# Classified or Coverup?
## The effect of redactions on conspiracy theory beliefs

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# Appendix

## Stimulus materials and question wording

### Conspiracy predispositions

To what degree do you agree with the following statement? Politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil.

- Strongly disagree [1]
- Moderately disagree [2]
- Slightly disagree [3]
- Slightly agree [4]
- Moderately agree [5]
- Strongly agree [6]

To what degree do you agree with the following statement? Much of what happens in the world today is decided by a small and secretive group of individuals.

- Strongly disagree [1]
- Moderately disagree [2]
- Slightly disagree [3]
- Slightly agree [4]
- Moderately agree [5]
- Strongly agree [6]

**Introductory article**

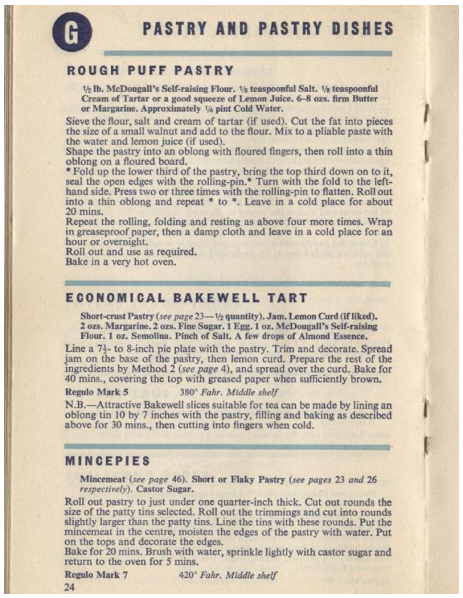
In 1996, TWA Flight 800 exploded minutes after takeoff from New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport on a flight bound for Paris, falling to the water and killing all 230 passengers on board. Some have suggested that the explosion was the result of the plane being hit by a surface-to-air missile accidentally fired by the U.S. Navy during a missile test. Both the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the National Transportation Safety Board conducted separate investigations and found that the plane exploded due to an electrical malfunction. Government officials argue that official documents from their investigation provide thorough evidence in support of this explanation, but others still claim that radar analysis and eyewitness testimony suggest a government coverup.


The remains of TWA Flight 800 inside a hangar in 1996.

## Experimental stimuli

### Control condition

We would now like you to read three excerpts from a vintage cookbook from the 1930s that show how food tastes and preparation have changed over the years. The first is a series of three recipes for pastries and pastry dishes. Please read the document carefully.



G

**PASTRY AND PASTRY DISHES**

**ROUGH PUFF PASTRY**

**½ lb. McDougall's Self-raising Flour. ½ teaspoonful Salt. ½ teaspoonful Cream of Tartar or a good squeeze of Lemon Juice. 6–8 ozs. firm Butter or Margarine. Approximately ¼ pint Cold Water.**

Sieve the flour, salt and cream of tartar (if used). Cut the fat into pieces the size of a small walnut and add to the flour. Mix to a pliable paste with the water and lemon juice (if used).
Shape the pastry into an oblong with floured fingers, then roll into a thin oblong on a floured board.
* Fold up the lower third of the pastry, bring the top third down on to it, seal the open edges with the rolling-pin.* Turn with the fold to the left-hand side. Press two or three times with the rolling-pin to flatten. Roll out into a thin oblong and repeat * to *. Leave in a cold place for about 20 mins.
Repeat the rolling, folding and resting as above four more times. Wrap in greaseproof paper, then a damp cloth and leave in a cold place for an hour or overnight.
Roll out and use as required.
Bake in a very hot oven.

**ECONOMICAL BAKEWELL TART**

**Short-crust Pastry** (*see page* 23—**½ quantity**). **Jam. Lemon Curd (if liked). 2 ozs. Margarine. 2 ozs. Fine Sugar. 1 Egg. 1 oz. McDougall's Self-raising Flour. 1 oz. Semolina. Pinch of Salt. A few drops of Almond Essence.**

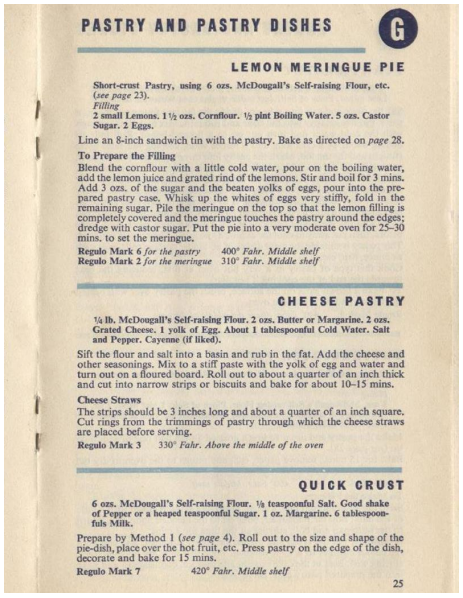
Line a 7½- to 8-inch pie plate with the pastry. Trim and decorate. Spread jam on the base of the pastry, then lemon curd. Prepare the rest of the ingredients by Method 2 (*see page 4*), and spread over the curd. Bake for 40 mins., covering the top with greased paper when sufficiently brown.
**Regulo Mark 5** 380° *Fahr. Middle shelf*
N.B.—Attractive Bakewell slices suitable for tea can be made by lining an oblong tin 10 by 7 inches with the pastry, filling and baking as described above for 30 mins., then cutting into fingers when cold.

