

Conspiracy Theories

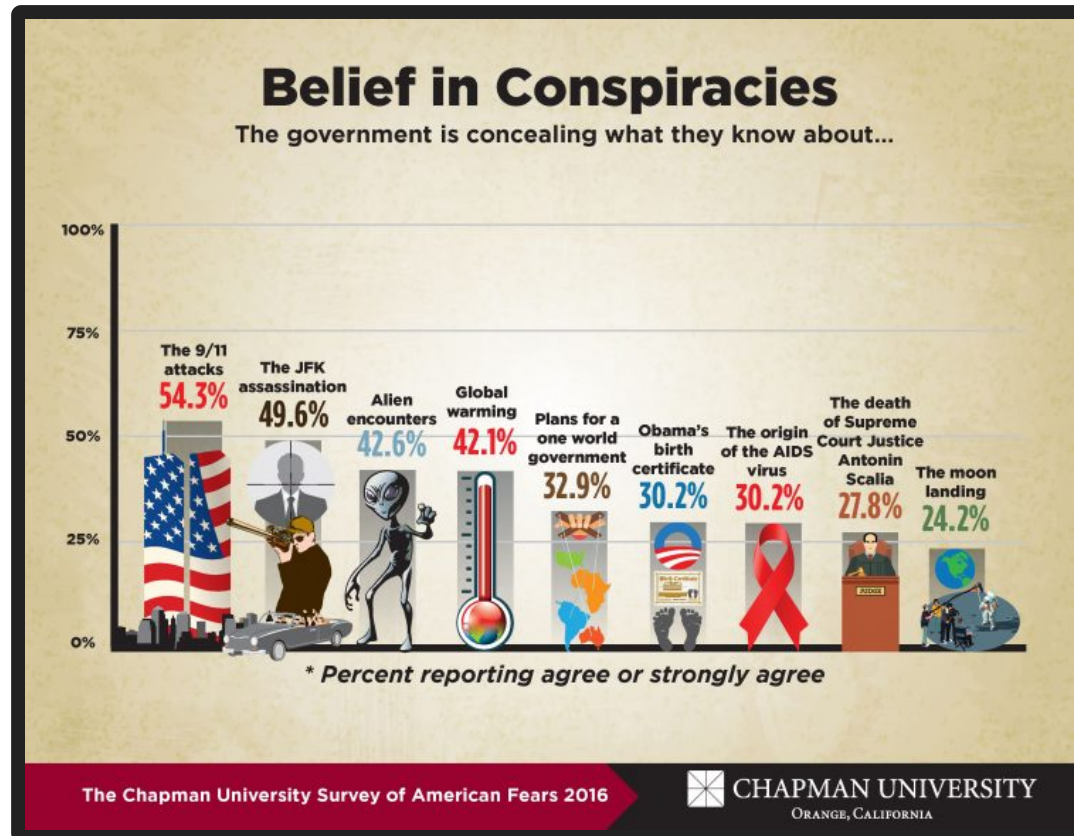
Too Many Connections



George Matthews, Plymouth State University

2020

The Puzzle of Conspiracy Theories



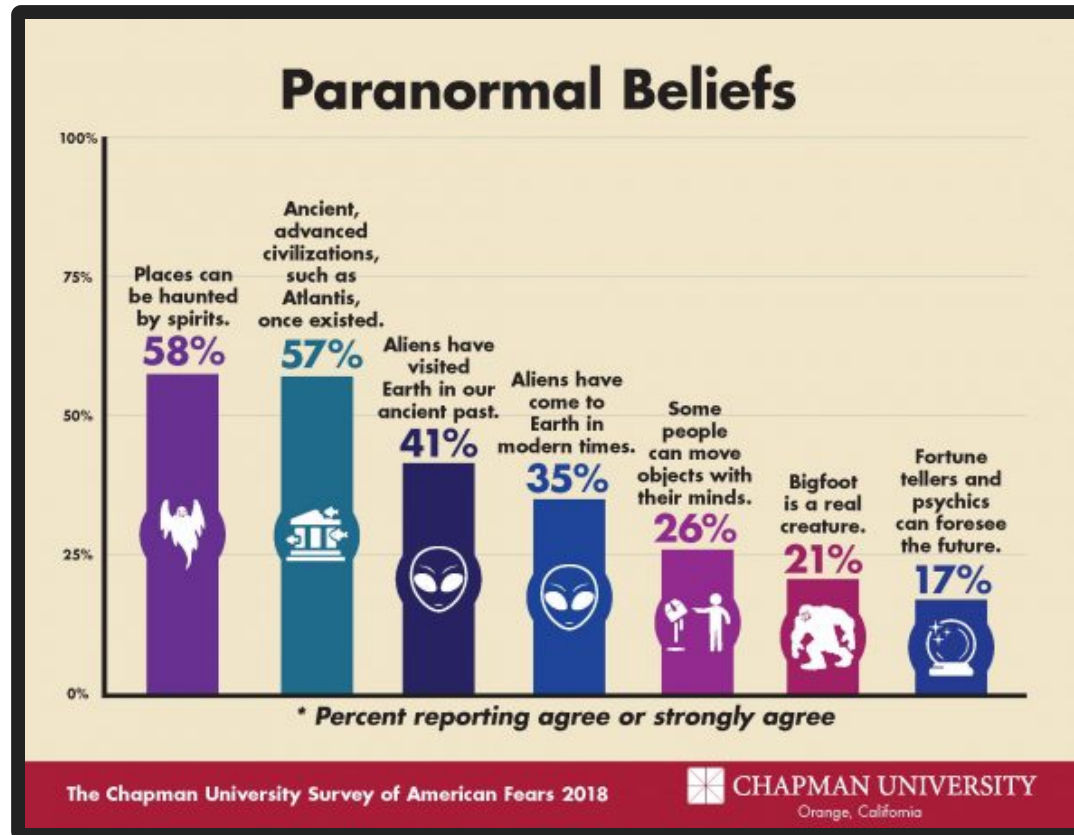
- They enjoy widespread and growing support and yet have little evidence in favor of them.

