

# The Big Lie: Expressive Responding and Misperceptions in the United States\*

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## Abstract

Misinformation about events surrounding the 2020 election and the COVID-19 pandemic pose an existential threat to American democracy and public health. Public opinion surveys reveal that high percentages of Republicans indicate that they endorse some aspects of mistaken beliefs surrounding election fraud in the 2020 election. Still, understanding how to measure the endorsement of misperceptions is critical for understanding the threat at hand. Are high levels of mistaken beliefs genuinely held, or are they partially a function of expressive responding? I address this question through a set of survey experiments encouraging accuracy oriented processing among the general public. Using well-powered surveys of Republicans and Independents, I find that treatments designed to encourage more accurate responses are ineffective in reducing the endorsement of partisan electoral and public health misperceptions and can in some cases even backfire. These findings suggest that support for these misperceptions are genuinely held.

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\*The data, code, and any additional materials required to replicate all analyses in this article are available at the Journal of Experimental Political Science Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network, at: [doi.org/10.7910/DVN/KTTNGM](https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/KTTNGM)

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# Supplemental Information: Expressive Responding and Partisan Misperceptions

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## A Republican Study

### A.1 Demographic Variables

	<i>Republican Sample<sup>+</sup></i>	<i>Independent Sample<sup>*</sup></i>
Age	50.0 (16.6)	41.0 (12.3)
Female	61.0%	46.2 %
College Degree	39.9%	60.1%
White	83.6%	72.4%
Ideology <sup>++</sup>	5.64 (1.23)	4.22 (1.18)
N	1496	597

<sup>+</sup>Source: CloudResearch Prime Panel Survey, Feb. 3, 2022.

<sup>\*</sup>Source: MTurk via CloudResearch, Mar. 7-11, 2022.

<sup>++</sup>7-point ideological scale from “extremely liberal” to ‘extremely conservative.’”

## A.2 Endorsement of Mistaken Beliefs By Partisan ID: Main Study

Variable	False Statement	Rep Sample+	Independent Sample*
<i>Election Winner</i>	Donald Trump was the legitimate winner of the 2020 presidential election.	.57	.16
<i>Antifa</i>	The Jan. 6th riot at the Capitol was mostly led by violent left-wing protesters trying to make Trump look bad.	.46	.12
<i>Votes Changed</i>	The 2020 election was stolen from Donald Trump through the use of voting machines which changed individual voters' votes.	.53	.15
<i>Immigrant Vote</i>	Donald Trump lost the 2020 Electoral College because of high numbers of illegal immigrants who voted for Joe Biden in Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Arizona.	.49	.11
<i>COVID</i>	The COVID-19 vaccine is dangerous and ineffective at combating coronavirus.	.33	.23
<i>Moon Landing</i>	The Apollo 11 Mission, commonly known as the moon landing, was later proven to be fake.	.09	.07

<sup>+</sup>N = 1564. Source: CloudResearch Prime Panel Survey, Feb. 3, 2022.

<sup>\*</sup>N = 597. Source: MTurk via CloudResearch, Feb. 7-11, 2022.

### A.3 CFA: Big Lie (Republicans)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Error Var</b>
<i>Votes Changed</i>	.410	.011	.082
<i>Antifa</i>	.256	.012	.181
<i>Election Winner</i>	.418	.011	.071
<i>Immigrant Vote</i>	.343	.012	.132

N = 1680. Source: CloudResearch Prime Panel Survey, Feb. 3, 2022.

Chi-square = 6.14 (p = .05), RMSEA = .035, CFI: .995.

**A.4 CFA: Full Omnibus DV (Republicans)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Error Var</b>
<i>Votes Changed</i>	.412	.011	.080
<i>Antifa</i>	.258	.012	.181
<i>Election Winner</i>	.417	.011	.073
<i>Immigrant Vote</i>	.342	.012	.132
<i>COVID</i>	.192	.011	.187

N = 1680. Source: CloudResearch Prime Panel Survey, Feb. 3, 2022.

Chi-square = 12.79 (p = .025), RMSEA = .030, CFI: .997.

