

QAnon and Conspiracy Beliefs

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supported by ISD and funded by Luminare.

Summary

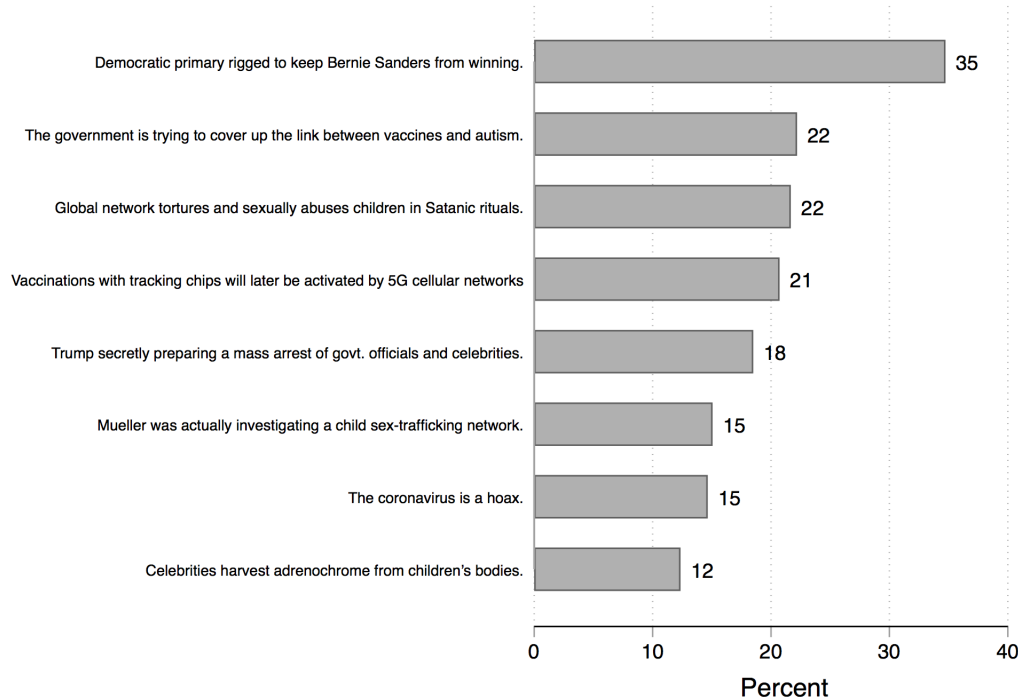
The findings in this report are based on a survey of 4,057 American adults. The survey was designed to probe the relationship between QAnon and conspiracy belief in the United States. Among the key findings:

- Only a small percentage of Americans know a lot about QAnon, and a majority report that they have not heard anything at all about it.
- The average American had heard less than one of the four QAnon conspiracy theories we asked about. Surveys that simply ask about belief in conspiracy theories likely overstate how much Americans believe in conspiracies outside of the survey context.
- Nevertheless, conspiracy belief is still fairly widespread; 41% of Americans had heard about and believed in at least one of the eight conspiracy theories we asked about. About one-in-five Americans recognized and believed in at least one of the four conspiracy claims that originated from QAnon.
- After accounting for the fact that most Americans have not heard of QAnon, only 7% have a favorable view of QAnon and a similar percentage say they can trust QAnon to provide accurate information at least most of the time.
- Views towards QAnon should not be taken as synonymous with conspiracy belief. The average respondent who viewed QAnon favorably had heard less than half of the four QAnon conspiracies we asked about and they only believed one of the four. Thus, QAnon supporters do not even know about, much less believe, all of the QAnon conspiracies.
- Similarly, conspiracy belief is not limited to QAnon supporters. In fact, 16% of those who did not rate QAnon favorably recognized and believed at least one of QAnon's conspiracy claims.