The Puzzle of Conspiracy Theories



- They are predictable in their emergence in times of crisis and great social stress.

The Puzzle of Conspiracy Theories



- They are individually easy to debunk or disprove, even as they seem impossible to combat on a wider scale.



- They are dangerous since they amplify inter-group hostility, encourage violence and subvert efforts to deal with social problems.

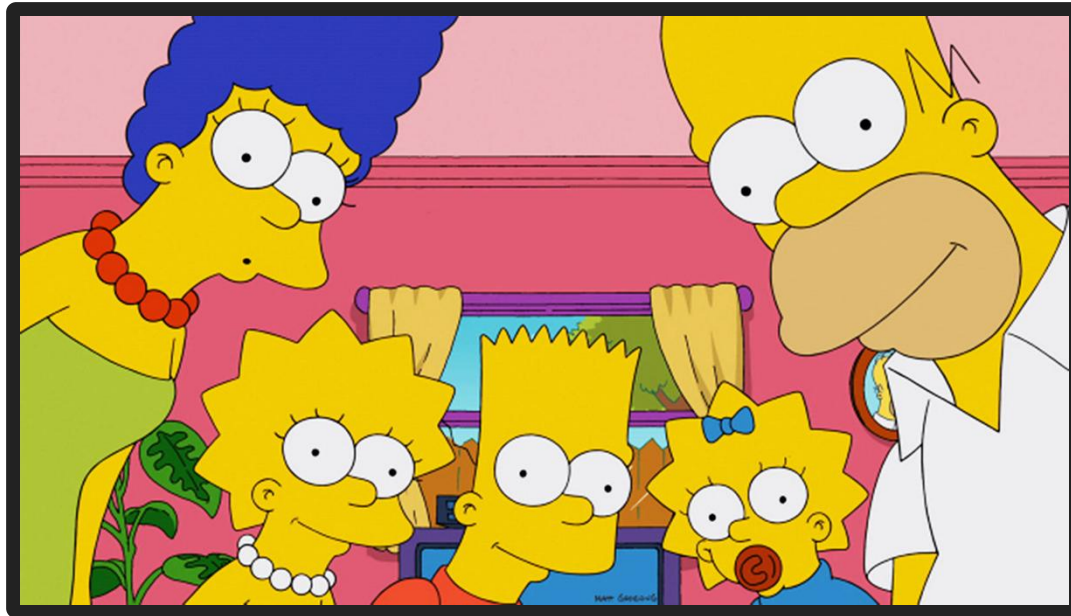
Approaches to Conspiracy Thinking

1. Accept them.



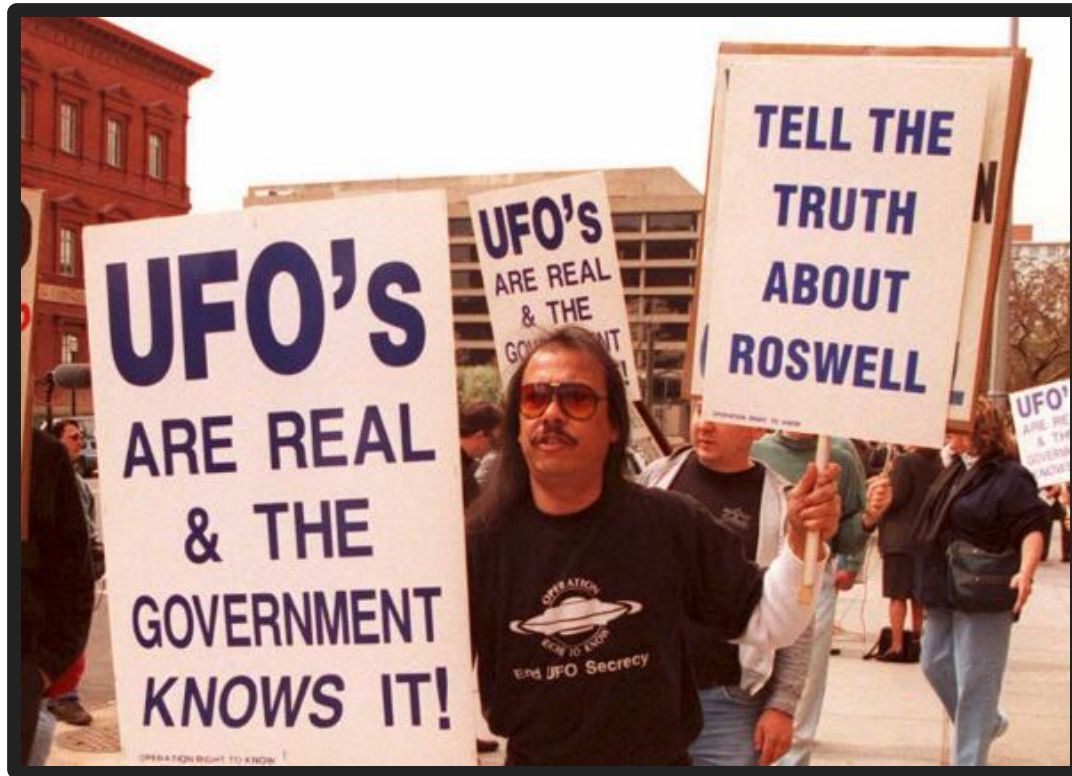
Approaches to Conspiracy Thinking

2. Debunk them one at a time.



Approaches to Conspiracy Thinking

3. *Accept relativism about them.*



Approaches to Conspiracy Thinking

