
THE SLOVENIAN CONSPIRACY THEORIST: AN ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL SURVEY RESULTS

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Slovenia, a small post-socialist state situated at the crossroads of Central and Southeastern Europe, provides an interesting case for the study of conspiratorial worldviews. The country's relatively short democratic history, persistent mistrust in political elites and political institutions, and polarised media landscape create fertile conditions for the spread of conspiratorial thinking. Yet systematic empirical research into the personality of the conspiracy theorist remains rather limited. The article seeks to address this gap by presenting the results of a national survey conducted in Slovenia, with the central aim of answering the main research question: Who is the person that can be labelled a conspiracy theorist in the Slovenian societal context? The analysis finds that belief in conspiracy theories varies most strongly by education, religion, and age rather than gender or urban–rural differences. Higher education consistently reduces conspiracy belief, Catholics show greater support than atheists, and Generation X is most prone to the Covid-19 bioweapon theory. Gender differences are minimal, except that older women are more likely to believe in the 5G conspiracy theory. Urban–rural divides are small, though Ljubljana residents are less prone to anti-vax and bioweapons conspiracies. Voter participation also correlates with lower support for Covid-19 and anti-vax conspiracies.

Key words: conspiracy theorist; Slovenia; political orientation; demographics; Covid19.

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Introduction

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In recent years, scholarly interest in conspiracy theories has intensified, reflecting their growing visibility and influence within contemporary societies. Conspiracy theories are commonly defined as explanatory narratives that attribute significant social or political events to the secret actions of powerful groups pursuing hidden agendas (Douglas et al., 2019). While such beliefs have historically circulated on the fringes of political culture, recent studies demonstrate that they are now firmly embedded within mainstream discourse, shaping attitudes towards institutions, science, and public policy (van Prooijen and Douglas, 2018). Slovenia, a small post-socialist state situated at the crossroads of Central and Southeastern Europe, provides a particularly revealing case for the study of conspiratorial worldviews. The country's relatively short democratic history, persistent mistrust in political elites and political institutions, and polarised media landscape create fertile conditions for the spread of conspiratorial thinking. Yet systematic empirical research into the personality of the conspiracy theorist remains rather limited.

This article seeks to address this gap by presenting the results of a national survey conducted in Slovenia, with the central aim of answering the main research question: Who is the person that can be labelled a conspiracy theorist in the Slovenian societal context? The research does not treat conspiracy theorists as a homogenous or monolithic group, but rather as a heterogeneous category shaped by intersecting demographic, socio-economic, and attitudinal variables. By situating the Slovenian case within broader comparative research, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of conspiracy belief as a global yet locally embedded phenomenon.

The importance of such inquiry lies in the multiple consequences that conspiracy theories exert on democratic life and social cohesion. Empirical research has consistently shown that conspiracy beliefs are associated with lower institutional trust, increased political cynicism, and reduced compliance with public health measures (Imhoff and Lamberty, 2020; Jolley and Paterson, 2020). In Slovenia, these effects became particularly salient during the COVID-19 pandemic, when opposition to vaccination campaigns, the spread of 5G-related fears, and claims about global elites intersected with broader dissatisfaction towards the political establishment. Understanding the socio-demographic and attitudinal profile of conspiracy believers is thus not merely an academic exercise but a crucial step towards designing evidence-based interventions that strengthen democratic resilience against misinformation.

From a theoretical perspective, this study draws on several interrelated strands of literature. Research on the ‘conspiracy mentality’ (Imhoff and Bruder, 2014) highlights the psychological predisposition to interpret events as the result of hidden plots, irrespective of the specific content of a given conspiracy theory. Sociological approaches, meanwhile, emphasise the role of social trust, cultural cleavages, and historical legacies in shaping the plausibility of conspiratorial claims (Butter and Knight, 2020). By combining these perspectives, the Slovenian case enables us to test established theoretical assumptions while also identifying particularities rooted in the country’s unique historical and political trajectory.