**MINCEPIES**

**Mincemeat** (*see page* 46). **Short or Flaky Pastry** (*see pages* 23 *and* 26 *respectively*). **Castor Sugar.**

Roll out pastry to just under one quarter-inch thick. Cut out rounds the size of the patty tins selected. Roll out the trimmings and cut into rounds slightly larger than the patty tins. Line the tins with these rounds. Put the mincemeat in the centre, moisten the edges of the pastry with water. Put on the tops and decorate the edges.
Bake for 20 mins. Brush with water, sprinkle lightly with castor sugar and return to the oven for 5 mins.
**Regulo Mark 7** 420° *Fahr. Middle shelf*
24

The second document consists of three more recipes for pastries and pastry dishes. The recipe book was published in England. Please read the document carefully.



PASTRY AND PASTRY DISHES G

LEMON MERINGUE PIE

**Short-crust Pastry, using 6 ozs. McDougall's Self-raising Flour, etc.** (*see page* 23).
*Filling*
**2 small Lemons. 1½ ozs. Cornflour. ½ pint Boiling Water. 5 ozs. Castor Sugar. 2 Eggs.**

Line an 8-inch sandwich tin with the pastry. Bake as directed on *page* 28.

**To Prepare the Filling**

Blend the cornflour with a little cold water, pour on the boiling water, add the lemon juice and grated rind of the lemons. Stir and boil for 3 mins. Add 3 ozs. of the sugar and the beaten yolks of eggs, pour into the prepared pastry case. Whisk up the whites of eggs very stiffly, fold in the remaining sugar. Pile the meringue on the top so that the lemon filling is completely covered and the meringue touches the pastry around the edges; dredge with castor sugar. Put the pie into a very moderate oven for 25–30 mins. to set the meringue.

**Regulo Mark 6** *for the pastry* 400° *Fahr. Middle shelf*
**Regulo Mark 2** *for the meringue* 310° *Fahr. Middle shelf*

CHEESE PASTRY

**¼ lb. McDougall's Self-raising Flour. 2 ozs. Butter or Margarine. 2 ozs. Grated Cheese. 1 yolk of Egg. About 1 tablespoonful Cold Water. Salt and Pepper. Cayenne (if liked).**

Sift the flour and salt into a basin and rub in the fat. Add the cheese and other seasonings. Mix to a stiff paste with the yolk of egg and water and turn out on a floured board. Roll out to about a quarter of an inch thick and cut into narrow strips or biscuits and bake for about 10–15 mins.

**Cheese Straws**

The strips should be 3 inches long and about a quarter of an inch square. Cut rings from the trimmings of pastry through which the cheese straws are placed before serving.

**Regulo Mark 3** 330° *Fahr. Above the middle of the oven*

QUICK CRUST

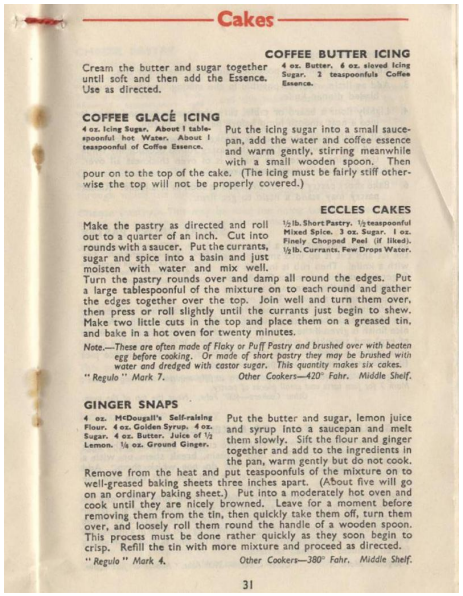
**6 ozs. McDougall's Self-raising Flour. ⅓ teaspoonful Salt. Good shake of Pepper or a heaped teaspoonful Sugar. 1 oz. Margarine. 6 tablespoonfuls Milk.**

Prepare by Method 1 (*see page* 4). Roll out to the size and shape of the pie-dish, place over the hot fruit, etc. Press pastry on the edge of the dish, decorate and bake for 15 mins.

**Regulo Mark 7** 420° *Fahr. Middle shelf*

25

The final document consists of recipes for cakes, ginger snaps, and icing. The recipe book was published in England. Please read the document carefully.



Cakes

COFFEE BUTTER ICING

**4 oz. Butter. 6 oz. sieved Icing Sugar. 2 teaspoonfuls Coffee Essence.**

Cream the butter and sugar together until soft and then add the Essence. Use as directed.

