



# Verschörungstheorien in Geschichte und Gegenwart

## Die USA und Deutschland im Vergleich

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# Definition

SECOND EDITION

MICHAEL BARKUN

# A CULTURE OF CONSPIRACY

APOCALYPTIC VISIONS IN CONTEMPORARY AMERICA

- Nichts geschieht durch Zufall.
- Nichts ist, wie es scheint.
- Alles ist miteinander verbunden.

# **Gegenwärtige Verbreitung**

# Conspiracy Theories and the Paranoid Style(s) of Mass Opinion

**J. Eric Oliver** University of Chicago  
**Thomas J. Wood** University of Chicago

*Although conspiracy theories have long been a staple of American political culture, no research has systematically examined the nature of their support in the mass public. Using four nationally representative surveys, sampled between 2006 and 2013, we find that half of the American public consistently endorses at least one conspiracy theory and that many popular conspiracy theories are differentiated along ideological and anomic dimensions. In contrast with many theoretical speculations, we do not find conspiracism to be a product of greater authoritarianism, ignorance, or political conservatism. Rather, the likelihood of supporting conspiracy theories is strongly predicted by a willingness to believe in other unseen, intentional forces. These findings offer an attraction to Manichean narratives. These findings both demonstrate the widespread allure of conspiracy theories and offer new perspectives on the forces that shape mass opinion and American political culture.*

Throughout their history, Americans have demonstrated high levels of suspicion towards centralized authority and their political elites (Barber 1983; Hart 1978). Often these sentiments go beyond a general distrust of government and encapsulate fears of larger, secretive conspiracies. From the anti-Catholic and anti-Masonic movements of the nineteenth century to the “Red Scares” of the twentieth, Americans periodically have organized themselves around narratives about hidden, malevolent groups secretly perpetuating political plots and social calamities to further their own nefarious goals, what we would define as “conspiracy theory” (Davis 1971). Today, conspiratorial theories exist on subjects ranging from the Kennedy assassination to the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings and appear to have wide circulation in the mass population. For instance, in a recent study by Stempel, Hargrove, and Stempel (2007), nearly a third of American respondents agreed that federal officials either assisted in the attacks of September 11th or did nothing to stop them in order to go to war in the Middle East.

Although scholars have long theorized about the “paranoid style” of American politics (Barkun 2003; Fenster 1999; Hofstadter 1964), none have estimated

the pervasiveness of conspiratorial thinking in the general public or empirically demonstrated who does and who does not endorse conspiracy theories. Most scholarship on conspiracy theories in America has focused on interpretive analyses of the theories themselves rather than on empirical research about their support in the mass public (e.g., Clarke 2002; Davis 1971; Hargrove & Melley 1999). The few empirical studies that have been done are either descriptive because they asked only a few scattered questions about specific theories (e.g., Stempel, Hargrove, & Stempel 2007) or about conspiratorial reasoning in specific subpopulations (e.g., Barreto et al. 2008; et al. 1999; Darwin, Neave, and Holmes 2008; & Sutton 2008; Goertzel 1994; Parsons et al. 2008). To our knowledge, there is no research that systematically examines support for a wide selection of conspiracy narratives across a representative sample of the American population. Given the historical prevalence of conspiratorial thinking, this is itself a significant oversight in studies of American politics and public opinion.

More importantly, if such conspiracy theories are as widely accepted as both the historical prevalence and previous research suggest, then it should prompt us to reconsider our general understanding of

„half of the American population agree[s] with at least one conspiracy from a short list of conspiracy theories“ (964)

**Tabelle 2:** Zustimmung bzw. Ablehnung zur Verschwörungsmentalität 2020 (in %)

	stimme nicht zu (1–3)	(4)	stimme zu (5–7)
Die meisten Menschen erkennen nicht, in welchem Ausmaß unser Leben durch Verschwörungen bestimmt wird, die im Geheimen ausgeheckt werden.	50,2	19,5	30,4
Es gibt geheime Organisationen, die großen Einfluss auf politische Entscheidungen haben.	43,8	18,0	38,1
Politiker und andere Führungspersönlichkeiten sind nur Marionetten der dahinterstehenden Mächte.	47,5	19,1	33,4

Skalierung: 1 = »stimme überhaupt nicht zu« bis 7 = »stimme voll und ganz zu«; Cronbachs Alpha = .91