**A.5 Regression of Treatment on Factor DVs (Republican)**

	Big Lie	Omnibus
(Intercept)	2.185*** (0.240)	2.777*** (0.275)
Accuracy	-0.061 (0.100)	-0.025 (0.113)
Response	0.175* (0.101)	0.226** (0.114)
White	0.129 (0.108)	0.208* (0.122)
Female	0.036 (0.087)	0.035 (0.099)
Age	-0.006** (0.003)	-0.013*** (0.003)
College Educated	-0.278*** (0.086)	-0.359*** (0.097)
Self Monitoring	0.016 (0.017)	0.020 (0.019)
AIC	5568.2	5941.7
N	1486	1486

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

Source: CloudResearch, Feb. 3, 2022.



**A.6 Regression of Treatment on Individual DVs (Republican)**

	Votes Changed	Imm Vote	Elec Winner	Antifa	COVID	Moon
(Intercept)	0.557*** (0.077)	0.527*** (0.077)	0.622*** (0.076)	0.474*** (0.077)	0.590*** (0.072)	0.151*** (0.046)
Accuracy	-0.033 (0.032)	-0.008 (0.032)	-0.019 (0.031)	-0.004 (0.032)	0.035 (0.029)	-0.013 (0.019)
Response	0.009 (0.032)	0.050 (0.032)	0.030 (0.031)	0.083*** (0.032)	0.050* (0.029)	-0.032* (0.018)
White	0.010 (0.036)	0.069* (0.036)	0.027 (0.035)	0.025 (0.036)	0.079** (0.032)	-0.061** (0.024)
Female	0.012 (0.027)	-0.012 (0.027)	0.072*** (0.027)	-0.035 (0.027)	0.000 (0.025)	0.012 (0.016)
Age	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.002*** (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.007*** (0.001)	-0.001*** (0.000)
College Educ	-0.085*** (0.027)	-0.074*** (0.027)	-0.074*** (0.027)	-0.046* (0.027)	-0.082*** (0.024)	-0.035** (0.015)
Self Monitor	0.008 (0.005)	0.004 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.002 (0.005)	0.003 (0.005)	0.011*** (0.003)
AIC	2152.5	2150.9	2111.7	2154.2	1886.9	514.3
N	1487	1486	1487	1487	1487	1487

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

Source: CloudResearch, Feb. 3, 2022.

**A.7 Regression of Treatments on Factor DVs (Trump Supporters)**

	Big Lie	Omnibus
(Intercept)	2.499*** (0.249)	3.160*** (0.288)
Accuracy	0.000 (0.105)	0.050 (0.120)
Response	0.118 (0.103)	0.175 (0.117)
White	-0.007 (0.112)	0.068 (0.128)
Female	0.096 (0.090)	0.080 (0.103)
Age	-0.007** (0.003)	-0.015*** (0.003)
College Educated	-0.228*** (0.087)	-0.298*** (0.100)
Self Monitoring	0.015 (0.018)	0.017 (0.021)
AIC	4843.0	5190.9
N	1309	1309

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

Source: CloudResearch, Feb. 3, 2022.

**A.8 Regression of Treatments on Individual DVs (Trump Supporters)**

	Votes Changed	Imm Vote	Elec Winner	Antifa	COVID	Moon
(Intercept)	0.635*** (0.081)	0.606*** (0.083)	0.741*** (0.080)	0.514*** (0.083)	0.659*** (0.078)	0.226*** (0.053)
Accuracy	-0.020 (0.034)	0.011 (0.034)	-0.012 (0.033)	0.018 (0.034)	0.049 (0.031)	-0.011 (0.021)
Response	-0.009 (0.033)	0.047 (0.033)	0.001 (0.032)	0.076** (0.034)	0.055* (0.031)	-0.033 (0.020)
White	-0.024 (0.039)	0.061 (0.039)	-0.030 (0.037)	-0.013 (0.040)	0.076** (0.036)	-0.060** (0.028)
Female	0.028 (0.028)	0.003 (0.029)	0.081*** (0.028)	-0.015 (0.029)	-0.015 (0.027)	-0.004 (0.017)
Age	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	-0.003*** (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	-0.008*** (0.001)	-0.002*** (0.001)
College Educ	-0.074*** (0.028)	-0.055* (0.028)	-0.059** (0.027)	-0.042 (0.028)	-0.070*** (0.026)	-0.041** (0.016)
Self Monitor	0.008 (0.006)	0.003 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)	0.003 (0.006)	0.009** (0.004)
AIC	1872.2	1891.5	1807.7	1910.6	1690.5	520.3
N	1310	1309	1310	1310	1310	1310

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

Source: CloudResearch, Feb. 3, 2022.

