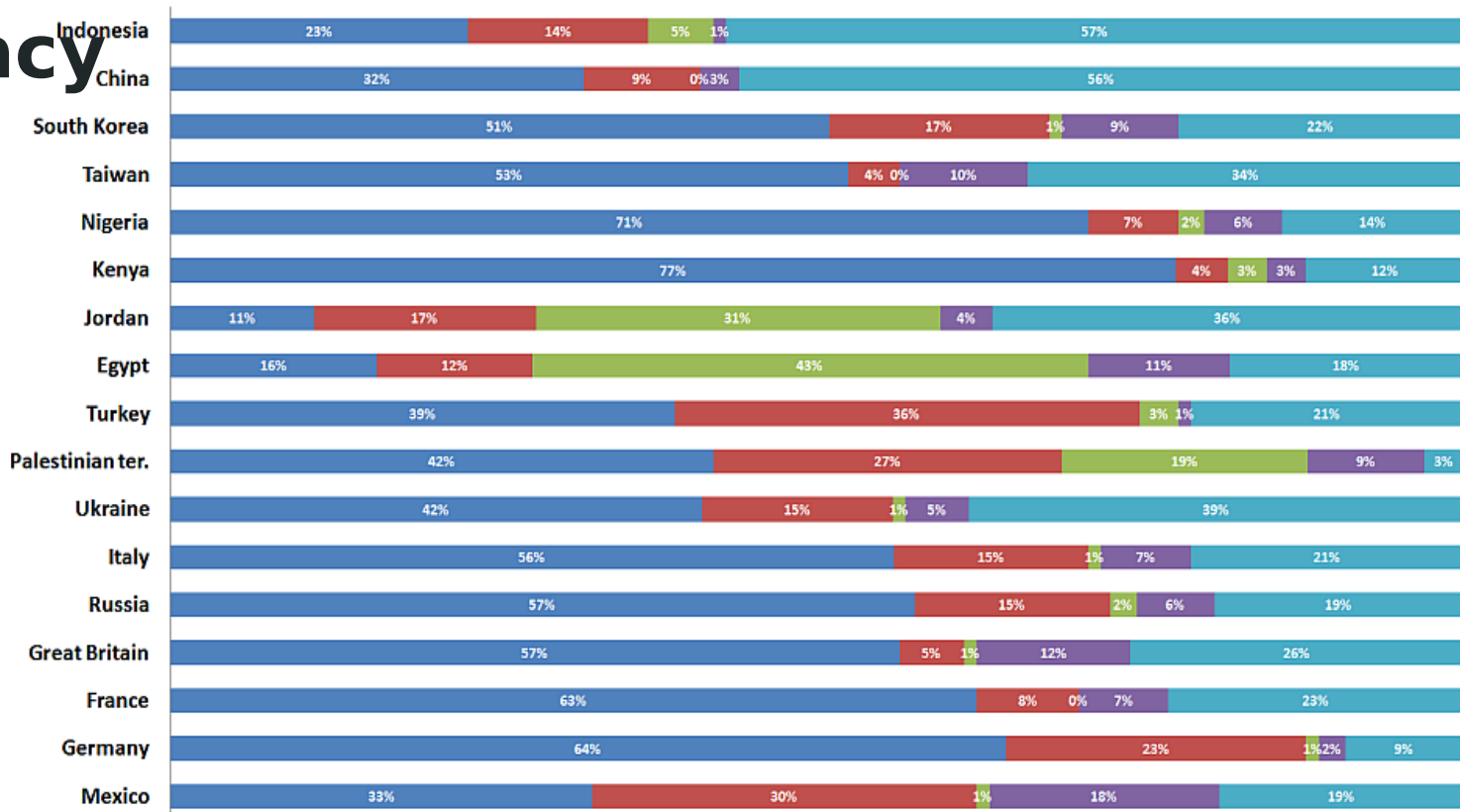
Popular conspiracy theories

JFK was killed by conspiracy	51 percent	160,096,160
Bush intentionally misled on Iraq WMDs	44 percent	138,122,178
Global warming is a hoax	37 percent	116,148,195
Aliens exist	29 percent	91,035,072
New World Order	28 percent	87,895,931
Hussein was involved in 9/11	28 percent	87,895,931
A UFO crashed at Roswell	21 percent	65,921,948
Vaccines are linked to autism	20 percent	62,782,808
The government controls minds with TV	15 percent	47,087,106
Medical industry invents diseases	15 percent	47,087,106
CIA developed crack	14 percent	43,947,966
Bigfoot exists	14 percent	43,947,966
Obama is the Antichrist	13 percent	40,808,825
The government allowed 9/11	11 percent	34,530,544
Fluoride is dangerous	9 percent	28,252,264
The moon landing was faked	7 percent	21,973,983
Bin Laden is alive	6 percent	18,834,842
Airplane contrails are sinister chemicals	5 percent	15,695,702
McCartney died in 1966	5 percent	15,695,702
Lizard people control politics	4 percent	12,556,562