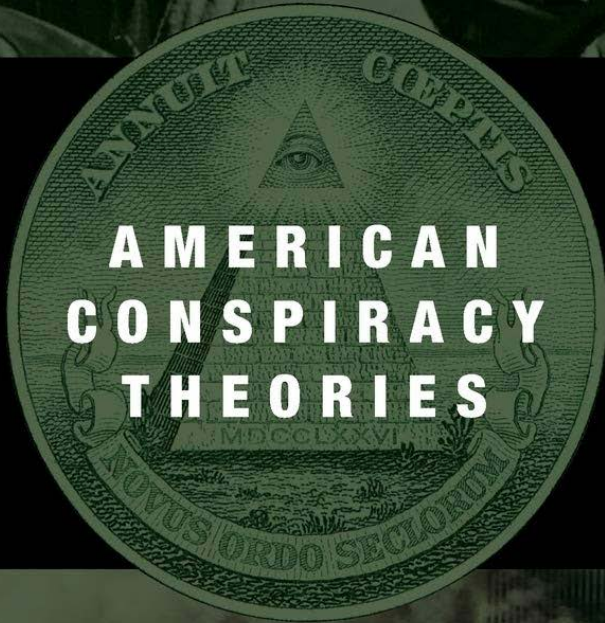
**(Leipziger Autoritarismus Studie 2020)**

# Wie lässt sich der Unterschied erklären?

- Gefühl von Macht- und Kontrollverlust
- Bildungsgrad
- Politische Polarisierung

# **Der Blick in die Geschichte**





**JOSEPH E. USCINSKI & JOSEPH M. PARENT**

„The data suggest one telling fact: we do not live in an age of conspiracy theories and have not for some time.“ (110-11)

# Amerikanische Verschwörungstheoretiker

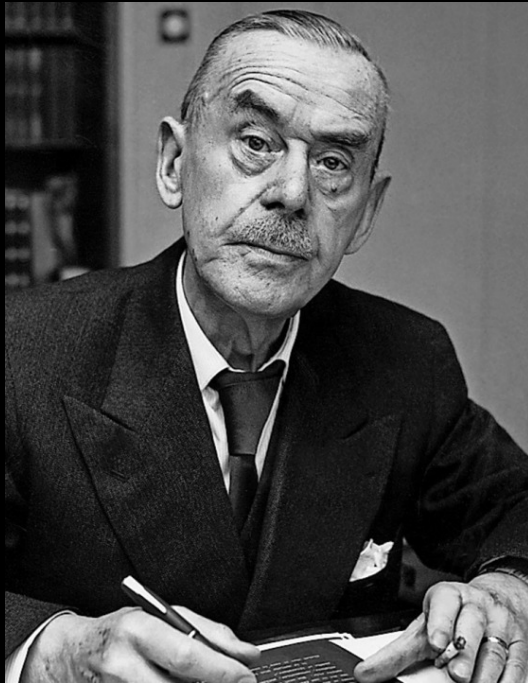


bis ca. 1960



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# Deutsche Verschwörungstheoretiker

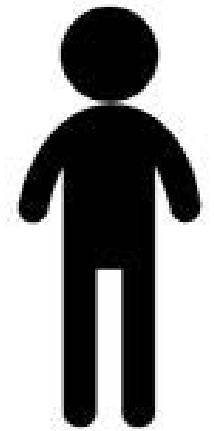
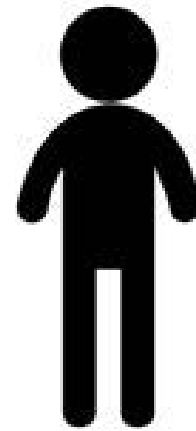
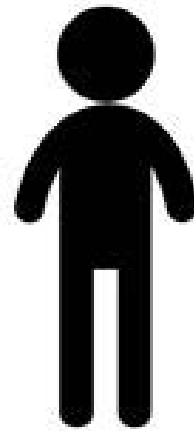
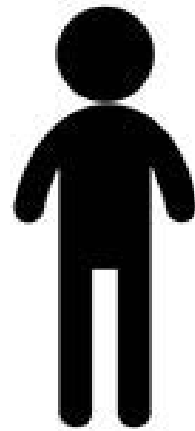
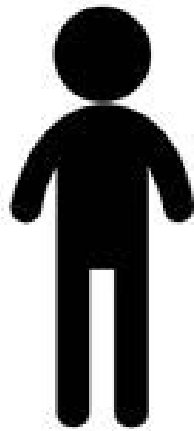


bis ca. 1960



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# Stigmatisiertes Wissen



**Aber Trump!**



# Fragmentierung der Öffentlichkeit



# THE STIGMATIZATION OF CONSPIRACY THEORY SINCE THE 1950s

“A Plot to Make us Look Foolish”



KATHARINA THALMANN



„conspiracy theory  
remains illegitimate [but]  
that might not matter  
anymore“ (192)



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## Biden Transition Updates



# After Supreme Court Defeat, Trump's Backers In Congress Are Quiet On What Comes Next

December 12, 2020 · 11:05 AM ET



COLIN DWYER





# Links und Literatur

- Zum Begriff Verschwörungstheorie:  
<https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/2020-12/verschwoerungstheorien-corona-krise-wort-des-jahres-2020>
- Leitfaden Verschwörungstheorie und Hinweise zum Umgang mit Anhänger\*innen:  
<https://conspiracytheories.eu/education/guide-and-recommendations/>
- Wer lieber Englisch liest:  
Butter, Michael. *The Nature of Conspiracy Theories*. London: Polity, 2020.