COFFEE GLACÉ ICING

**4 oz. Icing Sugar. About 1 tablespoonful hot Water. About 1 teaspoonful of Coffee Essence.**

Put the icing sugar into a small saucepan, add the water and coffee essence and warm gently, stirring meanwhile with a small wooden spoon. Then pour on to the top of the cake. (The icing must be fairly stiff otherwise the top will not be properly covered.)

ECCLES CAKES

**½ lb. Short Pastry. ½ teaspoonful Mixed Spice. 3 oz. Sugar. 1 oz. Finely Chopped Peel (if liked). ½ lb. Currants. Few Drops Water.**

Make the pastry as directed and roll out to a quarter of an inch. Cut into rounds with a saucer. Put the currants, sugar and spice into a basin and just moisten with water and mix well. Turn the pastry rounds over and damp all round the edges. Put a large tablespoonful of the mixture on to each round and gather the edges together over the top. Join well and turn them over, then press or roll slightly until the currants just begin to shew. Make two little cuts in the top and place them on a greased tin, and bake in a hot oven for twenty minutes.

*Note.—These are often made of Flaky or Puff Pastry and brushed over with beaten egg before cooking. Or made of short pastry they may be brushed with water and dredged with castor sugar. This quantity makes six cakes.*

*"Regulo" Mark 7.* *Other Cookers—420° Fahr. Middle Shelf.*

GINGER SNAPS

**4 oz. McDougall's Self-raising Flour. 4 oz. Golden Syrup. 4 oz. Sugar. 4 oz. Butter. Juice of ½ Lemon. ¼ oz. Ground Ginger.**

Put the butter and sugar, lemon juice and syrup into a saucepan and melt them slowly. Sift the flour and ginger together and add to the ingredients in the pan, warm gently but do not cook. Remove from the heat and put teaspoonfuls of the mixture on to well-greased baking sheets three inches apart. (About five will go on an ordinary baking sheet.) Put into a moderately hot oven and cook until they are nicely browned. Leave for a moment before removing them from the tin, then quickly take them off, turn them over, and loosely roll them round the handle of a wooden spoon. This process must be done rather quickly as they soon begin to crisp. Refill the tin with more mixture and proceed as directed.

*"Regulo" Mark 4.* *Other Cookers—380° Fahr. Middle Shelf.*

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**Unredacted/redacted manipulation**

[Shown in both conditions in Study 1 and Study 2]
We would now like you to read three excerpts from the documents released by the government during its investigation of TWA Flight 800. The first is a transcript of a conversation between an air traffic controller, the Flight 800 pilot, and another pilot in the crash vicinity. Please read the document carefully.

[Shown in Study 2 redaction condition only]
(Note: The documents you are going to read were redacted by the government, which stated that the redactions were necessary to avoid revealing details of airline procedures and military operations that would threaten aviation safety and national security.)

[all stimuli below are identical in Study 1 and Study 2]

[Unredacted]

8:30:14 p.m., Boston Air Route Traffic Control Center: TWA eight hundred, climb and maintain one five thousand [15,000 feet].
8:30:17, TWA Flight 800: TWA's eight hundred heavy, climb and maintain one five thousand, leaving one three thousand
8:31:12: [TWA Flight 800 explodes at an altitude of 13,800 feet, based on post-crash analysis.]
8:31:50, Eastwind Airlines Flight 507: We just saw an explosion out here on Stinger Bee five oh seven.
8:31:51: [Infrared sensor aboard US satellite detects large heat source in the vicinity of Flight 800 crash.]
8:31:57, Boston: Stinger Bee five oh seven, I'm sorry. I missed it. Ah, you're on eighteen. Did you say something else?
8:32:00: [TWA Flight 800 hits water, based on post-crash analysis.]
8:32:01, Eastwind 507: We just saw an explosion up ahead of us here something [like] about sixteen thousand feet or something like that. It just went down—to the water.
8:32:56, Boston: TWA eight hundred, [call] Center.
8:33:04, Boston: TWA eight hundred, Center.
8:33:09, Boston: TWA eight hundred, if you hear Center ident[ify].
8:33:17, Boston: Stinger Bee, ah, five zero seven, you reported an explosion, is that correct, sir?
8:33:21, Eastwind 507: Yes sir, about, ah, five miles at my eleven o'clock here.
8:33:48, Eastwind 507: [unintelligible] Stinger Bee, ah [unintelligible] Boston, we are directly over the site where that airplane or whatever it was just exploded and went into the water. [Then, from a second operator...] [unintelligible] eighteen, ah, nineteen miles on the two thirty-six radial [unintelligible] Hampton.
8:34:01, Boston: Roger that. Thank you very much, sir, we're investigating that right now. TWA eight hundred, Center. TWA eight zero zero, if you hear Center, ident.
8:35:36, Boston: TWA eight hundred, Center.
8:35:43, Eastwind 507: I think that was him.
8:35:45, Boston: I think so.
8:35:48, Eastwind 507: God bless him.
8:36:57, Boston: Stinger Bee five oh seven, thanks for that report, ah, New York on one three three point zero five [133.05 MHz]. Good day, sir.
8:37:05, Eastwind 507: Thirty-three oh five, so long Stinger five oh seven. Anything we can do for you before we go?
8:37:11, Boston: Well, I just want to confirm that, ah, that you saw the, ah, splash in the water approximately, ah, twenty [20 miles] southwest of Hampton, is that right?
8:37:20, Eastwind 507: Ah, yes sir. It, it blew up in the air, and then we saw two fireballs go down to the, to the water and there was a big [unintelligible] smoke form, ah, coming up from that. Also, ah, there seemed to be a light. I, I thought it was a landing light [unintelligible] it was coming right at us at, about, I don't know, about fifteen thousand feet or something like that, and I pushed my landing lights, ah, you know, so I saw him, and then it blew.
8:37:40, Boston: Roger that, sir, ah, that was a seven forty-seven out there you had a visual on that. Anything else in the area when it happened?
8:37:47, Eastwind 507: I didn't see anything. He seemed to be alone. I thought he had a landing light on. Maybe it was a fire, I don't know.
8:37:52, Boston: Stinger Bee five oh seven, ah, roger that. Anything else comes to your mind, ah, you can use your other radio, come back to this frequency and tell me about it.
8:37:59, Eastwind 507: That's all I can think of at this time.

