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How Many Americans Believe In Conspiracy Theories?

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Since the onset of the coronavirus crisis, conspiracy theories have been spreading almost as fast as the virus itself, especially on social media. In order to find out more about the dissemination and acceptance of such conspiracy theories, opinion researchers at Germany's Allensbach Institute surveyed 1,000 representative citizens in each of the United States, Great Britain, France and Germany in June 2020. Almost a third of Americans (32%) say flat out that most conspiracy theorists are “crackpots,” but as many as 22% believe that when it comes to so-called conspiracy theories, “there is more to them than the official accounts of the events.” One in four Americans also believes that the mainstream media “are not telling the truth about corona” and therefore prefers to obtain information from independent sources.

Blaming Bill Gates

In the United States, the survey finds that Bill Gates is more frequently criticized by younger than by older Americans. In response to one of the survey's items, “Bill Gates, one of the richest men in the world, is actually to blame for the corona crisis. He is using the crisis to set up a new world order,” one in eight Americans under the age of 30 agrees, compared with only one in twenty-five Americans over the age of 60.

On average, just 7% of the American population as a whole share the fringe opinion that Bill Gates is the culprit behind the Covid-19 pandemic and believe that he is exploiting the crisis to establish a “new world order.” This compares with 4% of the populations of Great Britain and France and 5% in Germany.

The survey data also reveals that one in five younger Americans – but only one in ten older Americans – has also heard of plans to implant microchips in people to make them easier to control. In truth, no such plans exist, although conspiracy theorists have taken a statement by Bill Gates out of context and claim that this is precisely what he is planning to do.

In contrast, Americans over the age of 60 have a very positive image of Bill Gates. More than half agree with the statement: “With his foundation, Bill Gates has done a lot of good in the fight against hunger and poverty.” Among younger Americans, in contrast, only one in three agrees with this statement.

The survey also reveals that variations in peoples' attitudes toward conspiracy theories are not only a question of age, but also of income. Of Americans who earn \$75,000 or more per annum, 53% say Gates has done a lot of good with his foundation, while only 33% of those who earn less than \$25,000 feel the same.

Capitalism And The Superrich

The survey also confirms strong anti-capitalist sentiment among many younger Americans. Among Americans under the age of 30, as many as 18% think that the corona crisis exposes failings in the capitalist system and that without capitalism, the virus could never have had such a major effect. Of Americans over the age of 60, far fewer share this view, with only 4% signaling their agreement with this statement. And while 40% of younger Americans believe “the true rulers of the world are the superrich,” only 24% of older Americans support this view. The new Allensbach Institute survey confirms the findings of the study *The Rich in Public Opinion*, which was recently published by Cato Institute and reveals, among other things, that younger and older Americans have very different attitudes toward the rich.

Findings In Europe

The Allensbach Institute also asked the same questions in Germany, France and Great Britain. In most cases, responses were similar to those of respondents in the United States. The only really major differences were in response to the following statement: “Most conspiracy theorists are crackpots.” While 53% of German respondents describe most conspiracy theorists as crackpots, only 18% of French respondents do the same.