The structure of this article is as follows. The next section reviews the relevant theoretical framework, focusing on individual demographic factors that may influence susceptibility to belief in conspiracy theories, followed by an overview of the survey methodology and data collection process. The empirical section then presents key findings regarding the demographic, socio-economic, and ideological correlates of conspiracy belief in Slovenia. Finally, the discussion reflects on the implications of these findings both for the Slovenian context and for the broader scholarly debate on conspiracy theories. Through this analysis, the figure of the ‘Slovenian conspiracy theorist’ will emerge not as a caricature but as a complex social actor, whose beliefs are embedded in broader dynamics of trust, identity, and power.

Literature Review

The following section offers an overview of the most recent research on the relationship between demographic factors and belief in conspiracy theories. As the reviewed literature demonstrates, studies on how individual demographic factors influence the susceptibility to belief in conspiracy theories have yielded mixed results. This may be due to the different social context of the countries under investigation, spanning from Asia and Europe to the US, as well as variations in research approaches, particularly the conspiracy-related statements used to assess the degree of support for conspiracy theories among the population.

Gender

A common stereotype portrays a typical conspiracy theorist as an ‘unwashed, middle-aged white male’ (Uscinski and Parent, 2014). However, empirical findings

on the relationship between gender and belief in conspiracy theories are inconsistent. Some studies suggest that men are more likely than women to endorse conspiracy beliefs (Galliford and Furnham, 2017), including specific ones about COVID-19 (Cassese, Farhard and Miller, 2020), while others report the opposite (Popoli and Longus, 2021), conclude with mixed findings (Enders et al., 2024; Kukovič, Pope, Dewell-Gentry and Haček, 2024) or find no significant correlation between gender and belief in conspiracy theories (Jolley and Douglas, 2014; Goertzel, 1994). These mixed results suggest that the relationship between gender and belief in conspiracy theories may vary depending on the specific content of the conspiracy theory. For instance, men are significantly more likely to endorse conspiracy theories related to feminism and LGBTQ+ (Marchlewska, Cichocka, Lozowski, Gorska and Winiewski, 2019), as well as the previously mentioned COVID-19 conspiracy theories (Cassese, Farhard and Miller, 2020).

Age

Conclusions regarding whether a typical conspiracy theorist is a middle-aged male appear to be more consistent with respect to age than they are with respect to gender. While some studies find no significant correlation between age and belief in conspiracy theories, other reveals that young people are generally more likely to support conspiracy theories (Galliford and Furnham, 2017), including those related to COVID-19 (Uscinski et al., 2020; Duplaga, 2020). One possible explanation is that young people are more likely to endorse conspiracy theories as they are more frequently exposed to them due to higher levels of social media use (Galliford and Furnham, 2017), or due to their less affluent position within society in social, political and economic terms versus their older peers (Enders et al., 2024).

Income

One highly consistent finding across studies is that income is negatively correlated with conspiracy thinking, meaning that individuals with higher incomes are less likely to endorse conspiracy theories and vice versa (Kukovič, Pope, Dewell-Gentry and Haček, 2024; Smallpage, Drochon, Uscinski and Klostad, 2020). According to some studies, this may be linked with feelings of marginalisation, anomia, and helplessness among those with lower income status, as higher income levels often correlate with greater security, material comfort, and a sense of personal success (Uscinski et al., 2020; Enders et al., 2024).

Nevertheless, not all studies confirm this relationship. A recent study by Sato et al. (2024), using Japan as a case study, revealed key findings that contrast with those reported in Western contexts. Notably, they found that higher income,

wealth, and regular employment were, at least in Japan, associated with higher endorsement of conspiracy beliefs. However, as the authors emphasise, further research is needed to provide an explanation for this unique finding.