Conspiracy Beliefs

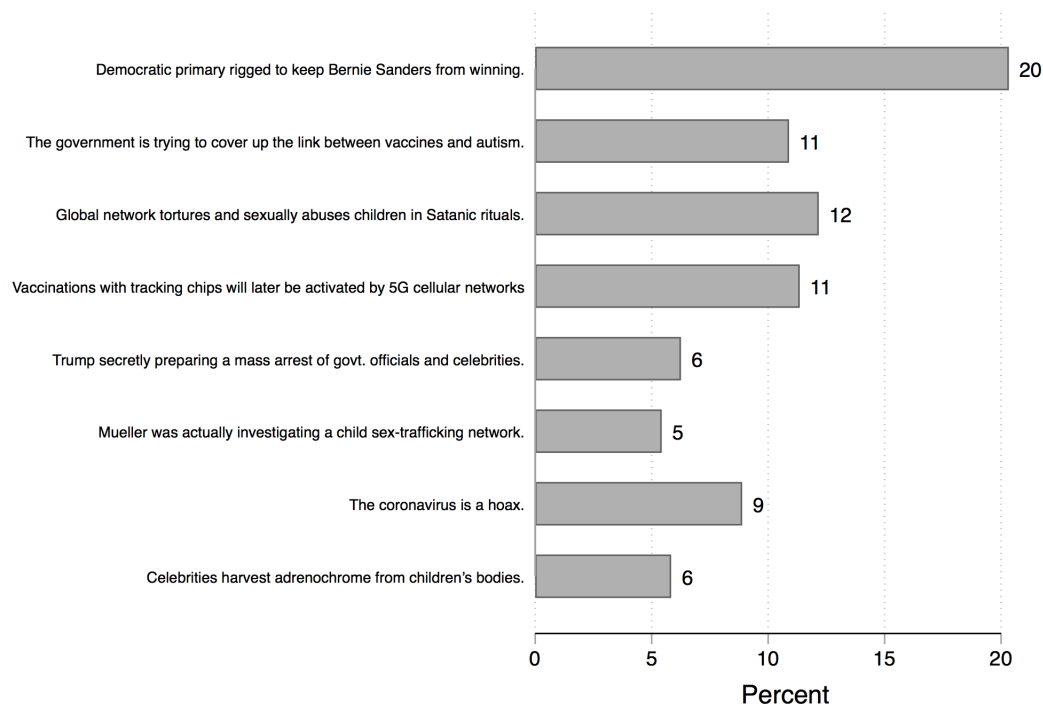
The survey asked respondents about eight conspiracy theories, four of which come from QAnon and others that do not. None of these conspiracy theories is true. Respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought each statement was “definitely true,” “probably true,” “probably false,” “definitely false,” or they could indicate that they were not sure. Notably, the two conspiracies that people are most likely to believe do not originate from QAnon – 35% think it is probably or definitely true that the Democratic Party rigged the primary to keep Bernie Sanders from winning the nomination and 22% think it is true that the government is covering up a link between vaccines and autism. Nevertheless, as many as one-in-five Americans say there is truth in at least some of the more outlandish QAnon claims.

Percent saying each conspiracy is probably or definitely true



However, it is important to be cognizant of the role of the survey instrument in this process; specifically, many of these respondents may actually be hearing these claims for the first time when asked about them during the survey and this may inflate our estimates of how many Americans actually believe in these conspiracies. To capture this dynamic, we followed up by asking respondents to indicate each of the claims that they had heard before seeing them in the survey. For all but one of the conspiracies (that involving the rigging of the Democratic primary against Sanders), a large majority of respondents indicated that they had not heard the claim before taking the survey. The average respondent had heard between 2 and 3 of the 8 conspiracy claims we asked about. Fewer than one-in-five

Percent saying each conspiracy is probably or definitely true and saying they had heard conspiracy before taking the survey



respondents had heard claims about Trump secretly preparing a mass arrest of officials and celebrities, that Mueller was investigating a child sex-trafficking network, or that celebrities harvest adrenochrome from children's bodies. For most other conspiracies we asked about, fewer than one-third said they had heard about it before the survey.

Thus, a better estimate of the prevalence of conspiracy belief among Americans can be derived by looking at the percentage of respondents who both say they had heard the claim before taking the survey and say that they believe it is true. With this calculation, we estimate that about one-in-five Americans believe that the Democratic primary was rigged against Bernie Sanders and about one-in-ten Americans believe conspiracies regarding a link between vaccines and autism, a global network that tortures and abuses children (a QAnon conspiracy), that Covid-19 vaccines will have tracking chips activated by 5G networks, and that the coronavirus is a hoax. About one-in-twenty say they have both heard of and believe the QAnon claims that Trump is preparing mass arrests of politicians and celebrities, that celebrities harvest adrenochrome from children's bodies, and that Mueller was actually investigating a child sex-trafficking network.

Notably, a fairly large share of Americans – 41% – believed in at least one conspiracy theory that they had heard before taking the survey. 22% of Americans believed and had heard just one of the claims – for about half of this group, the claim they knew about and believed was the one related to the primary being rigged against Sanders. Thus, about four-in-five Americans believed and had heard of one or zero of the eight conspiracy

theories. 6% said they had heard of and believed at least half of the conspiracy claims.

