Supplemental Appendix:

“Have Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories Increased Over Time?”

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I. Details about author-fielded surveys

Table A1: Original U.S. survey data fielded by authors and used across studies.

| Polling Organization | Dates Fielded | Sample Size | Sample/Sampling Procedure | IRB Protocol # (University of [redacted]) |
|----------------------|---------------|-------------|---------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| 1. CCES              | October 2012  | 1,230       | Opt-in YouGov panelists; weighted to be representative | 20120757                                 |
| 2. CCES              | October 2016  | 1,000       | Opt-in YouGov panelists; weighted to be representative | 20120757/ MOD00013692                     |
| 3. CCES              | October 2018  | 1,000       | Opt-in YouGov panelists; weighted to be representative | 20120757/ MOD00023764                     |
| 4. Qualtrics         | July 2019     | 2,000       | Quota sample; stratified to be representative | 20190623                                  |
| 5. Qualtrics         | March 2020    | 2,023       | Quota sample; stratified to be representative | 20200095                                  |
| 6. Qualtrics         | June 2020     | 1,040       | Quota sample; stratified to be representative | 20200673                                  |
| 7. Qualtrics         | October 2020  | 2,015       | Quota sample; stratified to be representative | 20201154                                  |
| 8. Qualtrics         | May 2021      | 2,021       | Quota sample; stratified to be representative | 20210244                                  |

Note: “CCES”=Cooperative Congressional Election Study; all surveys fielded on U.S. adults (18+).
Table A2: Sociodemographic information about all original U.S. samples, compared to 2010 U.S. Census estimates.

| Characteristic         | 2010 Census Estimate | Qualtrics May 2021 | Qualtrics October 2020 | Qualtrics June 2020 | Qualtrics March 2020 | Qualtrics July 2019 | CCES Oct. 2018 | CCES Oct. 2016 | CCES Oct. 2012 |
|------------------------|----------------------|--------------------|------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|---------------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| Age                    | 38                   | 48                 | 43                     | 46.5                | 39                   | 50                  | 48             | 48             | 47             |
| High school degree     | 88                   | 97                 | 97                     | 98                  | 95                   | 99                  | 91             | 89             | 89             |
| Some college or more   | 59                   | 71                 | 76                     | 76                  | 60                   | 60                  | 63             | 59             | 59             |
| Female                 | 51                   | 50                 | 51                     | 51                  | 52                   | 52                  | 52             | 52             | 52             |
| White                  | 72                   | 62                 | 68                     | 60                  | 65                   | 62                  | 70             | 73             | 73             |
| Black                  | 13                   | 14                 | 14                     | 17                  | 15                   | 14                  | 13             | 12             | 12             |
| Hispanic               | 16                   | 16                 | 17                     | 27                  | 18                   | 16                  | 9              | 6              | 8              |
| n                      | 2,021                | 2,015              | 1,040                  | 2,023               | 2,000                | 1,000               | 1,000          | 1,230          |

Note: All entries are percentages except age, which is the median.

While median age is slightly higher for our surveys than the 2010 Census estimates, recall that we are able to poll on only those age 18 years old and older, whereas the Census provides the median age of all Americans.
Table A3: Descriptive characteristics of European samples in 2016, by country.