## A.9 Effect of Treatment Group on Voting for Donald Trump

	<i>Trump Vote</i>
(Intercept)	0.529*** (0.065)
Accuracy	-0.027 (0.023)
Response	0.042* (0.021)
White	0.010 (0.028)
Ideology	0.024** (0.009)
Female	-0.034+ (0.018)
Age	0.003*** (0.001)
College Educated	0.081*** (0.017)
Num.Obs.	1422
AIC	973.7
Std.Errors	Robust

Source: CloudResearch, Feb. 3, 2022.

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

## B Independent Study

### B.1 CFA: Big Lie (Independents)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Error Var</b>
<i>Votes Changed</i>	.308	.013	.036
<i>Antifa</i>	.177	.013	.073
<i>Election Winner</i>	.317	.013	.034
<i>Immigrant Vote</i>	.204	.012	.053

N = 594. Source: MTurk via CloudResearch, Mar. 7-11, 2022.

Chi-square = 5.53 (p = .06), RMSEA = .055, CFI: .996.

## B.2 CFA: Full Omnibus DV (Independents)

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Estimate</b>	<b>SE</b>	<b>Error Var</b>
<i>Votes Changed</i>	.313	.013	.033
<i>Antifa</i>	.184	.013	.070
<i>Election Winner</i>	.309	.013	.039
<i>Immigrant Vote</i>	.202	.012	.054
<i>COVID</i>	.244	.017	.120

N = 596. Source: MTurk via CloudResearch, Mar. 7-11, 2022.

Chi-square = 41.02 (p = .01), RMSEA = .110, CFI: .969.

**B.3 Regression of Treatment on Factor DVs (Independents)**

	Big Lie	Omnibus
(Intercept)	0.190 (0.239)	0.306 (0.298)
Accuracy	-0.062 (0.113)	-0.059 (0.141)
Response	-0.059 (0.111)	-0.062 (0.139)
White	-0.151 (0.107)	-0.120 (0.134)
Female	0.262*** (0.093)	0.361*** (0.116)
Age	0.007* (0.004)	0.006 (0.005)
College Educated	-0.134 (0.094)	-0.180 (0.117)
Self Monitoring	0.029 (0.022)	0.043 (0.027)
N	592	592
AIC	1791.9	2058.1

Source: CloudResearch, March 7-11, 2022.

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

**B.4 Regression of Treatment on Individual DVs (Independents)**

	Votes Changed	Imm Vote	Elec Winner	Antifa	COVID	Moon
(Intercept)	0.000 (0.07)	0.082 (0.064)	0.046 (0.082)	0.062 (0.071)	0.115 (0.087)	0.182*** (0.064)
Accuracy	-0.037 (0.038)	0.002 (0.030)	-0.064* (0.038)	0.037 (0.034)	0.003 (0.044)	-0.023 (0.026)
Response	-0.044 (0.037)	0.037 (0.031)	-0.056 (0.037)	0.004 (0.030)	-0.003 (0.042)	-0.020 (0.025)
White	-0.003 (0.035)	-0.058* (0.032)	-0.071** (0.036)	-0.018 (0.031)	0.031 (0.039)	-0.059** (0.027)
Female	0.051* (0.030)	0.060** (0.026)	0.081*** (0.031)	0.070** (0.027)	0.099*** (0.036)	0.017 (0.021)
Age	0.002 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
College Educated	-0.017 (0.031)	-0.041 (0.027)	-0.047 (0.031)	-0.029 (0.028)	-0.046 (0.036)	-0.058*** (0.022)
Self Monitoring	0.014* (0.007)	0.003 (0.006)	0.007 (0.007)	0.005 (0.007)	0.015 (0.009)	-0.003 (0.005)
N	592	592	592	592	592	592

Source: CloudResearch, March 7-11, 2022.