Belief in the QAnon conspiracies was more rare. Fewer than one-in-five (19%) said they had heard of and believed in any of the QAnon claims. Only 7% of Americans recognized and believed in more than one QAnon conspiracy. Fewer than 1% said they believed in all four QAnon claims.

Views of QAnon

Understanding and contextualizing QAnon’s reach and influence involves first understanding how many people are aware of QAnon. Our survey asked respondents how much they had heard or read about QAnon, a question that has also asked by the Pew Research Center.¹ Our findings are similar to Pew’s on this metric. In our survey, just 7% report that they have heard or read a lot about QAnon, with an additional 34% saying they have heard or read a little. A majority of Americans have heard nothing at all.

How much heard or read about QAnon?

Response	This survey	Pew survey
A lot	7%	9%
A little	34%	38%
Nothing at all	60%	53%

For those who knew something about QAnon, we also asked where they had first heard about QAnon. The accompanying word cloud shows the most common words included in responses to this question. Among the key sources from which people have learned about QAnon include the news and social media sites, especially

Facebook and Twitter. People also frequently reported first hearing about QAnon from friends or from Donald Trump. On average, about 10% of people who reported using various social media platforms said they saw information about QAnon on those platforms at least once a day.

When respondents indicated that they had heard something about QAnon, we asked follow up questions including a question asking whether they had a favorable or unfavorable view of QAnon and whether they thought they could trust QAnon to provide accurate information. Overall, just 2% of Americans say they have a very favorable impression of QAnon with another 5% reporting a somewhat favorable view. 24% of Americans have a somewhat or very unfavorable view of QAnon while 69% are unsure or haven’t heard about QAnon. Republicans are more likely to view QAnon favorably than Democrats, with 12% of Republicans expressing a favorable view compared to 5% of Democrats.

Where first hear about QAnon?



¹<https://pewrsr.ch/3ksWADH>

The degree to which respondents trust QAnon to provide accurate information is fairly equivocal. Just 2% of Americans say they “always” trust QAnon to provide accurate information with an additional 5% saying they trust QAnon most of the time. However, about one-in-six Americans say that they trust QAnon at least some of the time.

There are some noteworthy partisan divisions when it comes to trust in QAnon. About one-in-four Republicans say that they trust QAnon at least some of the time compared to just 13% of Democrats who say the same. Similarly, 87% of

How often can you trust QAnon to provide accurate information?

Response	Total	Democrats	Republicans
Always	2%	2%	4%
Most of the time	5%	4%	7%
Only some of the time	10%	7%	13%
Never	23%	35%	13%
Haven't heard of QAnon	60%	52%	63%

Democrats either never trust QAnon or have not heard about QAnon, compared to 76% of Republicans. There was also a notable age-based divide; Americans under the age of 45 were about twice as likely to say they trust QAnon at least some of the time compared to those 45 and over (23% to 12%).

Respondents were also asked whether their own beliefs about QAnon had negatively affected their relationships with friends and family. About 40% of those who said that QAnon can always or most of the time be trusted to provide accurate information (just 7% of the total sample) said that their relationships had been negatively affected by the fact that their friends and family did not agree that QAnon could be trusted.

QAnon and Conspiracy Belief

Only a minority of Americans have heard of QAnon, but 7% still have a favorable view of QAnon. How does conspiracy belief relate to QAnon favorability? In the table below, we show the percent of people who both had heard of each QAnon conspiracy before taking the survey and who also say they believe that the conspiracy is true. We do this for three groups – those who rate QAnon favorably (about 7% of the sample), those who rate QAnon unfavorably (24%) and those who are not sure how they would rate QAnon or have never heard of it (69%).

This exercise illuminates a couple of important patterns. First, just because an individual indicates that they have a favorable view of QAnon does not necessarily mean that they believe in QAnon’s conspiracy claims. For example, just 38% of those rating QAnon favorably had heard of and believe the conspiracy involving the abuse of children by global networks elites. For other QAnon conspiracies, the pre-survey beliefs were even lower. What this means is that it is problematic to equate an individual’s support for QAnon with belief in all of QAnon’s conspiracy theories.