| Variable (range)          | GB    | DE    | SE    | PT    | IT    | PL    |
|---------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| Trust in Media (0–3)      | 0.87  | 1.24  | 1.25  | 1.18  | 1.03  | 1.06  |
|                           | (0.73)| (0.81)| (0.92)| (0.72)| (0.76)| (0.73)|
| Trust Government (0–3)    | 0.77  | 0.99  | 1.13  | 0.70  | 0.63  | 0.56  |
|                           | (0.74)| (0.81)| (0.94)| (0.65)| (0.72)| (0.71)|
| Ideology (1–5)            | 2.86  | 2.86  | 3.28  | 2.71  | 2.75  | 3.08  |
|                           | (1.20)| (0.99)| (1.31)| (1.41)| (1.30)| (1.27)|
| Religious Thinking (0–3)  | 0.73  | 0.92  | 0.60  | 1.12  | 1.25  | 1.23  |
|                           | (0.90)| (1.01)| (0.80)| (1.01)| (0.98)| (1.10)|
| Education (1–5)           | 2.94  | 3.02  | 3.00  | 3.14  | 2.88  | 3.52  |
|                           | (1.13)| (1.06)| (1.14)| (1.15)| (1.37)| (1.34)|
| Unemployed (prop.)        | 0.06  | 0.04  | 0.04  | 0.11  | 0.13  | 0.06  |
|                           | (0.24)| (0.19)| (0.19)| (0.32)| (0.34)| (0.24)|
| Age (18–87)               | 48.91 | 48.42 | 48.86 | 43.67 | 45.96 | 44.37 |
|                           | (16.98)| (14.85)| (17.90)| (13.88)| (14.86)| (14.86)|
| Female (prop.)            | 0.56  | 0.50  | 0.51  | 0.50  | 0.52  | 0.51  |
|                           | (0.50)| (0.50)| (0.50)| (0.50)| (0.50)| (0.50)|
| n                         | 1,742 | 2,039 | 1,007 | 500   | 1,001 | 1,000 |

Note: Entries are means (unless where otherwise noted) with standard deviations in parentheses. Country codes are as follows: Great Britain (GB), Germany (DE), Sweden (SE), Portugal (PT), Italy (IT), Poland (PT).
II. Details about surveys not fielded by authors

**Table A4:** Details about surveys from which the first time points in Table 3 were taken. Only includes those surveys not fielded by the authors (which are described above).

| Question wording (response options)                                                                 | Dates Fielded       | Polling Organization        | Target                      | Sample Size |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 1. Do you believe the government adds fluoride to our water supply, not for dental health reasons, but for other, more sinister reasons, or not? (Do/do not) | 3/27/2013–3/30/2013 | Public Policy Polling       | Registered voters           | 1,247       |
| 2. Do you believe global warming is a hoax, or not? (Do/do not)                                   | 3/27/2013–3/30/2013 | Public Policy Polling       | Registered voters           | 1,247       |
| 3. Do you think the government is keeping information from the public that shows U.F.O.’s (Unidentified Flying Objects) are real or that aliens have visited the Earth? (Yes/no) | 6/27/1996–6/28/1996 | PSRA/Newsweek Poll          | Adults                      | 769         |
| 4. Do you believe media or the government adds secret mind-controlling technology to television broadcast signals, or not? (Do/do not) | 3/27/2013–3/30/2013 | Public Policy Polling       | Registered voters           | 1,247       |
| 5. Do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or completely disagree that AIDS is a form of systematic destruction of minorities like blacks and Hispanics? | 11/27/1995–12/17/1995 | Kaiser Survey on Americans and AIDS/HIV | Adults                      | 1,511       |
| 6. Do you think that the Reagan campaign made a deal with the Iranians to hold the American hostages in Iran until after the 1980 presidential election or not? | 7/17/1991–7/18/1991 | Time/CNN/Yankelovich Clancy Shulman Poll | Adults                      | 1,000       |
| 7. Do you think one man was responsible for the assassination of President Kennedy, or do you think there were others involved? (Others/one man) | 12/8/1966–12/13/1966 | Gallup (AIPO)               | Adults                      | 1,469       |
| 8. Thinking about space exploration, do you think the government staged and faked the Apollo moon landings, or don't you feel that way? (Yes, staged/no, not staged) | 7/19/1995–7/20/1995 | Time/CNN/Yankelovich Partners Poll | Adults                      | 1,000       |
| 9. Do you believe that Osama bin Laden is dead, or do you think he is still alive? (Alive/dead)     | 6/3/2011–6/7/2011   | CNN/Opinion Research Corporation Poll | Adults                      | 1,015       |
10. Do you believe that the pharmaceutical industry is in league with the medical industry to "invent" new diseases in order to make money, or not? (Do/do not)  
11. Some people have argued that President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew about Japanese plans to bomb Pearl Harbor but did nothing about it because he wanted an excuse to involve the U.S. (United States) on the side of the allies in the war. From what you know or have read, do you agree or disagree with this point of view? (Agree/disagree)  
12. Some people are hiding the truth about the December 14, 2012 school shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary in order to advance a political agenda (Agree/disagree/neither agree nor disagree)  
13. Do you think the U.S. government has engaged in the assassination of entertainers who have tried to spread a counterculture message they didn’t like, such as John Lennon, Kurt Cobain, Tupac Shakur, and others, or not? (Yes/no)  
14. Do you feel that the Assassination of Martin Luther King was the act of one individual or part of a larger conspiracy? (One individual/larger conspiracy)  
15. Do you feel that the Assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy was the act of one individual or part of a larger conspiracy? (One individual/larger conspiracy)  
16. Are you a believer in QANON? (Yes/no)  
17. The Food and Drug Administration is deliberately preventing the public from getting natural cures for cancer and other diseases because of pressure from drug companies. (SA–SD)  
18. Health officials know that cell phones cause cancer but are doing nothing to stop it because large corporations won't let them. (SA–SD)
19. Certain U.S. government officials planned the attacks of September 11, 2001, because they wanted the United States to go to war in the Middle East. (SA–SD)