Education

Previous research has identified education level as one of the key demographic predictors of belief in conspiracy theories. Multiple studies indicate that individuals with higher levels of education are less likely to believe in conspiracy theories compared to those with lower levels of education (Douglas, Sutton, Callan, Dawtry and Harvey, 2016; Mancosu, Vassallo and Vezzoni, 2017; Enders et al., 2024). In exploring why this relationship emerges, Van Prooijen (2017) confirmed that education increases individuals' sense of control over their lives, thereby decreasing feelings of powerlessness. This is important because people are particularly susceptible to conspiracy theories when they feel powerless (Wardawy-Dudziak, 2024). Education also negatively predicts a tendency to accept overly simplistic explanations for complex events – a relationship that is mediated by analytic thinking skills – which, in turn reduces belief in conspiracy theories (Van Prooijen, 2017). Although the author did not establish a causal link between education and belief in conspiracy theories, the findings suggest that education may equip individuals with a set of cognitive skills that help them resist conspiracy theories (Douglas et al., 2019).

However, not all research has confirmed this relationship (Uscinski et al., 2020; Goertzel, 1994), and some studies have even reported contrasting findings (Galliford and Furnham, 2017). These inconsistencies may be due, in part, to certain limitations – such as the restricted generalisability of some findings.

Political Orientation

Various studies suggest that individuals at the political extremes – whether on the far left or far right – are more likely to endorse conspiracy theories, particularly those targeting other-minded groups. Extremist thinking, whether left- or right-wing, tends to rely on rigid, clear-cut worldviews grounded in concrete axioms, which makes it easier to assign meaning to social and political events (Pilch, Turska-Kawa, Wardawy, Olszanecka-Marmola and Smolkowska-Jedo, 2023). Van Prooijen et al. (2015) investigated this phenomenon through four studies (one in the US and three in the Netherlands). Their findings indicate that belief in conspiracy theories is significantly higher among individuals at both ends of the political spectrum, while those with moderate political views tend to endorse such theories less frequently. Smallpage et al. (2020) confirmed that relationship

in Poland, Argentina, Portugal, and Italy, but not in Sweden, Great Britain, and Germany. Other studies confirmed the relationship between extreme right-wing identification and belief in conspiracy theories (Mancosu, Vassallo and Vezzoni, 2017; Galliford and Furnham, 2017).

At the same time, it would be reasonable to assume that the level of support for a given conspiracy theory on the extreme left or right end of the political spectrum depends on the content of the specific theory, particularly when the conspiracy theory targets representatives of the opposing side or emphasises malevolent intentions directed at one's in-group (Marmola and Olszanecka-Marmola, 2024). Individuals on the far left may be more likely to endorse conspiracy theories related to the profit-driven capitalist system, such as COVID-19 conspiracy theories claiming that the virus was intentionally developed by Big Pharma (Šteger, 2024), whereas individuals on the far right may be more inclined to support theories concerning climate change or immigration, such as the conspiracy theory about Muslims replacing the Christian population with Islam, the so-called Eurabia conspiracy theory (Bergmann, 2021).

Nonetheless, those findings and assumptions raise further questions about the underlying political dynamics within countries (Smallpage, Drochon, Uscinski and Klofstad, 2020), including in countries within the European Union.

Religiosity

The relationship between religiosity and endorsement of conspiracy theories is not straightforward (Jasinskaja-Lahti and Jetten, 2019). It remains ambiguous due to religious heterogeneity, variation in cultural contexts, and differences in research approaches (Turska-Kawa and Galica, 2024). Empirical research on the topic has yielded mixed results. For instance, a study in Italy found a positive and significant association between religiosity and belief in conspiracy theories (Mancosu, Vassallo and Vezzoni, 2017), which is similar to our previous research on the case of Slovenia (Kukovič, Pope, Dewell-Gentry and Haček, 2024) and a study in the US, where the authors examined the relationship between religiosity and conspiracy theories about COVID-19 (Uscinski et al., 2020). These findings may reflect a shared tendency in both religiosity and belief in conspiracy theories to attribute unexplained phenomena to invisible forces that allegedly secretly shape people's lives (Oliver and Wood, 2014). Interestingly, our previous research revealed quite important differences among religious groups within the European Union in their support for a specific but religiously neutral conspiracy theory – namely that viruses have been produced in government laboratories to

control our freedom. The lowest level of support was observed among Protestants (12.7%), while the highest was found among Orthodox Christians (48.2%) (Kukovič, Pope, Dewell-Gentry and Haček, 2024).