4. *Try to explain them.*



Elements of Conspiracy Thinking



- Search for control and meaning in a world out of control and confusing.

Elements of Conspiracy Thinking



- Someone is to blame and we can thus do something about our predicament.

Elements of Conspiracy Thinking



- Symbolic connections, hidden meanings, deep significance of events, invisible agents -- these ideas resonate with magical thinking and come naturally to us.

Elements of Conspiracy Thinking



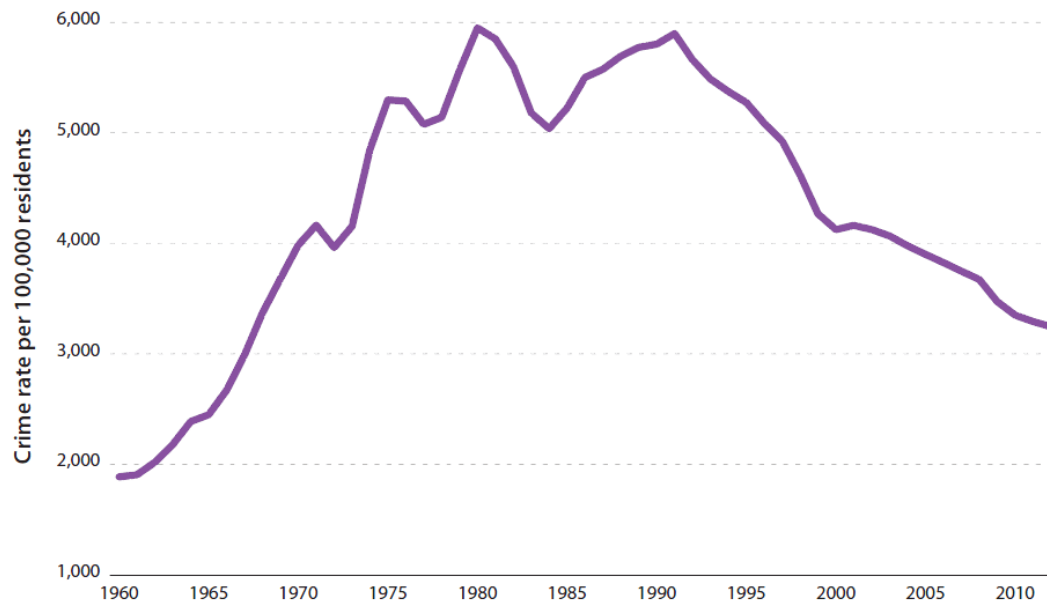
- Common narrative: there is a nefarious plot, organized by a secret elite, which most people don't see or suspect, but I have figured it out and now they are trying to kill me.