20. The U.S. government is mandating the switch to compact fluorescent light bulbs because such lights make people more obedient and easier to control. (SA–SD)

21. Billionaire George Soros is behind a hidden plot to destabilize the American government, take control of the media, and put the world under his control. (SA–SD)

22. Do you think there was a police conspiracy to frame O.J. Simpson or not? (Yes/no)

23. Do you think there is, or is not, a national conspiracy to kill policemen? (Is/is not)

Note: All polls are of Americans. “SA–SD” corresponds to five-point Likert type response options ranging from strongly agree to strong disagree.
### III. Table with all conspiracy theories in Study 1

**Table A5: Change in 51 conspiracy beliefs over time.**

| Question wording                                                                 | Percentage 1 (Time 1) | Percentage 2 (Time 2) | Diff. | p-value for difference |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------|------------------------|
| 1. Humans have made contact with aliens and this fact has been deliberately      | 23 (07/2019)          | 33 (03/2020)          | +10   | <0.001                 |
| 2. Do you think the U.S. government has engaged in the assassination of           | 12 (09/2013)          | 20 (05/2021)          | +8    | <0.001                 |
| entertainers who have tried to spread a counterculture message they didn’t like, |                       |                       |       |                        |
| such as John Lennon, Kurt Cobain, Tupac Shakur, and others, or not?**            |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 3. Billionaire George Soros is behind a hidden plot to destabilize the American  | 19 (10/2011)          | 26 (05/2021)          | +7    | <0.001                 |
| government, take control of the media, and put the world under his control.      |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 4. The number of deaths related to the coronavirus has been exaggerated.         | 29 (06/2020)          | 36 (05/2021)          | +7    | <0.001                 |
| 5. Do you think one man was responsible for the assassination of President       | 50 (12/1966)          | 56 (05/2021)          | +6    | <0.001                 |
| Kennedy, or do you think there were others involved?                             |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 6. Do you believe that the pharmaceutical industry is in league with the medical  | 15 (03/2013)          | 20 (05/2021)          | +5    | <0.001                 |
| industry to "invent" new diseases in order to make money, or not?**              |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 7. Thinking about space exploration, do you think the government staged and      | 6 (07/1995)           | 10 (05/2021)          | +4    | <0.001                 |
| faked the Apollo moon landings, or don't you feel that way?                      |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 8. Do you believe media or the government adds secret mind-controlling           | 15 (03/2013)          | 17 (05/2021)          | +2    | 0.132                  |
| technology to television broadcast signals, or not?*                            |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 9. Do you believe the government adds fluoride to our water supply, not for      | 9 (03/2013)           | 11 (05/2021)          | +2    | 0.067                  |
| dental health reasons, but for other, more sinister reasons, or not?**          |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 10. Do you think the government is keeping information from the public that      | 49 (06/1996)          | 50 (05/2021)          | +1    | 0.637                  |
| shows U.F.O.'s (Unidentified Flying Objects) are real or that aliens have       |                       |                       |       |                        |
| visited the Earth?                                                              |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 11. Are you a believer in QANON?**                                               | 5 (08/2019)           | 6 (05/2021)           | +1    | 0.205                  |
| 12. There is a “deep state” embedded in the government that operates in secret   | 43 (03/2020)          | 44 (05/2021)          | +1    | 0.521                  |
| and without oversight.                                                          |                       |                       |       |                        |
| 13. Hillary Clinton conspired to provide Russia with access to nuclear materials. | 28 (03/2020)          | 29 (04/2021)          | +1    | 0.481                  |
| 14. The U.S. government is mandating the switch to compact fluorescent light     | 11 (10/2011)          | 12 (05/2021)          | +1    | 0.325                  |
| bulbs because such lights make people more obedient and easier to control.       |                       |                       |       |                        |
| Number | Statement                                                                                                                                  | Supporting Value 1 | Supporting Value 2 | Difference | Confidence Score |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------|------------------|
| 15.    | The threat of coronavirus has been exaggerated by political groups who want to damage President Trump.                                    | 30 (03/2020)      | 31 (10/2020)      | +1         | 0.490            |
