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## ► To cite this version:

Ophélie Carreras, Jérémy Béna, Patrice Terrier. Exposure and Conspiracism: The Truth Effect in a Survey of Conspiracism in the French Public Opinion. International Convention of Psychological Science (ICPS 2019), Mar 2019, Paris, France. hal-01911915

**HAL Id: hal-01911915**

**<https://hal.science/hal-01911915>**

Submitted on 13 Mar 2019

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# Exposure and Conspiracism: The Truth Effect in a Survey of Conspiracism in the French Public Opinion

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IFOP survey (2017) data analysis

## 1. Background

- The French Institute for Public Opinion conducted a survey on conspiracism in the French public opinion (IFOP, 2017).
- **1252 respondents** first saw **11 statements** (10 conspiracist, 1 creationist) and **judged them as already seen or not**. Then, they indicated if they **agreed or not with these statements** on a 4-point Likert scale (1: "Totally disagree"; 4: "Totally agree").

**Do we find an effect of [perceived] exposure on belief in conspiracist theories in these data?**

- Repeated statements (or perceived as such) are usually judged true more often than new ones: the so-called **truth effect** is robust and well-replicated (Dechêne, Stahl, Hansen, & Wänke, 2010; Bacon, 1979).

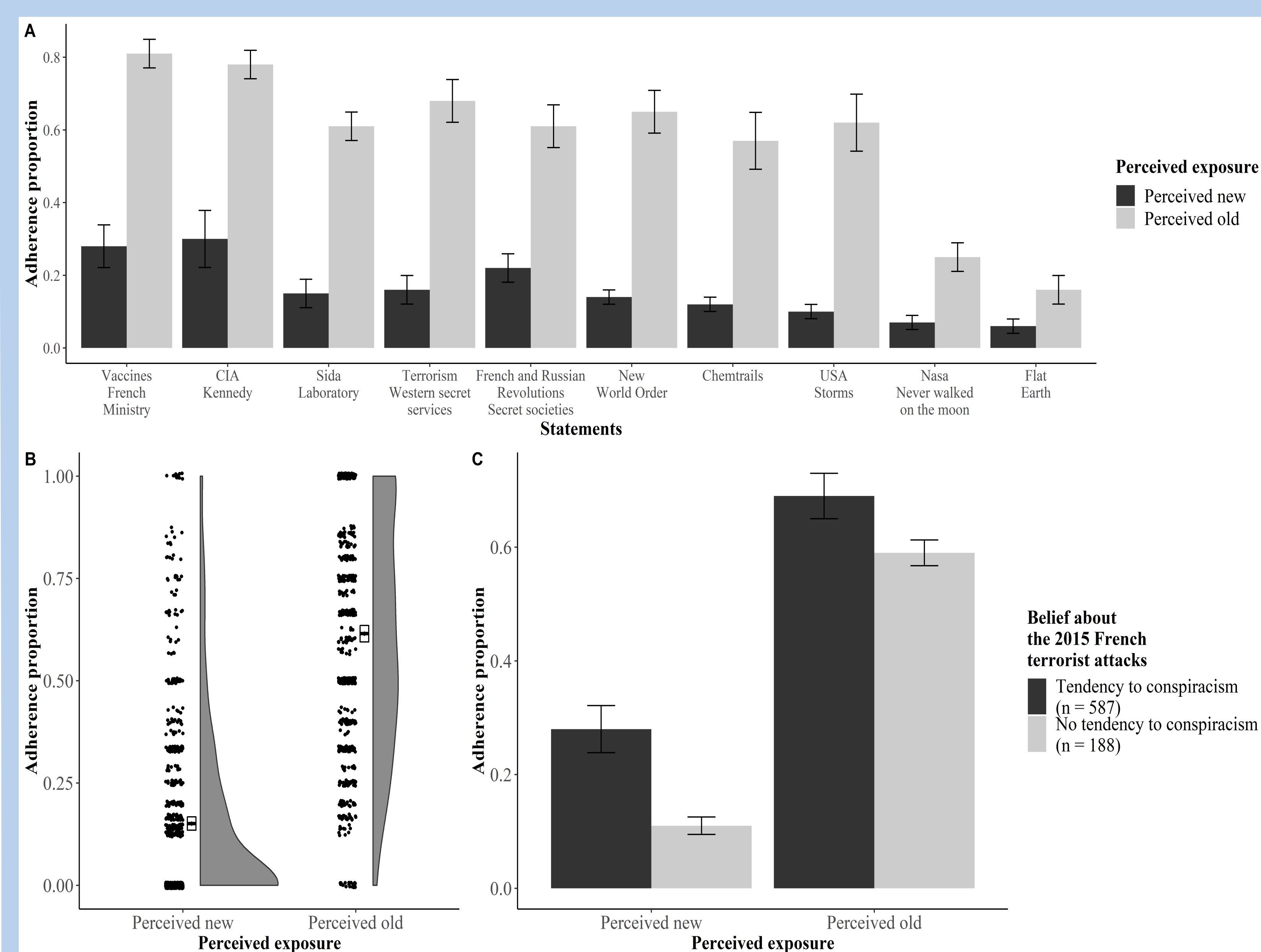
The extent to which the **truth effect replicates with conspiracist statements in a representative sample** could be of importance in order to both **extend the understanding of the truth effect** in situations deviating from those of laboratory studies and to **contribute to the study of conspiracist beliefs**.