# [Redacted]

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8:37:59, Eastwind 507: That's all I can think of at this time.

The second document is an excerpt from the radar evidence summarized in the official aircraft accident report regarding the inflight breakup of TWA Flight 800 over the Atlantic Ocean. The report was conducted by the National Transportation Survey Board. Please read the document carefully.



Examination of the radar data showed the following vehicle and/or object tracks within 10 nm of TWA flight 800 just before the accident (see figure 25):

- A U.S. Navy P-3 antisubmarine airplane was less than 3 nm south-southwest of TWA flight 800 at an altitude of about 20,000 feet msl, moving to the southwest at more than 250 knots ground speed)
- USAir (now USAirways) flight 217 was about 3 nm south-southwest of TWA flight 800, descending through an altitude of about 21,700 feet msl and moving northward.
- TWA flight 900 was about 9 nm west of TWA flight 800 at an altitude of about 19,000 feet msl, moving to the east northeast.
- An unidentified (primary radar) track was recorded less than 3 nm south-southeast of TWA flight 800, moving southwest about 30 knots ground speed, consistent with the speed of a boat.
- An unidentified (primary radar) track was recorded about 5 nm west of TWA flight 800 moving east-southeast about 15 knots ground speed, consistent with the speed of a boat.
- An unidentified (primary radar) track was recorded about 5 nm west-northwest of TWA flight 800, moving to the south-southwest about 12 knots ground speed, consistent with the speed of a boat.
- An unidentified (primary radar) track was recorded about 6 nm northwest of TWA flight 800, moving to the southeast about 20 knots ground speed consistent with the speed of a boat.

The radar data also showed several isolated primary returns not associated with any track. (As previously noted, primary radar returns are often recorded from surfaces other than airplane surfaces.)

The Safety Board's examination of all of the available radar data revealed no sequence of primary or secondary radar returns that intersected TWA flight 800s position at any time, nor did it reveal any radar returns consistent with a missile or other projectile traveling toward the accident airplane. No secondary radar returns were received from TWA flight 800 after 2031:12; however, after 2031:12, numerous new primary radar returns appeared near the accident airplane's last recorded radar position, some of which were visible for up to 20 minutes after the last secondary radar return was received from the accident airplane. The primary radar returns that appeared near the accident airplane after 2031:12 were recorded largely in two areas of dense concentration, located about 1 to 1 1/2 miles east-northeast and 1 1/2 to 2 1/2 miles northeast of the last secondary radar return, respectively

Factual Information 89 Aircraft Accident Report

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- An [redacted] unidentified (primary radar) track was recorded about 5 nm west-northwest of TWA flight 800, moving to the south-southwest about 12 knots ground speed, [redacted] consistent with the speed of a boat.
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The final document is an excerpt from the conclusions of the official aircraft accident report regarding the inflight breakup of TWA Flight 800 over the Atlantic Ocean. The report was conducted by the National Transportation Survey Board. Please read the document carefully.



### 3.1 Findings

1. The flight crew was properly certificated and qualified and had received the training and off-duty time prescribed by Federal regulations. No evidence indicated any preexisting medical or behavioral conditions that might have adversely affected the flight crew's performance during the accident flight.

2. The airplane was certificated, equipped, and dispatched in accordance with Federal regulations and approved TWA procedures.

3. At the time of the accident, there were light winds and scattered clouds in the area, but there were no significant meteorological conditions that might have disrupted the flight.