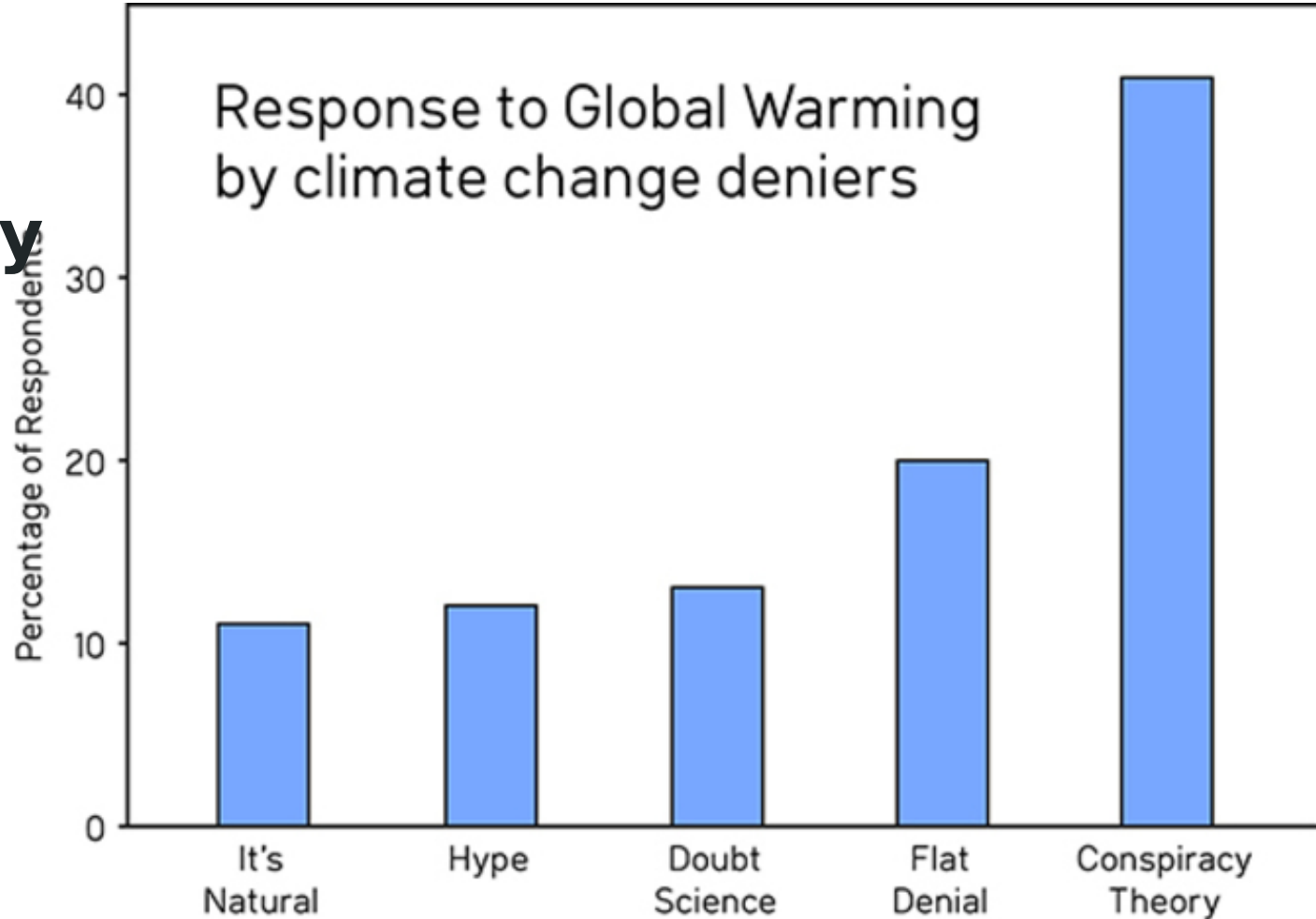
9/11 conspiracy theory

Who do you think was behind the 9/11 attacks?

■ Al-Qaeda ■ U.S. govt. ■ Israel ■ Other ■ Don't Know



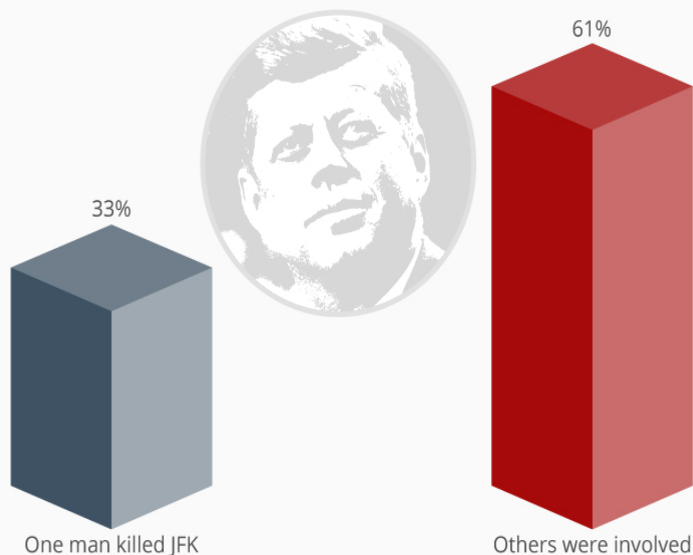
Climate change conspiracy theory



JFK conspiracy theory

Most Americans Believe JFK Conspiracy Theories

US public's beliefs about the assassination of President Kennedy



Belief in JFK conspiracies has dropped in recent years

Americans' beliefs about President John F. Kennedy's death



People also believe in these...

The 1969 moon landing was...

How often do ads contain subliminal messages?

83%

Real

14%

Staged

65%

Frequently

19%

Sometimes

15%

*Hardly
ever/never*



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Conspiracy theories appear as

- cognitive biases
- false pattern recognition
- entertainment

How do the theories spread?

→ Personality traits and characteristics:

- paranoia
- cynicism
- mistrust
- feelings of powerlessness
- anxiety
- uncertainty

→ Upbringing

→ Demographic factors:

- lower levels of education
- extremes in terms of political orientation

→ Rejection of science

The nature of people's beliefs in the theories

- are based on general and simple ideas instead of specific ones
- have a tendency towards inanimate objects
- have common traits in things that resemble each other

When strange events happen, which do you usually believe?



21%
The most mysterious explanation



The consequences of conspiracy theories

... are extremely negative.

People become less eager to take action in different areas of life, including:

- taking care of their own health
- the political system
- the improvement of the surrounding environment

Conspiracy theories:

- reduce trust in the government
- create a gap between the government and science
- devalue people as a part of the society

The need for conspiracy theories

People are most prone to start believing in conspiracy theories when they:

- feel out of control
- are anxious
- feel powerless
- find their needs threatened
- do not want to accept the real world
- need mental comfort



People feel the need for being controlled

Due to this, conspiracy theories:

- can be used as a method of manipulation
- depending on the content, motivate or discourage to do something
- misinform and encourage to take wrong actions

There is a significant relationship between “the human need for control and the tendency to believe in conspiracy theories” (Douglas, Sutton, & Cichocka)

How to remain conscious

- Do not be seduced by simplicity
- Be smart to doctored images
- Accept one's own ignorance
- Look beyond the bubble
- Be curious
- Consider
- the opposite

It is possible to reduce one's belief in theories by:

- teaching people about counter arguments
- making fun of the idea of conspiracy theories



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