On the other hand, other research has failed to find significant differences in the degree of endorsement of conspiracy theories between believers and non-believers (Jasinskaja-Lahti and Jetten, 2019). Moreover, studies using complementary measures – such as strength of faith, religious beliefs, religious experience, and religious practice – to assess religiosity, as well as both a general conspiracy belief scale and a specific conspiracy theories scale to assess conspiracy belief, have found mixed results (Turska-Kawa and Galica, 2024).

Research Design

The data collection for the Slovenian opinion poll took place from October 2024 to February 2025. The approach and implementation of the survey followed the proven methodology used at the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ljubljana when conducting national opinion polls based on probability sampling. The survey was conducted as part of the research programme of the Centre for Public Opinion Research and Mass Communication. It was possible to participate in the survey either online (self-completion using an online questionnaire) or by post (self-completion using a paper questionnaire). The people on the sample list received a written invitation with a personalised code to take part in the online survey. The population consisted of all residents of the Republic of Slovenia aged 18 years or older. The selection of persons included in the sample was based on the Central Register of Residents of Slovenia as the initial list. Based on the sampling plan, the sample size was set at $N = 2700$ persons. After the first three weeks, 361 people (13.4% of the sample) had responded to the invitation to participate. All others received a repeated invitation to participate (1st reminder). The response rate after the first reminder was 12.4%. We reached a further 7.2% of the sample with the second reminder. After two and a half months of running the survey, a third (final) reminder was sent out, to which a further 103 respondents (3.8% of the sample) replied. At the end of the survey, 966 fully completed surveys were collected. We also included 26 partially completed surveys in the final database. The final size of the file thus amounts to 992 completed surveys. The calculation of the response rate, excluding the proportion of ineligible respondents,

gives a sample utilisation rate of 37%. In terms of the method of response, 89.6% of the SJM24/1 (2024) survey was completed online and 10.4% by post.

Analysis

We investigated the propensity of the general population towards conspiracy theories as a function of a few demographic factors, including gender, age, religious beliefs and education. The aim was to determine which segment of the population is most inclined towards the prevailing conspiracy theories, including the New World Order conspiracy theory, the Covid-19 bioweapons conspiracy theory, the anti-vax conspiracy theory and the 5G radiation conspiracy theory, and to determine the profile of the typical ‘Slovenian conspiracy theorist’.

Table 1: Propensity towards conspiracy theories according to gender (in %)

| Statements | Male | | | | Female | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| | up to 30 years | 31 to 45 years | 46 to 60 years | 61 and over | up to 30 years | 31 to 45 years | 46 to 60 years | 61 and over |
| A small secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics | 56.3 | | | | 55.2 | | | |
| A group of scientists manipulates, fabricates or suppresses evidence to deceive the public | 54.9 | 56.5 | 55.4 | 58.2 | 46.7 | 62.5 | 57.5 | 51.8 |
| The coronavirus is the result of deliberate and concealed efforts of a government or organisation | 34.3 | | | | 29.3 | | | |
| The coronavirus was deliberately created and intentionally released from a laboratory | 39.2 | 30.1 | 29.6 | 38.4 | 24.6 | 33.3 | 28.4 | 30.2 |
| The introduction of the 5G network is responsible for the spread of the coronavirus | 35.8 | | | | 35.4 | | | |
| Evidence of the dangers of 5G radiation is being hidden from the public | 25.3 | 30.1 | 42.2 | 41.4 | 32.8 | 42.1 | 38.6 | 29.8 |
| Vaccine safety data are often fabricated | 40.2 | | | | 43.5 | | | |
| | 32.9 | 38.3 | 45.2 | 41.7 | 38.1 | 46.4 | 48.3 | 41.3 |
| | 5.8 | | | | 9.9 | | | |
| | 6.1 | 2.8 | 8.2 | 7.0 | 5.3 | 7.9 | 14.7 | 9.3 |
| | 16.5 | | | | 35.9 | | | |
| | 19.8 | 9.1 | 15.4 | 21.3 | 28.1 | 26.0 | 38.1 | 44.4 |
| | 31.8 | | | | 29.7 | | | |
| | 37.3 | 29.9 | 26.9 | 33.4 | 28.3 | 30.6 | 34.0 | 27.2 |