| 16.    | Hydroxychloroquine can prevent or cure COVID-19.                                                                                         | 18 (06/2020)      | 18 (05/2021)      | 0          | >0.999           |
| 17.    | Health officials know that cell phones cause cancer but are doing nothing to stop it because large corporations won't let them.          | 20 (09/2013)      | 20 (05/2021)      | 0          | >0.999           |
| 18.    | Certain U.S. government officials planned the attacks of September 11, 2001, because they wanted the United States to go to war in the Middle East. | 19 (10/2011)      | 19 (05/2021)      | 0          | >0.999           |
| 19.    | Regardless of who is officially in charge of governments and other organizations, there is a single group of people who secretly control events and rule the world together. | 35 (03/2020)      | 35 (10/2020)      | 0          | >0.999           |
| 20.    | The number of Jews killed by the Nazis during World War II has been exaggerated on purpose.                                               | 15 (03/2020)      | 15 (10/2020)      | 0          | >0.999           |
| 21.    | Climate change is a hoax perpetrated by corrupt scientists and politicians.                                                                 | 19 (07/2019)      | 19 (10/2020)      | 0          | >0.999           |
| 22.    | Barack Obama faked his citizenship to become president.                                                                                   | 20 (03/2020)      | 19 (05/2021)      | −1         | 0.422            |
| 23.    | Do you completely agree, mostly agree, mostly disagree, or completely disagree that AIDS is a form of systematic destruction of minorities like blacks and Hispanics? | 16 (11/1995)      | 15 (05/2021)      | −1         | 0.416            |
| 24.    | The coronavirus is being used to force a dangerous and unnecessary vaccine on Americans.                                                 | 25 (06/2020)      | 24 (05/2021)      | −1         | 0.541            |
| 25.    | The dangers of vaccines are being hidden by the medical establishment.                                                                    | 30 (03/2020)      | 29 (05/2021)      | −1         | 0.486            |
| 26.    | Elites, from government and Hollywood, are engaged in a massive child sex trafficking racket.                                            | 35 (10/2020)      | 34 (05/2021)      | −1         | 0.504            |
| 27.    | Coronavirus was purposely created and released by powerful people as part of a conspiracy.                                                | 31 (03/2020)      | 29 (05/2021)      | −2         | 0.165            |
| 28.    | Jeffrey Epstein, the billionaire accused of running an elite sex trafficking ring, was murdered to cover-up the activities of his criminal network. | 50 (03/2020)      | 48 (05/2021)      | −2         | 0.203            |
| 29.    | The Food and Drug Administration is deliberately preventing the public from getting natural cures for cancer and other diseases because of pressure from drug companies. | 37 (09/2013)      | 35 (05/2021)      | −2         | 0.235            |
| 30.    | The one percent (1%) of the richest people in the U.S. control the government and the economy for their own benefit.                       | 55 (03/2020)      | 52 (05/2021)      | −3         | 0.056            |
| 31.    | A powerful family, the Rothschilds, through their wealth, controls governments, wars, and many countries' economies.                      | 29 (03/2020)      | 26 (05/2021)      | −3         | 0.033            |
32. Bill Gates is behind the coronavirus pandemic.
33. The AIDS virus was created and spread around the world on purpose by a
    secret organization.
34. The dangers of 5G cellphone technology are being covered up.
35. 5G cell phone technology is responsible for the spread of the coronavirus.
36. Do you feel that the Assassination of Senator Robert Kennedy was the act of
    one individual or part of a larger conspiracy?
37. The dangers of genetically-modified foods are being hidden from the public.
38. School shootings, like those at Sandy Hook, CT and Parkland, FL are false
    flag attacks perpetrated by the government.
39. Do you believe that Osama bin Laden is dead, or do you think he is still alive?
40. The coronavirus is being used to install tracking devices inside our bodies.
41. Putting disinfectant into your body can prevent or cure COVID-19.
42. Donald Trump colluded with Russia to rig the 2016 presidential election.
43. Some people are hiding the truth about the December 14, 2012 school shooting
    at Sandy Hook Elementary in order to advance a political agenda. *
44. Some people have argued that President Franklin D. Roosevelt knew about
    Japanese plans to bomb Pearl Harbor but did nothing about it because he
    wanted an excuse to involve the U.S. (United States) on the side of the allies in
    the war.
45. Republicans won the presidential elections in 2016, 2004, and 2000 by stealing
    them.
46. Do you believe global warming is a hoax, or not?
47. Do you think there was a police conspiracy to frame O.J. Simpson or not?
48. Do you feel that the Assassination of Martin Luther King was the act of one
    individual or part of a larger conspiracy?
49. Do you think there is, or is not, a national conspiracy to kill police?
50. Do you think that the Reagan campaign made a deal with the Iranians to hold
    the American hostages in Iran until after the 1980 presidential election or not?