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$



## C Supplementary Pre-Registered Hypothesis

I registered an additional hypothesis below which suggested that the efficacy of treatments designed to encourage accuracy oriented processing would be moderated by an individuals' level of self-monitoring.

**H Supplemental:** *Accuracy pressures and response substitution will be less effective for Republicans with low levels of self-monitoring.*

To test this, I begin by confirming the reliability of the three factor self-monitoring scale<sup>1</sup>: given acceptable reliability (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .72$ ), I sum the three items to create the *Self-Monitor* variable. I next interact the self-monitor variable with each treatment variable to create two interaction variables (*Response X Self Monitor* and *Accuracy X Self Monitor*). I then regress both the *Big Lie* and *Omnibus* variables on the interaction variables as well as their constituent terms (*Accuracy*, *Response* and *Self-Monitor*) and control variables for both the Republican and Trump subsamples. As shown in Appendices C.1 & C.2, neither the interactive terms or the lower order coefficients are associated with any significant change in support for either factor variable (*Big Lie* and *Omnibus*).

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<sup>1</sup>See Appendix D.4 for full text.

**C.1 Regression Including Self-Monitor Interaction (Republican)**

	Big Lie	Omnibus
(Intercept)	2.284*** (0.290)	2.912*** (0.332)
Accuracy	-0.089 (0.291)	-0.091 (0.330)
Response	-0.079 (0.298)	-0.094 (0.337)
Self Monitoring	0.003 (0.029)	0.001 (0.033)
White	0.130 (0.109)	0.208* (0.122)
Female	0.034 (0.087)	0.033 (0.099)
Age	-0.006** (0.003)	-0.013*** (0.003)
College Educated	-0.276*** (0.086)	-0.356*** (0.097)
Accuracy X Self Monitor	0.004 (0.039)	0.010 (0.044)
Response X Self Monitor	0.036 (0.040)	0.046 (0.046)
AIC	5571.2	5944.6
N	1486	1486

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

Source: CloudResearch, Feb. 3, 2022.

**C.2 Regression Including Self-Monitor Interaction (Trump Supporters)**

	Big Lie	Omnibus
(Intercept)	2.536*** (0.304)	3.229*** (0.350)
Accuracy	0.046 (0.315)	0.069 (0.360)
Response	-0.022 (0.304)	-0.028 (0.344)
Self Monitoring	0.010 (0.030)	0.008 (0.034)
White	-0.006 (0.112)	0.070 (0.128)
Female	0.095 (0.090)	0.079 (0.103)
Age	-0.007** (0.003)	-0.015*** (0.003)
College Educated	-0.227*** (0.088)	-0.296*** (0.100)
Accuracy X Self Monitoring	-0.007 (0.043)	-0.003 (0.049)
Response X Self Monitoring	0.020 (0.041)	0.029 (0.046)
AIC	4846.5	5194.4
N	1309	1309

\*  $p < 0.1$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Robust Standard Errors in parentheses

Source: CloudResearch, Feb. 3, 2022.

## D Survey Items: Main Study

### D.1 Experimental Design

Treatment Arm	Treatment Text	Response Options
<i>Control</i>	We are now going to show you a series of statements. These statements will come in pairs. We would like you to tell us which of the statements you think is <b>most likely</b> to be true.	NA
<i>Accuracy Pressure</i>	Before you answer our next set of questions, we want to remind you that it is important to answer as accurately as you can. We try to use data only from respondents who clearly demonstrate that they have read and understood the survey. Our work depends on you answering honestly. Do you attest that you will answer accurately and to the best of your knowledge?	Yes (1) No (0)
<i>Response Substitution</i>	Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: It would be better for America if Donald Trump were still the president.	Strongly Agree (5) Agree (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)
	Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: The public health benefits of restrictions on public activity to prevent the spread of coronavirus—such as mask wearing, vaccine mandates, and travel bans— <b>have been worth</b> the cost.	Strongly Agree (5) Agree (4) Neither Agree nor Disagree (3) Disagree (2) Strongly Disagree (1)