4. The in-flight breakup of TWA flight 800 was not initiated by a preexisting condition resulting in a structural failure and decompression.

5. The in-flight breakup of TWA flight 800 was not initiated by a bomb or a missile strike.

6. The fuel/air vapor in the ullage of TWA flight 800's center wing fuel tank was flammable at the time of the accident.

7. A fuel/air explosion in the center wing fuel tank of TWA flight 800 would have been capable of generating sufficient internal pressure to break apart the tank.

8. The witness observations of a streak of light were not related to a missile, and the streak of light reported by most of these witnesses was burning fuel from the accident airplane in crippled flight during some portion of the postexplosion preimpact breakup sequence. The witnesses' observations of one or more fireballs were of the airplane's burning wreckage falling toward the ocean.

9. The TWA flight 800 in-flight breakup was initiated by a fuel/air explosion in the center wing fuel tank.

10. Boeing's design practice that permits parts less than 3 inches long in any direction to be electrically unbonded may not provide adequate protection against potential ignition hazards created by static electricity generated by lightning or other high-energy discharges. Conclusions 307 Aircraft Accident Report



### 3.2 Probable Cause

The National Transportation Safety Board determines that the probable cause of the TWA flight 800 accident was an explosion of the center wing fuel tank (CWT), resulting from ignition of the flammable fuel/air mixture in the tank. The source of ignition energy for the explosion could not be determined with certainty, but, of the sources evaluated by the investigation, the most likely was a short circuit outside of the CWT that allowed excessive voltage to enter it through electrical wiring associated with the fuel quantity indication system. Contributing factors to the accident were the design and certification concept that fuel tank explosions could be prevented solely by precluding all ignition sources and the design and certification of the Boeing 747 with heat sources located beneath the CWT with no means to reduce the heat transferred into the CWT or to render the fuel vapor in the tank nonflammable.



### 3.1 Findings

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3. At the time of the accident, there were light winds and scattered clouds in the area, but there were no significant meteorological conditions that might have disrupted the flight.

4. The in-flight breakup of TWA flight 800 was not initiated by a preexisting condition resulting in a structural failure and decompression.

5. [redacted] The in-flight breakup of TWA flight 800 was not initiated by a bomb or a missile strike. [redacted]

6. The fuel/air vapor in the ullage of TWA flight 800's center wing fuel tank was flammable at the time of the accident. [redacted]

7. A fuel/air explosion ******* in the center wing fuel tank of TWA flight 800 would have been capable of generating sufficient internal pressure to break apart the tank. [redacted]

8. The witness observations of a streak of light were not related to a missile, [redacted] and the streak of light reported by most of these witnesses was burning fuel from the accident airplane in crippled flight during some portion of the postexplosion preimpact breakup sequence. The witnesses' observations of one or more fireballs were of the airplane's burning wreckage falling toward the ocean. [redacted]

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**Dependent variables**

We would now like to ask you for your beliefs about TWA Flight 800. For each of the statements below and on the following pages, please indicate how likely or unlikely you think it is that the statement is true.

A mechanical failure caused the explosion of TWA Flight 800.

- Very unlikely [6]
- Somewhat unlikely [5]
- Slightly unlikely [4]
- Slightly likely [3]
- Somewhat likely [2]
- Very likely [1]

The U.S. government was involved in the explosion of TWA Flight 800.

- Very unlikely [1]
- Somewhat unlikely [2]
- Slightly unlikely [3]
- Slightly likely [4]
- Somewhat likely [5]
- Very likely [6]

TWA Flight 800 was shot down by a missile fired by the U.S. military.

- Very unlikely [1]
- Somewhat unlikely [2]

- Slightly unlikely [3]
- Slightly likely [4]
- Somewhat likely [5]
- Very likely [6]

The government thoroughly investigated the crash of Flight 800 and determined its true cause.

- Very unlikely [6]
- Somewhat unlikely [5]
- Slightly unlikely [4]
- Slightly likely [3]
- Somewhat likely [2]
- Very likely [1]

The government is covering up the true cause of the explosion of TWA Flight 800 from the public.

- Very unlikely [1]
- Somewhat unlikely [2]
- Slightly unlikely [3]
- Slightly likely [4]
- Somewhat likely [5]
- Very likely [6]

## Testing H2 as a difference-in-differences estimate

As noted in the main text, our second hypothesis predicted that the difference in conspiracy beliefs between the redacted and unredacted conditions would be greater among individuals with high conspiracy predispositions than those with low predispositions.