* The question was: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree)? The answers ‘don’t know’ and ‘have no opinion’ were not included. Percentages show agreement (answers 4 agree and 5 totally agree) with individual statements within a gender and/or age group. N=992. Source: Slovenian Public Opinion Poll 2024/1, Centre for Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research, available at https://www.cjm.si/ul/SJM_24_1.pdf

We first tested the propensity of both sexes to believe four major conspiracy theories (Table 1). We can clearly see that the greatest inclination towards the conspiracy theories tested can be attributed to the New World Order conspiracy theory ('A small secret group of people is responsible for making all the important decisions in world politics'). 56.3% of men and 55.2% of women (strongly) agree with this conspiracy theory, with agreement being highest among older men and middle-aged women. The only conspiracy theory where one gender differs from the other is the 5G radiation conspiracy theory, as women (particularly those aged 45+) are statistically significantly more likely than men to believe that evidence of the dangers of 5G radiation is being hidden from the public. All other conspiracies tested in Table 1 revealed no statistically significant differences between the two genders, as the t-test for independent samples revealed no statistically significant differences in the means between the two groups compared. However, it is interesting to note that the Covid-19 bioweapon conspiracy theory still has significant support among both genders several years after the end of the global pandemic, as middle-aged men and middle-aged women in particular tend to believe that the coronavirus was deliberately created and deliberately released from a laboratory.

Table 2: Propensity towards conspiracy theories according to age (both genders together, in %)

| Statement | Up to 30 years | 31 to 45 years | 46 to 60 years | 61 and more |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| A small secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics | 51.8 | 59.2 | 56.9 | 55.0 |
| The coronavirus is the result of deliberate and concealed efforts of a government or organisation | 29.1 | 35.1 | 40.4 | 35.6 |
| The coronavirus was deliberately created and intentionally released from a laboratory | 35.4 | 42.0 | 46.9 | 41.6 |
| Vaccine safety data are often fabricated | 33.3 | 30.2 | 30.2 | 30.5 |

* The question was: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree)? The answers 'don't know' and 'have no opinion' were not included. Percentages show agreement (answers 4 agree and 5 totally agree) with individual statements within an individual group. N=992. Source: Slovenian Public Opinion Poll 2024/1, Centre for Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research, available at https://www.cjm.si/ul/SJM_24_1.pdf

The inclination of the different age groups towards the three most important conspiracy theories (Table 2) with the highest level of agreement is in line with the results of the previous section. While there are only minor differences

between age groups for the New World Order and the anti-vax conspiracy theories, the largest differences can be seen for the Covid-19 bioweapons conspiracy theory, where the lowest support was measured among the youngest age group (up to 30 years; Generation Z and Generation Alpha) and the highest support was found among the middle-aged population, especially the 46–60 age group, usually referred to as Generation X (people born between 1965 and 1980). The only conspiracy theory with an inclination of over 50% is the New World Order conspiracy theory.

Table 3: Propensity towards conspiracy theories according to education (in %)

| Statement | Primary school or less | Vocational school | High school | Higher education, MA, PhD |
|---|------------------------|-------------------|-------------|---------------------------|
| A small secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics | 52.8 | 62.3 | 55.4 | 55.0 |
| The coronavirus is the result of deliberate and concealed efforts of a government or organisation | 39.6 | 47.4 | 44.1 | 25.3 |
| The coronavirus was deliberately created and intentionally released from a laboratory | 50.9 | 57.1 | 48.1 | 30.2 |
| Vaccine safety data are often fabricated | 50.0 | 37.6 | 33.2 | 23.1 |

* The question was: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree)? The answers 'don't know' and 'have no opinion' were not included. Percentages show agreement (answers 4 agree and 5 totally agree) with individual statements within an individual group. N=992. Source: Slovenian Public Opinion Poll 2024/1, Centre for Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research, available at https://www.cjm.si/ul/SJM_24_1.pdf

The next demographic factor we tested for propensity towards the three prevailing conspiracy theories was education. We divided the population into four different groups according to the level of formal education acquired, namely primary school or less, vocational school, high school and higher education or more (Table 3). There are statistically significant differences between the different groups, as the higher the level of education acquired, the lower the tendency towards the conspiracy theories tested. The largest differences can be observed for the anti-vax and Covid-19 bioweapons conspiracy theories, with much smaller differences between the groups concerning the New World Order conspiracy theory.