## D.2 Misperceptions

<b>Variable</b>	<b>False Statement</b>	<b>True Statement</b>
<i>Election Winner</i>	Donald Trump was the legitimate winner of 2020 presidential election.	Joe Biden was the legitimate winner of the 2020 presidential election.
<i>Antifa</i>	The Jan. 6th riot at the Capitol was mostly led by violent left-wing protestors trying to make Trump look bad.	The Jan. 6th riot at the Capitol was mostly led by Trump supporters angry that he had lost the election.
<i>Votes Changed</i>	The election was stolen from Donald Trump through the use of voting machines which changed individual voters' votes.	There was no evidence that individual votes were changed by voting machines in the 2020 election.
<i>COVID</i>	The COVID-19 vaccine is dangerous and ineffective at combating coronavirus.	The COVID-19 vaccine is safe and effective at combating coronavirus.
<i>Moon</i>	The Apollo 11 mission to the moon, popularly known as the moon landing, was later proven to be fake.	During the nine successful Apollo missions, 12 American astronauts walked on the moon.
<i>Immigrants Voted</i>	Donald Trump lost the 2020 Electoral College because of high numbers of illegal immigrants who voted for Joe Biden in Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Arizona.	There is no evidence that illegal immigrants voted in large numbers in the 2020 election, including in the battleground states of Georgia, Pennsylvania, and Arizona. These elections were certified as free and fair by both Republic and Democratic lawmakers.

### D.3 Pre-Stimuli Battery

Variable	Survey Item	Response Options	Coding
<i>Partisanship*</i>	Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Republican, Democrat, an Independent, or what?	Strong Democrat	7
		Weak Democrat	6
		Independent Democrat	5
		Independent Independent	4
		Independent Republican	3
		Weak Republican	2
		Strong Republican	1
<i>Ideology</i>	Here is a 7-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, or haven't you thought much about this?	Extremely liberal	1
		Liberal	2
		Slightly liberal	3
		Moderate/Middle of Road	4
		Slightly Conservative	5
		Conservative	6
		Extremely Conservative	7

\* Derived from two question format employed by the American National Election Studies.

## D.4 Self-Monitoring Battery\*

Variable	Survey Item	Response Options	Coding
<i>Self-Monitor 1</i>	How good or bad of an actor would you be?	Excellent	5
		Good	4
		Fair	3
		Poor	2
		Very poor	1
<i>Self-Monitor 2</i>	When you're in a group of people, how often are you the center of attention?	Always	5
		Most of the time	4
		About half the time	3
		Once in a while	2
		Never	1
<i>Self-Monitor 3</i>	When you're with other people, how often do you put on a show to impress or entertain them?	Always	5
		Most of the time	4
		About half the time	3
		Once in a while	2
		Never	1

\* Drawn from Berinsky and Lavine (2012).

## D.5 Control Items

Variable	Survey Item	Response Options	Coding
<i>Vote Choice</i>	You may know that the 2020 presidential election was held on November 2nd, 2020 between Joe Biden and Donald Trump. Do you recall who you voted for, or were you not able to vote?	Donald Trump	1
		Joe Biden	0
		Someone else	2
		I was not eligible or able to vote	8
<i>Race+</i>	Which of the following best describes your racial or ethnic background?	White non-Hispanic	8
		White Hispanic	7
		Black non-Hispanic	6
		Black Hispanic	5
		Asian	4
		Native American	3
		Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2
		Other/Multiracial	1
<i>Gender</i>	What is your gender?	Male	2
		Female	1
		Non-binary/other	0
<i>Age</i>	What is your age in years?	Text entry box	Input age
<i>Education</i>	What is the highest level of education you have completed?	8th Grade or lower	1
		Some high school, no degree	2
		High school grad/GED	3
		Some college, no degree	4
		College degree	5
		Professional degree	6

<sup>+</sup> Derived from U.S. Census two question format asking for race and Hispanic origin separately.