Tables 2 and A2 estimate the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} Y = \beta_0 &+ \beta_1 * \text{redacted} + \beta_2 * \text{unredacted} + \beta_3 * \text{highconspiracy} \\ &+ \beta_4 * \text{redactedXhighconspiracy} + \beta_5 * \text{unredactedXhighconspiracy} \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

We wish to calculate the following difference-in-differences estimate, which represents the difference in redaction effects (relative to the baseline condition, which is the excluded category in the model above) between low- and high-predisposition participants:

> (Effect of redacted text on high-conspiracy subjects - effect of unredacted text on high-conspiracy subjects) - (Effect of redacted text on low-conspiracy subjects - effect of unredacted text on low-conspiracy subjects)

This quantity of interest can be reduced to what is reported in the auxiliary row in the tables as follows:

$$\begin{aligned} &= \left( \underbrace{(\beta_1 + \beta_4)}_{\text{Redacted/HC}} - \underbrace{(\beta_2 + \beta_5)}_{\text{Unredacted/HC}} \right) - \left( \underbrace{\beta_1}_{\text{Redacted/LC}} - \underbrace{\beta_2}_{\text{Unredacted/LC}} \right) \\ &= (\beta_1 - \beta_2) + (\beta_4 - \beta_5) - (\beta_1 - \beta_2) \\ &= \beta_4 - \beta_5 \end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

Table A1: Respondent characteristics

(a) Study 1

| | Control | Unredacted | Redacted | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Age* | | | | |
| 18-29 | 48% | 46% | 45% | 46% |
| 30-39 | 27% | 28% | 26% | 27% |
| 40-59 | 21% | 22% | 26% | 23% |
| 60+ | 4% | 3% | 3% | 3% |
| *Gender* | | | | |
| Female | 49% | 50% | 56% | 52% |
| Male | 51% | 50% | 44% | 48% |
| *Education* | | | | |
| High school or less | 10% | 10% | 9% | 10% |
| Some college/associate degree | 41% | 40% | 41% | 41% |
| Bachelor's degree | 37% | 36% | 36% | 36% |
| Graduate degree | 12% | 14% | 14% | 14% |
| *Race* | | | | |
| Nonwhite | 21% | 19% | 21% | 20% |
| White | 79% | 81% | 79% | 80% |
| *Party* | | | | |
| Democrat | 39% | 38% | 45% | 41% |
| Republican | 19% | 19% | 14% | 18% |
| Independent/something else | 42% | 43% | 41% | 42% |
| N | 835 | 852 | 837 | 2524 |

(b) Study 2

| | Control | Unredacted | Redacted | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| *Age* | | | | |
| 18-29 | 46% | 44% | 44% | 44% |
| 30-39 | 30% | 30% | 32% | 31% |
| 40-59 | 21% | 23% | 20% | 21% |
| 60+ | 4% | 3% | 4% | 4% |
| *Gender* | | | | |
| Female | 52% | 50% | 55% | 52% |
| Male | 48% | 50% | 45% | 48% |
| *Education* | | | | |
| High school or less | 9% | 9% | 11% | 10% |
| Some college/associate degree | 38% | 38% | 39% | 39% |
| Bachelor's degree | 39% | 39% | 37% | 38% |
| Graduate degree | 14% | 13% | 13% | 14% |
| *Race* | | | | |
| Nonwhite | 16% | 22% | 20% | 20% |
| White | 84% | 78% | 80% | 80% |
| *Party* | | | | |
| Democrat | 43% | 42% | 44% | 43% |
| Republican | 18% | 19% | 18% | 18% |
| Independent/something else | 39% | 39% | 37% | 38% |
| N | 835 | 839 | 841 | 2515 |

Table A2: Response timing by condition

(a) Study 1

| | Stimulus (seconds) | Mech. failure | Govt. involved | Shot down | Thorough investigation | Govt. coverup | Average beliefs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Redacted | 105.15** | -2.37** | -0.06 | 0.27 | -0.07 | -0.04 | -0.40* |
| | (8.16) | (0.59) | (0.23) | (0.24) | (0.25) | (0.22) | (0.20) |
| Unredacted | 107.28** | -2.07** | -0.31 | -0.25 | 0.04 | -0.13 | -0.52* |
| | (8.31) | (0.61) | (0.21) | (0.21) | (0.25) | (0.21) | (0.20) |
| Control mean | 179.68** | 15.39** | 6.19** | 5.28** | 7.12** | 5.58** | 7.87** |
| | (4.97) | (0.43) | (0.16) | (0.15) | (0.17) | (0.15) | (0.14) |
| Redacted − unredacted | -2.14 | -0.31 | 0.26 | 0.52* | -0.11 | 0.10 | 0.11 |
| | (9.29) | (0.58) | (0.22) | (0.24) | (0.26) | (0.21) | (0.20) |
| N | 2493 | 2512 | 2512 | 2509 | 2501 | 2500 | 2478 |

