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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, $t(774) \geq 3.61$, $p \leq 3.234e - 4$, $d \geq .30$, $BF_{10} \geq 51.72$.

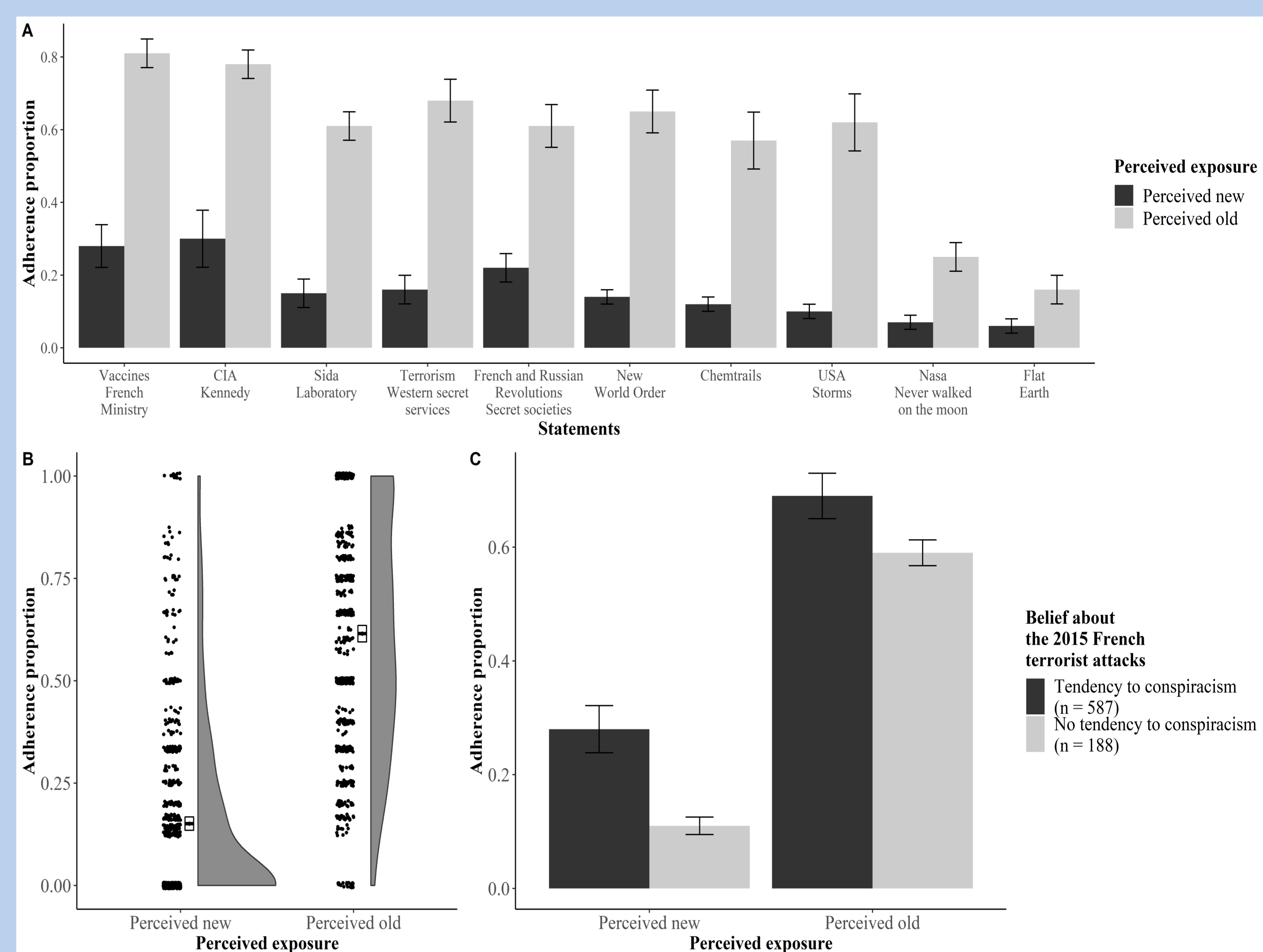


Fig. Adherence proportion as a function of **A.** perceived repetition for each conspiracist statement, **B.** perceived repetition (boxes are the means [black bars] and 95% confidence intervals [box limits], dots are the individual observations, and distributions are the probability density functions), 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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