Note: $P$-value corresponds to two-tailed difference in proportions test. All polls are of U.S. adults. Where response options are not dichotomous (e.g., yes/no, believe/don’t believe), the proportion expressing belief is those who “agree” or “strongly agree” with a sentiment. *registered voters only.
IV. Examining the potential impact of survey design

We undertook several analyses to ensure that various elements of survey design were not systematically impacting results in Study 1. Note, however, that Studies 2, 3, and 4 all use data collected via identical methods across data points, so survey design has no bearing on our findings of stability.

First, we investigated whether there are systematic differences in support for conspiracy belief by survey mode. There are four different modes represent in our dataset. Average support for conspiracy theories, by mode, are as follows:

- Online: 25.34 (n=84)
- Automated telephone: 15.50 (n=6)
- Telephone: 33.40 (n=10)
- Face-to-face: 47 (n=2)

Contrary to what one may expect, we find higher levels of reported conspiracy beliefs among those who were interviewed by a trained interviewer, either over the telephone or face-to-face, compared to those who completed their questionnaire online or by automated telephone poll. Because sample sizes are quite small for some modes, we tested the effect of mode in a regression context, including controls for year (so as not to confound the effect of mode and year, which are related) and a dummy variable that simply captures whether the survey was fielded by Qualtrics. Results appear in the first column of Table A6; online is the omitted reference category for the mode variable and standard errors are clustered by conspiracy theory question (of which there are two entries for each question).

None of the three variables we consider are statistically significant. If we remove the Qualtrics dummy variable, we do find a significant (p=0.004) coefficient on the automated telephone category of -14.385, suggesting that automated phone polls showed lower levels of conspiracy theory belief than online polls, on average. Note, however, that there is only one automated phone poll in our dataset—Public Policy Polling—which contains six conspiracy belief questions. Also note that this finding works against our principle finding of stability, since automated phone polls are always T1 and never T2 (i.e., this pattern is much more likely to result in an observed increase in conspiracy beliefs than a decrease).

Next, we considered whether the number of conspiracy belief questions on a given poll may have depressed stated conspiracy beliefs by triggering social desirability bias in a different way. For example, respondents may react differently when confronted with only a single or small number of conspiracy belief questions compared to a scenario where a great many are asked at once.