Table 4: Propensity towards conspiracy theories according to place of residence (in %)

| Statement | Rural areas | Small urban settlements | Larger urban settlements | Towns with more than 10.000 inhabitants | Ljubljana |
|---|-------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|---|-----------|
| A small secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics | 58.8 | 54.2 | 51.7 | 59.7 | 54.5 |
| The coronavirus is the result of deliberate and concealed efforts of a government or organisation | 37.4 | 36.4 | 36.6 | 37.4 | 25.5 |
| The coronavirus was deliberately created and intentionally released from a laboratory | 44.9 | 40.6 | 41.7 | 45.8 | 32.7 |
| Vaccine safety data are often fabricated | 29.8 | 33.2 | 28.3 | 36.5 | 23.3 |

* The question was: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree)? The answers 'don't know' and 'have no opinion' were not included. Percentages show agreement (answers 4 agree and 5 totally agree) with individual statements within an individual group. N=992. Source: Slovenian Public Opinion Poll 2024/1, Centre for Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research, available at https://www.cjm.si/ul/SJM_24_1.pdf

We expected that the propensity for believing the three prevailing conspiracy theories would be greater in rural areas than in urban areas, as the level of education is generally higher in urban areas (Table 4). We found that there are only very small statistically significant differences between rural areas, smaller towns and even larger Slovenian cities with several tens of thousands of inhabitants in terms of the inclination towards the three most frequently tested conspiracy theories. However, once we also tested the inhabitants of the capital, which is by far the largest Slovenian city (Ljubljana), the propensity to believe the anti-vax and Covid-19 bioweapons conspiracy theories decreased significantly, while there was basically no significant difference in the New World Order conspiracy theory.

Table 5: Propensity towards conspiracy theories according to place of employment (in %)

| Statement | Public sector | Private sector |
|---|---------------|----------------|
| A small secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics | 56.7 | 57.8 |
| The coronavirus is the result of deliberate and concealed efforts of a government or organisation | 36.7 | 34.6 |
| The coronavirus was deliberately created and intentionally released from a laboratory | 41.1 | 40.6 |
| Vaccine safety data are often fabricated | 27.2 | 29.7 |

* The question was: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree)? The answers ‘don’t know’ and ‘have no opinion’ were not included. Percentages show agreement (answers 4 agree and 5 totally agree) with individual statements within an individual group. N=992. Source: Slovenian Public Opinion Poll 2024/1, Centre for Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research, available at https://www.cjm.si/ul/SJM_24_1.pdf

There was virtually no statistically significant difference in the propensity for the three predominant conspiracy theories in relation to place of employment (Table 5), as both people employed in the public and private sector show very similar and surprisingly high levels of propensity for the New World Order conspiracy theory (namely 56.7% in the public sector and 57.8% in the private sector), and a less significant propensity for the anti-vax and Covid-19 bio-weapons conspiracy theories.

Table 6: Propensity towards conspiracy theories according to religious beliefs (in %)

| Statement | Atheists | Catholics |
|---|----------|-----------|
| A small secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics | 51.0 | 57.4 |
| The coronavirus is the result of deliberate and concealed efforts of a government or organisation | 29.3 | 38.0 |
| The coronavirus was deliberately created and intentionally released from a laboratory | 33.8 | 44.9 |
| Vaccine safety data are often fabricated | 27.2 | 31.1 |

* The question was: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree)? The answers ‘don’t know’ and ‘have no opinion’ were not included. Percentages show agreement (answers 4 agree and 5 totally agree) with individual statements within an individual group. N=992. Source: Slovenian Public Opinion Poll 2024/1, Centre for Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research, available at https://www.cjm.si/ul/SJM_24_1.pdf