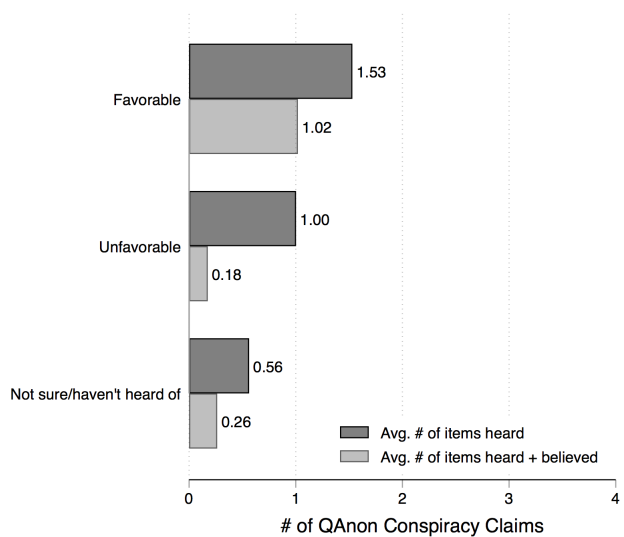
Percent who had heard of and believe in QAnon conspiracies by rating of QAnon

QAnon Conspiracy	Rating of QAnon			Total
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Not sure/ haven't heard of	
Global network tortures and sexually abuses children in Satanic rituals.	38%	6%	10.9	12%
Trump secretly preparing a mass arrest of govt. officials and celebrities.	26%	4%	5%	6%
Celebrities harvest adrenochrome from children's bodies.	21%	3%	5%	6%
Mueller was actually investigating a child sex-trafficking network.	19%	3%	4%	5%

However, a second important point that arises from this analysis is the notion that conspiracy belief is broader than simply those who support QAnon. For example, of the 12% of Americans who believe the conspiracy about tracking chips and 5G networks, just 22% have a favorable view of QAnon. The vast majority (64%) of Americans who believe this conspiracy are those who said they hadn't heard of QAnon or weren't sure how to rate it. The same is true for each of the QAnon conspiracy claims – the individuals who had heard of these claims before the survey and say that they believe them are mostly people who haven't heard of QAnon or rate it unfavorably.

Another way of looking at these dynamics is to consider how many of the four QAnon conspiracy claims respondents had heard before taking the survey and how many they heard and believed. Among the small group of Americans who have a favorable view of QAnon, the average number of QAnon conspiracies they had heard before the survey was just 1.53 (out of a total of 4). Thus, the QAnon supporters are not fully enmeshed in all of the QAnon conspiracies. Additionally, the average number of QAnon conspiracies that QAnon supporters had heard and said they thought were true was even smaller – 1.02. Among those with an unfavorable view the average number of QAnon conspiracies recognized was 1 but the average number that they had heard and said they believed was just .18. Finally, among the vast majority of respondents who hadn't heard of QAnon or were not sure how to rate it, the

Average number of QAnon conspiracy claims heard and believed by QAnon favorability



average number of QAnon conspiracy theories recognized was .56 and the average number recognized and believed was .26.

Thus, it is certainly true that QAnon supporters express much higher knowledge of and belief in QAnon's conspiracy claims, but a majority of QAnon supporters had heard of only zero of 1 of these claims. At the same time, just because a respondent had not heard of QAnon did not mean that they were free from conspiracy belief. In fact, 16% of Americans who did not rate QAnon favorably said they had heard of and believed at least one of QAnon's conspiracy claims.

Conclusion

The findings from this study provide important context for understanding the relationship between QAnon and the broader problem of conspiracy theory beliefs. A majority of Americans know nothing about QAnon and fewer than one-in-ten have a favorable view toward it. Furthermore, even among the small group of QAnon supporters, there is not widespread recognition of – or belief in – QAnon conspiracy claims. At the same time, a majority of those who recognized and believed in QAnon conspiracy theories that we asked about were not QAnon supporters (most said they had not even heard of QAnon). To be sure, conspiracy belief is much less common among those who are unaware of or feel negatively towards QAnon, but some among this group (16%) have heard of and believe at least one QAnon conspiracy theory. Ultimately, equating QAnon support in a survey with full adherence to the conspiracy claims put forth by QAnon likely overstates the extent to which QAnon supporters are fully enmeshed in QAnon and minimizes the penetration and influence of QAnon conspiracy theories beyond those who identify as supporters.

Survey methodology

The survey was fielded online on September 18th-20th, 2020 using respondents provided by Lucid. After removing respondents who failed attention check items, the final sample was 4,057 American adults. Post-stratification weights were used to ensure that the sample was representative of American adults on targets from the American Community Survey. The survey was weighted on age, region, gender, race, education, and the interaction of race and education. Weights ranged from .432 to 3.862. The survey has a margin of error of ± 1.7 percentage points, though the margin of error will be larger for subgroups.

At the end of the survey, respondents were debriefed about each of the conspiracy claims and were told that each had been proven untrue by reputable sources. We also provided respondents with links to resources that debunk these conspiracies and an ISD resource that explains how to identify false conspiracy theories.