(b) Study 2

| | Stimulus (seconds) | Mech. failure | Govt. involved | Shot down | Thorough investigation | Govt. coverup | Average beliefs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Redacted | 112.82** | -1.15+ | -0.21 | -0.26 | -0.31+ | -0.18 | -0.46* |
| | (7.72) | (0.66) | (0.19) | (0.17) | (0.18) | (0.20) | (0.19) |
| Unredacted | 104.53** | -1.87** | -0.27 | -0.23 | -0.07 | -0.32 | -0.55** |
| | (7.65) | (0.59) | (0.19) | (0.17) | (0.23) | (0.19) | (0.18) |
| Control mean | 179.66** | 14.35** | 5.78** | 4.88** | 6.59** | 5.26** | 7.39** |
| | (4.68) | (0.42) | (0.14) | (0.13) | (0.13) | (0.15) | (0.13) |
| Redacted − unredacted | 8.29 | 0.72 | 0.05 | -0.03 | -0.24 | 0.14 | 0.10 |
| | (8.62) | (0.66) | (0.18) | (0.24) | (0.22) | (0.18) | (0.19) |
| N | 2493 | 2511 | 2507 | 2511 | 2507 | 2502 | 2486 |

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. OLS estimates with robust standard errors. Response times trimmed to the $99^{\text{th}}$ percentile of the distribution by question due to extreme outliers. Timing for outcome variables only considered for non-missing responses.

## Study 2: Participants, design, and procedure

To address the concern that no reason was given for the redactions in Study 1, the instructions provided to respondents in the redaction condition in Study 2 were modified to include a realistic rationale (e.g., Landay and Doyle 2014; Jansen 2015):

> (Note: The documents you are going to read were redacted by the government, which stated that the redactions were necessary to avoid revealing details of airline procedures and military operations that would threaten aviation safety and national security.)

This rationale is substantively plausible given the content of the stimulus documents, which include, for instance, information on correspondence between commercial aircraft and air traffic control (which could be thought to contain sensitive information on airline procedures) and radar data that describes the position of an antisubmarine airplane (further details on its status or procedures could be thought to be classified).

After completing the survey, respondents were debriefed that the redactions and the provided rationale were fictitious, though the documents they read were genuine. All other materials and procedures in Study 2 were identical to Study 1, including the content of the stimuli and the wording and construction of the dependent variables.

A new set of Amazon Mechanical Turk participants were recruited to complete Study 2 on the Qualtrics online survey platform.[1] The study was conducted from August 20–21, 2015.[2] By construction, the sample size was equivalent to Study 1 ($n = 2515$). The demographic characteristics (48% male, 80% white, median age group 30–39, 52% bachelor's degree or higher) and political leanings of the sample (43% identify as Democrats, 18% as

[1] Those who had previously taken part in Study 1 were excluded by a script that checked their Mechanical Turk ID against a list of past participants.

[2] A piece of debris was identified as part of Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 several weeks before the study was conducted. In this sense, the context of the studies was similar (Study 1 was conducted during the initial search for wreckage from the flight).

Republicans, 38% as independents or something else) were also virtually identical (see Table A1 above for further details).

## Study 2: Results

As in Study 1, we again find strong support for our first hypothesis. Even when a rationale was provided for the presence of redactions, respondents exposed to redacted documents reported higher conspiracy beliefs (mean=2.50, 95% CI: 2.41–2.59) than those exposed to unredacted documents (mean=2.35, 95% CI: 2.27–2.44; $t = 2.29$, $p < .05$). Our research question about the effect of exposure to the documents relative to controls yields somewhat different results, however. Unlike in Study 1, average conspiracy beliefs decreased relative to controls (mean=2.64, 95% CI: 2.55–2.73) in both the unredacted and redacted conditions ($t = 4.62$, $p < .01$ and $t = 2.29$, $p < .05$, respectively).[3] In other words, the presence of redactions partially offset but did not eliminate the misperception-reducing effect of exposure to the information in the documents.[4] The treatment effects for Study 2 are analyzed more systematically in Table A3, which follows the structure of Table 1 above. The key quantity for each dependent variable is the difference in effects between the redacted and unredacted conditions, which is presented in a row at the bottom at the table. This quantity is positive and significant at the $p < .05$ level for the average belief measure as well as three of the five dependent variables in the scale, indicating that conspiracy beliefs were higher overall on average and for a majority of the individual outcome measures when redactions were present.[5] Moreover, a preregistered timing analysis mirroring the exploratory findings from Study 1 above again provides no evidence that respondents in the redaction condition differed in how long they spent longer reading the

[3]As described above, the comparison between the redacted condition and the controls estimates the the *joint* effect of exposure to corrective information *and* redactions.

[4]Note: We again find no difference in redaction effects by conspiracy predispositions and thus omit discussion of those results here to conserve space (see Table A4 below).

[5]The differences we observe in conspiracy adherence mirror Figure 1 above. Overall, 29% of respondents in the control condition had an average response above the outcome measures' midpoint (95% CI: 26–32%) compared with 24% of those in the redacted condition (95% CI: 21–26%) and 20% in the unredacted condition (95% CI: 17–23%).