The situation is different when discussing the tendency for the three predominant conspiracy theories in connection with religious beliefs (Table 6). It should be noted that the respondents self-reported their individual religious beliefs, and we only tested two large groups, namely self-identified Catholics and self-identified atheists. What we can observe in Table 6 is a clear statistically significant difference between the two groups when we tested the Covid-19 bioweapons conspiracy theory, and a slightly less significant (but still noticeable) difference when we discussed the anti-vax and New World Order conspiracy theories. In all three cases, people who describe themselves as Catholics showed a stronger inclination towards conspiracy theories than atheists.

Table 7: Propensity towards conspiracy theories according to 2022 parliamentary voter turnout (in % inside each individual (yes/no) group)

| Statement | Yes, I have participated | No, I have not participated |
|---|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| A small secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics | 55.2 | 60.2 |
| The coronavirus is the result of deliberate and concealed efforts of a government or organisation | 32.9 | 45.4 |
| The coronavirus was deliberately created and intentionally released from a laboratory | 38.8 | 52.2 |
| Vaccine safety data are often fabricated | 26.3 | 42.9 |

* The question was: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree)? The answers 'don't know' and 'have no opinion' were not included. Percentages show agreement (answers 4 agree and 5 totally agree) with individual statements within an individual group. N=992. Source: Slovenian Public Opinion Poll 2024/1, Centre for Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research, available at https://www.cjm.si/ul/SJM_24_1.pdf

Data analysis using a t-test for independent samples showed that the groups of voters and non-voters (Table 7) differed in their level of support for certain conspiracy theories, particularly in relation to the Covid-19 bioweapons and anti-vax conspiracy theories.

For the statement that a small secret group of people is responsible for making all important decisions in world politics, the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant ($p = 0.158$). This means that voter turnout is not significantly related to the tendency to agree with this statement – both groups express a similar level of agreement. For the statement that the coronavirus is the result of a deliberate and covert action by a government or organisation,

the results showed a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$). The average level of agreement was lower among voters than among non-voters (difference = -0.423). The same applies to the statement that the coronavirus was deliberately created and deliberately released from a laboratory, where voters expressed lower agreement ($p < 0.001$, difference = -0.443) than non-voters. There was also a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.001$, difference = -0.458) between the two groups on the statement that vaccine safety data is largely falsified, with voters expressing significantly lower agreement than non-voters. Overall, the results suggest that voter turnout is not associated with the propensity towards the New World Order conspiracy theory but is associated with a lower propensity towards the Covid-19 bioweapons and anti-vax conspiracy theories.

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Table 8: Propensity towards conspiracy theories among voters according to their electoral choice (in %)

| Statement | Center-left | Center-right | Others |
|---|-------------|--------------|--------|
| A small secret group of people is responsible for making all major decisions in world politics | 53.1 | 55.8 | 70.2 |
| The coronavirus is the result of deliberate and concealed efforts of a government or organisation | 31.8 | 31.4 | 51.1 |
| The coronavirus was deliberately created and intentionally released from a laboratory | 38.0 | 33.1 | 60.4 |
| Vaccine safety data are often fabricated | 26.8 | 21.6 | 37.5 |

* The question was: How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements on a scale from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree)? The answers 'don't know' and 'have no opinion' were not included. Percentages show agreement (answers 4 agree and 5 totally agree) with individual statements within an individual group. N=992. Source: Slovenian Public Opinion Poll 2024/1, Centre for Public Opinion and Mass Communications Research, available at https://www.cjm.si/ul/SJM_24_1.pdf

If we focus our analysis (Table 8) only on the group of voters (i.e., only those who voted in the April 2022 general election), and divide them according to their voting decision,² we can clearly see that there is no statistically significant

2 We divided voters into a centre-left group (voters that cast their votes for the Freedom Movement, The Left, Social Democrats, Alenka Bratušek Party, List of Marjan Šarec, Vesna, and Pirate Party), centre-right group (voters that cast their votes for the Slovenian Democratic Party, New Slovenia Christian Democrats, Lets Connect Slovenia (Povežimo Slovenijo), Our country Party of Aleksandra Pivec, and Slovenian National Party) and others group (all others, mostly very small political parties).