This task is somewhat complicated by the fact that we do not have access to the full questionnaire for every data point we employ—sometimes these were made available in the Roper Center database or by individual researchers, sometimes they were not. However, Roper does include descriptions of the topics addressed by questionnaires. We used this information to create a dummy variable coded 0 if we know or can reasonably surmise that only conspiracy belief question or a single conspiracy theory topic was addressed in a given survey, or 1 if we know that there were multiple questions about multiple conspiracy theories. We re-estimated the
model from the first column of Table A6, including this new dummy variable; results appear in the second column.

We find a significant positive impact of the number of conspiracy belief questions asked on a survey on average support for conspiracy theories (note, however, that we do not observe a significant bivariate correlation between beliefs and this variable, \( p=0.981 \)). As with the findings regarding survey mode, this result provides peace of mind: surveys with many conspiracy belief questions, which are more likely to serve as \( T_2 \) data points than \( T_1 \) data points, reveal higher levels of support for conspiracy theories, on average. If \( T_2 \) is likely to be greater than \( T_1 \), on average, this would work against our principle finding of general stability over time.

Altogether, we find little reason for concern that survey mode or questionnaire design are systematically promoting the results we present in the main text. If anything, these supplemental analyses show that design effects may promote a bias in favor of an increase in conspiracy theory beliefs, rather than stability or a decrease.

### Table A6: OLS regression of percentage of conspiracy believers for each conspiracy theory in Study 1, standard errors clustered by conspiracy theory question.

|                          | 1            | 2            |
|--------------------------|--------------|--------------|
| **Mode: Automated telephone** | -10.433      | -10.827      |
|                          | (8.457)      | (8.278)      |
| **Mode: Telephone**      | -11.197      | 3.967        |
|                          | (8.586)      | (9.557)      |
| **Mode: Face-to-face**   | -20.993      | 1.744        |
|                          | (13.587)     | (18.756)     |
| **Qualtrics?**           | 5.265        | 2.671        |
|                          | (8.526)      | (8.438)      |
| **Year**                 | -0.914**     | -0.576       |
|                          | (0.321)      | (0.357)      |
| **Number of CTs on Survey** | 15.179*     |              |
|                          |              | (7.092)      |
| **R^2**                  | 0.154        | 0.183        |
| **n**                    | 102          | 102          |

Note: OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.

***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05
V. Examining changes in and impact of “don’t know” responses

Restricting our analysis, at first, to only those conspiracy beliefs that were polled at least 20 years before the most recent data we employ (i.e., 2001 or earlier), we are left with 10 conspiracy theories. We then computed the correlation between change in “don’t know/no opinion” rates and change in beliefs (subtracting T₂ from T₁), which is −0.36 (p=0.305). Note the large p-value. This is not only because of the small number of observations, but a relatively unclear pattern, as Figure A1 below showcases. Even if the correlation were clearer and statistically significant, Studies 3 and 4 demonstrate that once the peculiarities of specific conspiracy theories have been removed from the equation, there is much more stability than change.

We also note that, when examining only the conspiracy theory questions that were first polled in the last 20 years, we still observe an average change of −2.27 percentage points in beliefs, compared to −4.57 on the full sample. In other words, our substantive conclusion—that stability is most common, and when there is change it tends to be downward—is unaffected by removal of the older polls. Indeed, of the conspiracy theory beliefs first polled during or after 2001 in Table 3, four showed a significant increase, 13 showed no change, and eight showed a significant decrease (i.e., double the number that increased).