Another Puzzle

FIGURE 1.

Crime Rate in the United States, 1960–2012

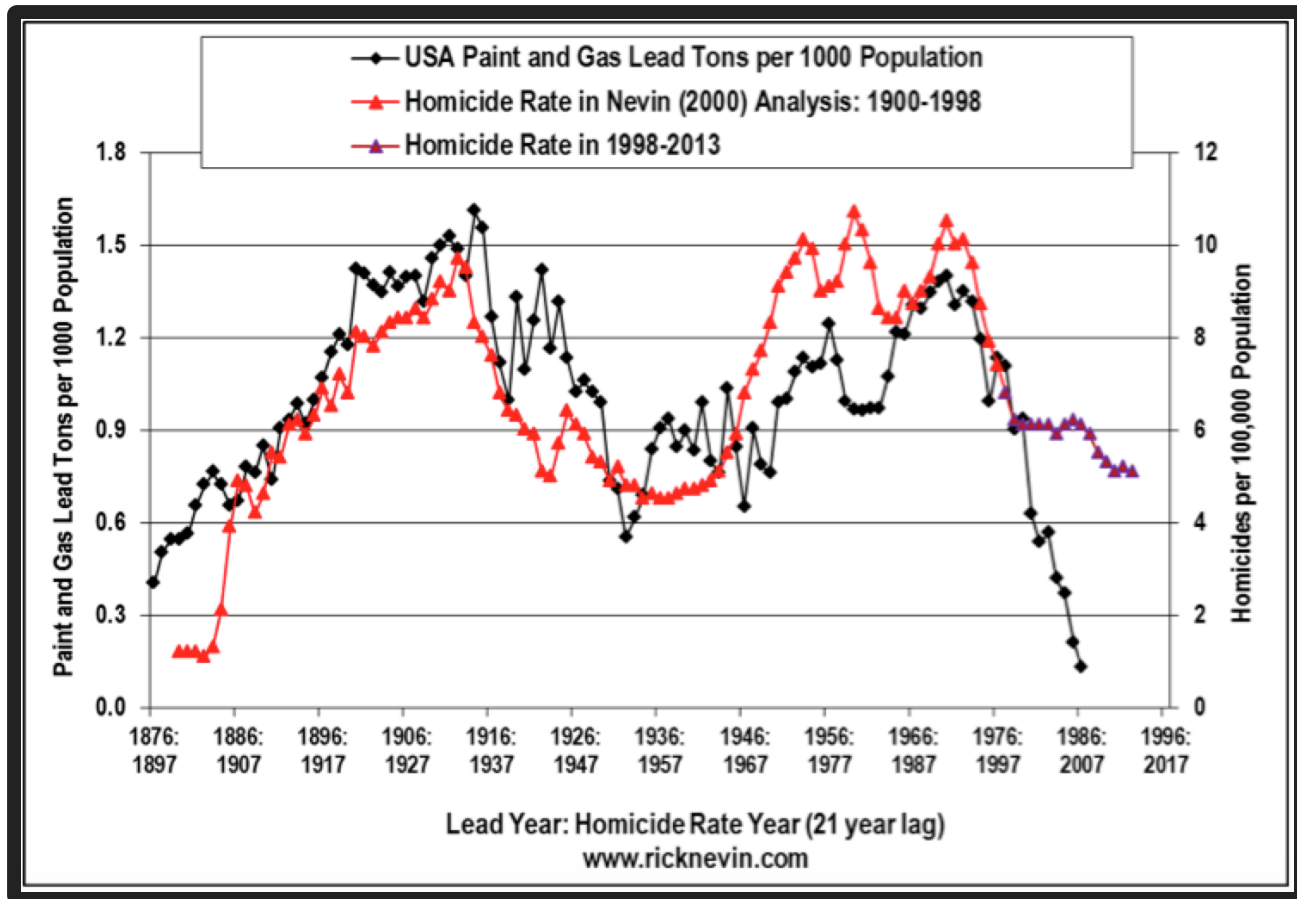
After being particularly elevated during the 1970s and 1980s, the crime rate fell nearly 45 percent between 1990 and 2012.



Sources: DOJ 2010b; authors' calculations.

Note: The crime rate includes all violent crimes (i.e., aggravated assault, forcible rape, murder, and robbery) and property crimes (i.e., burglary, larceny-theft, and motor vehicle theft).

The Criminal Element



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Find out more

Wikipedia's List of Conspiracy Theories

Conspiracy Theories Cannot Be Stopped

Conspiracy Theories are Dangerous

The Secret History of Lead



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