## E Supplemental Ethics Appendix

Given that the topic of this project deals with inaccurate statements, special care was taken to ensure that the research did not cause the further dissemination of misperceptions which threaten democracy. In particular, we avoided any type of deception, and provided an alternate question format (Clifford, Kim and Sullivan 2020) which presented the accurate statement alongside the misperception. Following the experiment (but before payment), respondents were also explicitly debriefed about the inaccurate statements, and provided with both academic and journalistic sources providing evidence for the debrief (full text of the debrief found on the OSF website [here](#)). Respondents initially consented to their inclusion both by accepting the survey invitation from CloudResearch, as well as explicitly at the beginning of the survey where they were presented with information about the survey, including length, topic, researcher affiliation and identity, and risks and benefits of the survey. Respondents were paid .80 USD for completion of the survey, with a median completion time of approximately four and a half minutes, for an hourly rate of approximately 10.67 USD per hour, well above minimum wage.

## F Power Analysis

In order to ensure that the analyses are sufficiently powered, a power analysis was conducted using the “pwr” package in R. I expect that the effect sizes will be between small (.05) and moderate (.15), given previous findings concerning expressive responding and accuracy oriented processing (Schaffner and Luks 2018; Prior, Sood and Khanna 2015). Using the standard power of .8, alpha level of .05 and an effect size of .05, I would require 192 respondents per treatment group. All models, including those examining heterogeneous treatment effects, are therefore well powered to measure the preregistered hypotheses.

## **G Conspiracy Theories, Misperceptions, and Mistaken Beliefs:**

### **Note on Terminology**

Previous versions of this article utilized the term “conspiracy theories” to describe the six substantive statements measured in the experimental treatments. In the interest of more precise conceptualization, however, the current version of this article uses the broader term “misperceptions.” I specifically use the classic definition of Sunstein and Vermeule (2009) to define a conspiracy theory: concerted efforts to explain some event by invoking powerful actors who seek to keep their involvement in such events hidden. A classic example of such inaccurate theories is that the September 11th attacks were an “inside job” orchestrated by the Bush administration in order to justify a war in the Middle East. This clearly satisfies the necessary conditions of a conspiracy theory. It seeks to upend a common understanding of the September 11th attacks (terrorist attack by Al-Qaeda); it identifies powerful actors hiding their role (the Bush administration); and provides a motivation for their actions (American imperialism).

Although the statements surrounding what we colloquially call “the big lie” are often called conspiracy statements, it is not clear that they satisfy the necessary conditions for a conspiracy theory. Muirhead and Rosenblum (2019) argue that what distinguishes the lies of Donald Trump from classic conspiracy theory is the overall “lack of theory.” In contrast to shadowy plots, Trump and his allies simply insist through repetition that the “election was rigged,” without always providing any evidence of this claim. The authors define this style of false statements as “new conspiracism.”

A review of the six substantive statements measured in this experiment shows that three of the statements likely satisfy a classic definition of conspiracy theories: *Antifa*, *Votes Changed*, and *Immigrant Vote*. All three of these statements explain how specific actors engaged in a widespread conspiracy—that Antifa engaged in a false flag operation on January 6th to make Donald Trump look bad; that votes were changed through fraudulent voting machines; and that illegal immigrants voted in large numbers in specific states causing Trump to lose. By contrast, however, the three other statements are “merely” false assertions: alleging that Donald Trump was the legitimate winner of the 2020 presidential election; that the COVID-19 vaccine is dangerous and ineffective; and that the Apollo 11 moon landing was faked. Missing from these statements are overall theories that

explain how or why, for instance, the moon landing was faked.

Consequently, I elect to instead use the terms “misperceptions” and “false beliefs” to accurately describe all six of these statements. Flynn, Nyhan and Reifler (2017) define misperceptions as “...factual beliefs that are false or contradict the best available evidence in the public domain.” In this conceptualization, conspiracy theories are a subset of false beliefs or misperceptions. I distinguish this from mere ignorance of the truth—respondents are not misinformed that Donald Trump won the election, but instead believe he won the election because it accords with their pre-existing identity commitments. Still, given substantial response instability in measuring misperceptions, it remains an open question of how deeply committed respondents are to these misperceptions (Graham 2022). As most of these misperceptions were highly salient to Republicans at the time the survey was administered—and because repeat surveys tend to show that belief in the big lie cross-sectionally is stable—these beliefs are likely deeply held enough to be classified as misperceptions.

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