Figure A1: Change in the percentage of conspiracy theory believers by change in the percentage of “don’t know” or “no opinion” responses for T₁ polls fielded before 2001. LOWESS smoother and 95% confidence band in blue; regression line in red.
With this supplementary analysis, we wish to make two brief theoretical notes. First, it’s difficult to know how “don’t know” or “no opinion” should be interpreted. Many of these responses could be due to respondents not having heard of the conspiracy theory before. We don’t suspect that this would stop individuals high in conspiracy thinking from providing affirmative responses—these individuals see conspiracies all around them, regardless of logic, reality, or their knowledge of the details of a given theory (robust correlations between conspiracy thinking and beliefs in specific conspiracy theories provide, some of which we present in the appendix, are highly suggestive of this). Some could have heard the conspiracy theory in question expressed in a different way or simply have no opinion, regardless of their knowledge of the event in question. Likewise, some, who might have agreed with the conspiracy theory in years prior, might now be less enthusiastic about it as positive evidence has, over decades, failed to avail itself. We have no way of distinguishing between these possibilities.

Second, an increase in “don’t know” responses seems to us to be evidence against an increase in conspiracism, in anything. If people require historical details about the events involved in a given theory, then it would be hard to conclude that they have become more conspiratorial over time. Instead, it appears that (some) “old” conspiracy theories fade and new ones become relevant—this process is more consistent with replacement than a cumulative increase.
VI. Psychometric properties of the ACTS

**Figure A2:** Cronbach’s alpha and proportion of variance accounted for by first factor of an exploratory factor analysis (iterated principal axis factoring) of the ACTS conspiracy thinking items.
VII. Predictive validity of the ACTS

In order to showcase the validity of the ACTS, we examine the predictive power when it comes to beliefs in specific conspiracy theories. Using the May 2021 survey, we generated a variable that captures a count of all conspiracy theories endorsed by each respondent (out of 37 such beliefs on this survey). We then regressed this count on the ACTS, plus controls for partisanship, ideology, religiosity, age, educational attainment, gender, race, and ethnicity. Model results and question wording follow. Figure A3 shows the predicted number of conspiracy theory beliefs held at for people falling in lower, middle, and upper third of the conspiracy thinking scale. Those in the upper third believe more than five times the number of conspiracy theories as those in the lower third.

Question wording/variable coding:

Conspiracy thinking. (each item is 1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree; \(\alpha=0.86, M=3.11, SD=1.00\)):
1. Much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places.
2. Even though we live in a democracy, a few people will always run things anyway.
3. The people who really 'run' the country, are not known to the voters.
4. Big events like wars, the current recession, and the outcomes of elections are controlled by small groups of people who are working in secret against the rest of us.

Ideology. (self-placement; 1=extremely liberal, 7=extremely conservative)

Partisanship. (self-placement; 1=strong Democrat, 7=strong Republican)

Religiosity. "On average, I attend religious services or a place of worship: (please do not include weddings or funerals)"
1. Never
2. A few times a year
3. Once or twice a month
4. Once a week
5. Every day

Sociodemographics:
1. Educational attainment (6-point scale, 1=No high school degree, 5=post-grad degree)
2. Age (age in years, 18–96)
3. Gender (0=male, 1=female)
4. Race (Black: 0=not Black, 1=Black; White: 0=not White, 1=White)
5. Ethnicity (Hispanic: 0=not Hispanic, 1=Hispanic)
Table A7: OLS regression of count of conspiracy theory beliefs on ACTS plus controls. May 2021 survey.

|                          | Coefficient | Std. Error | p-value |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------|---------|
| Conspiracy Thinking (ACTS)| 5.806**     | (0.179)    |         |
| Partisanship             | 0.017       | (0.079)    |         |
| Ideology                 | 0.062       | (0.094)    |         |
| Religiosity              | 0.578***    | (0.105)    |         |
| Age                      | -0.055***   | (0.008)    |         |
| Education                | -0.002      | (0.092)    |         |
| Female                   | -0.749**    | (0.264)    |         |
| White                    | 0.186       | (0.443)    |         |
| Black                    | 0.715       | (0.534)    |         |
| Hispanic                 | 0.445       | (0.501)    |         |
| Constant                 | -2.023      | (0.784)    |         |

|              |             |            |         |
|--------------|-------------|------------|---------|
| R²           | 0.407       |            |         |
| n            | 2019        |            |         |

Note: OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses.
***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05
**Figure A3:** Predicted number of conspiracy theory beliefs held by level of conspiracy thinking, holding control variables at their mean.