difference between the two groups (centre-left party voters and centre-right party voters) when it comes to their inclination towards the three conspiracy theories tested. However, there is a statistically significant difference with the group of the other parties, which shows a much stronger inclination towards all three tested conspiracy theories. However, it should be noted that only very small political parties with modest support belong to this group, with one exception. Namely, the political party Resni.ca, which was founded during the Covid-19 pandemic in December 2020 as an anti-systemic and conspiracy-oriented political party and was able to obtain almost 3% of the vote in the 2022 parliamentary elections.

We also asked the respondents whether they believe that the political system allows them to have any influence on the government's decision-making processes. The results show that the feeling of political powerlessness (the belief that one has very little or no say in decision-making) is strongly associated with agreement with the New World Order conspiracy theory, but not also with the Covid-19 bioweapons and anti-vax conspiracy theories. The claim that a small secret group of people is responsible for making all important decisions in world politics is directly related to the feeling that the political system is closed and inaccessible. People who feel that they have no influence on the functioning of government are more susceptible to the idea that there is a hidden elite that makes all the important decisions. This connection is understandable to some extent, as a feeling of powerlessness can indeed reinforce the impression that decision-making processes are secretive or even abused and manipulated. Conspiracy theories related to the coronavirus pandemic also have a political dimension, but are often based on medical, scientific or technological interpretations of events. The propensity for these claims may (also) depend more on general attitudes towards science, healthcare and vaccination than on a sense of political influence.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that individuals who perceive themselves as politically powerless are, on average, more likely to endorse conspiracy theories. Specifically, they are more inclined to support the New World Order theory and the claim that the coronavirus was the result of a deliberate and covert action by governments or organisations. However, no statistically significant differences were observed between politically powerless individuals and those who perceive some

degree of influence when it comes to the Covid-19 bioweapons and anti-vaccination conspiracy theories. This suggests that perceptions of political powerlessness shape belief in conspiracy theories unevenly, depending on the specific narrative.

Gender differences were minimal, with the sole exception of the 5G radiation conspiracy theory, where women – particularly those over 45 – were significantly more likely than men to believe that evidence of health risks is being concealed from the public. Notably, the Covid-19 bioweapon conspiracy theory continues to attract considerable support across genders even years after the pandemic, especially among middle-aged men and women who believe the virus was deliberately engineered and released. These findings align with prior research indicating that susceptibility to conspiracy theories depends heavily on the content of the specific theory.

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Age-based differences were relatively small for the New World Order and anti-vaccination theories but more pronounced for the Covid-19 bioweapons theory, with the support lowest among Generations Z and Alpha and highest among Generation X. Education emerged as a strong predictor: higher educational attainment was consistently associated with lower belief in conspiracy theories. This effect was most pronounced for the anti-vaccination and Covid-19 bioweapons theories, while smaller differences were observed for the New World Order theory. These results are consistent with prior studies, which similarly show that higher education reduces susceptibility to conspiratorial thinking (Douglas et al., 2016; Mancosu et al., 2017; Enders et al., 2024).

Contrary to expectations, geographic differences were modest. Only small statistical differences were found between rural areas, small towns, and larger Slovenian cities, though residents of Ljubljana showed significantly lower support for both the anti-vaccination and Covid-19 bioweapons theories. Religious affiliation, however, proved more consequential: Catholics were consistently more inclined towards conspiracy theories than atheists, with statistically significant differences for the Covid-19 bioweapons theory and smaller yet notable differences for the anti-vaccination and New World Order theories.

Finally, voting behaviour was also a differentiating factor. Independent samples t-tests revealed that voters and non-voters diverged in their support for certain theories, particularly the Covid-19 bioweapons and anti-vaccination conspiracies. While voter turnout was unrelated to belief in the New World Order theory, it was associated with a significantly lower propensity towards the Covid-19 bioweapons and anti-vaccination narratives.

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