

# Framing the unthinkable: Individual differences in conspiracy beliefs around the Trump assassination attempt

Friday, September 12, 2025 6:00 PM (10 minutes)

The 2024 U.S. presidential election campaign was marked by an assassination attempt on Donald Trump. The incident sparked intense public debate and gave rise to various alternative theories, including claims that the attack was staged by Trump himself or orchestrated by the Democratic Party.

Grounded in literature on individual differences linked to conspiratorial thinking, the present study examined how specific variables - i.e. Socio-Cognitive Polarization (SCP), problem-solving abilities, and general conspiratorial beliefs - may have influenced the adherence to different explanations of the event. Conducted in early 2025, our study compared responses collected before and after the assassination attempt to assess whether belief in pro- versus anti-Trump conspiracy theories shifted around his election.

116 participants (age:  $M = 42.5$ ,  $SD = 12.7$ ; sex: 57 females, 3 non-binary) were grouped into two clusters based on different levels of psychological flexibility. Those classified as more flexible demonstrated lower levels of SCP and conspiratorial ideation, and higher problem-solving skills, whereas the results were opposite for the less flexible group. Interestingly, even participants with greater psychological flexibility were more likely to endorse anti-Trump conspiracy theories in the aftermath of the election results.

These findings underscore the pervasive influence of conspiratorial ideation in shaping interpretations of socio-political events. They suggest that even individuals with greater cognitive resources and flexibility may be susceptible to biased reasoning. Results highlight the need to further explore how individuals make sense of complex events and underscore the necessity of interventions aimed at mitigating misinformation and its broader social impact.

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