## 2. Measures

- Data from the adherence task were recoded in **binary scores** (agree/ disagree) for each conspiracist statement ( $n = 10$ ) and each respondent.
- If respondents judged as "already seen" at least two statements and as "new" at least two statements, we computed a **truth effect score: the difference of adherence proportion between the statements judged as already seen and those judged as new** ( $N = 775$  respondents, 54.19% women ;  $M_{age} = 46.12$ ,  $SD_{age} = 18.42$ ).
- **Individual tendency to conspiracism** was estimated with respondents' opinions about the level of involvement of the French State in the terrorist attacks of January 2015 (recoded into two levels: tendency; no tendency).

## 3. Results

- **Statements judged as already seen were believed more often than those judged as new** (Fig. A & B),  $t(774) = 40.07$ ,  $p = 6.10e - 191$ ,  $d = 1.44$ ,  $BF_{10} = 7.91e + 186$  ( $M_{old} = .62$ ,  $SD_{old} = .29$ ,  $M_{new} = .15$ ,  $SD_{old} = .23$ ,  $M_{diff} = .46$ ,  $SD_{diff} = .32$ ).
- Individual tendency to conspiracism on the 2015 French terrorist attacks significantly moderated this effect (Fig. C),  $t_{Welch}(280) = -2.12$ ,  $p = .035$ ,  $d = .19$ ,  $BF_{10} = 1.21$  (tendency:  $M = .42$ ,  $SD = .36$ , no tendency:  $M = .48$ ;  $SD = .31$ ).
- Respondents with a tendency to conspiracism did recognize and believe more conspiracist statements than other respondents,  $t(774) \geq 3.61$ ,  $p \leq 3.234e - 4$ ,  $d \geq .30$ ,  $BF_{10} \geq 51.72$ .



**Fig.** Adherence proportion as a function of **A.** perceived repetition for each conspiracist statement, **B.** perceived repetition (boxes are the means [black bars] and 95% confidence intervals [box limits], dots are the individual observations, and distributions are the probability density functions), and **C.** perceived repetition and tendency to conspiracism on the 2015 French terrorist attacks (error bars are the 95% confidence intervals in **A.** and **C.**).

## 4. Discussion

- Supports the robustness of the truth effect despite deviations from laboratory settings.
- We hypothesize that **the truth effect might be taken into account to explain belief in conspiracist theories**. Further studies of the truth effect with conspiracist statements would allow to better understand and lessen adherence in conspiracist theories.

## Acknowledgments

We thank Rudy Reichstadt for providing access to the data of the French conspiracism survey (IFOP, 2017) and useful comments on data analyses.

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