Table A3: Redaction effects on TWA Flight 800 conspiracy beliefs

| | Mech. failure | Govt. involved | Shot down | Thorough investigation | Govt. coverup | Average beliefs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Redacted documents | -0.19** | -0.15* | -0.24** | 0.00 | -0.13+ | -0.15* |
| | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.08) | (0.06) |
| Unredacted documents | -0.28** | -0.32** | -0.39** | -0.10 | -0.31** | -0.29** |
| | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.08) | (0.06) |
| Control mean | 2.63** | 2.70** | 2.59** | 2.50** | 2.78** | 2.64** |
| | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.05) | (0.05) |
| *Redaction effect* (H1): | | | | | | |
| Redacted − unredacted | 0.09 | 0.16* | 0.15* | 0.10 | 0.18* | 0.14* |
| | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.07) | (0.06) |
| N | 2513 | 2509 | 2513 | 2509 | 2504 | 2488 |

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. OLS estimates with robust standard errors.

stimuli or answering outcome measures (see Table A2 above).[6]

[6]Unlike in Study 1, respondents made fewer relevant comments in the redacted versus the unredacted condition. However, the difference was substantively very small (1.2% versus 2.5%; $t = 2.00$, $p < .05$). Given that only 31 respondents in either condition made such comments, the weight of the evidence based on response time data from the full sample is still consistent with the interpretation that respondent attention and engagement was equivalent between the redacted and unredacted conditions.

Table A4: Redaction effects by conspiracy predispositions (Study 2)

| | Mech. failure | Govt. involved | Shot down | Thorough investigation | Govt. coverup | Average beliefs |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Redacted documents | -0.25** | -0.22** | -0.26** | -0.11 | -0.21* | -0.22** |
| | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.08) |
| Unredacted documents | -0.29** | -0.31** | -0.38** | -0.09 | -0.30** | -0.28** |
| | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.09) | (0.08) | (0.09) | (0.08) |
| High conspiracy predisp. | 0.57** | 0.97** | 0.91** | 0.65** | 0.94** | 0.80** |
| | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.10) | (0.11) | (0.09) |
| Redacted × high consp. | 0.08 | 0.08 | -0.02 | 0.20 | 0.10 | 0.09 |
| | (0.14) | (0.14) | (0.14) | (0.13) | (0.15) | (0.12) |
| Unredacted × high consp. | 0.03 | -0.03 | -0.02 | -0.03 | -0.02 | -0.02 |
| | (0.14) | (0.14) | (0.14) | (0.13) | (0.15) | (0.12) |
| Control mean | 2.37** | 2.25** | 2.18** | 2.20** | 2.35** | 2.27** |
| | (0.07) | (0.06) | (0.06) | (0.06) | (0.07) | (0.06) |
| *Difference in redaction effects (H2):* | | | | | | |
| Redacted × high consp. − | 0.06 | 0.11 | 0.01 | 0.23+ | 0.12 | 0.11 |
| unredacted × high consp. | (0.13) | (0.13) | (0.13) | (0.13) | (0.14) | (0.12) |
| N | 2510 | 2506 | 2510 | 2506 | 2501 | 2485 |

+ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$. OLS estimates with robust standard errors.

Table A5: Compliance with JEPS reporting standards

| Item | Location |
|---|---|
| A. *Hypotheses* | |
| State specific objectives or hypotheses. | Page 3 |
| B. *Subjects and context* | |
| Report eligibility and exclusion criteria for participants. | Pages 2–3. Mechanical Turk workers were ineligible for Study 1 if they had participated in a pretest of the study or for Study 2 if they had participated in the pretest or Study 1. |
| How were participants contacted for recruitment? Were incentives offered? | Page 5, appendix (respondents from Mechanical Turk were offered incentives to participate) |
| Report recruitment dates defining the periods of recruitment and when the experiments were conducted. | Page 5, appendix |
| Describe settings and locations where the data were collected. | Page 5, appendix |
| If there is a survey: Provide response rate and how it was calculated. | N/A; studies conducted on Mechanical Turk. |
| C. *Allocation method* | |
| Report details of the procedure used to generate the assignment sequence (e.g., randomization procedures). | Random assignment was generated by the Qualtrics software platform. |
| If random assignment used, report details of procedure (e.g., any restrictions, blocking). | N/A (simple random assignment) |
| If random assignment used, to help detect errors such as problems in the procedure used for random assignment or failure to properly account for blocking, provide a table (in text or appendix) showing baseline means and standard deviations for demographic characteristics and other pretreatment measures (if collected) by experimental group. | See Table A1 above. There is some evidence of imbalance by gender and party in Study 1 and race in Study 2, but as we note in footnote 11, our results are unchanged if we control for these factors and the other respondent characteristics listed in the table. |

*(continued on next page)*

| Item | Location |
|---|---|
| Describe blinding. | Subjects were blind to which condition they were in. |
| D. *Treatments* | |
| Provide a detailed description of the interventions in each treatment condition as well as a description of the control group. | Pages 5–6, appendix |
| State how and when manipulations or interventions were administered. | See page 6, appendix; manipulation was random assignment by Qualtrics into experimental condition |
| Report the number of repetitions of the experimental task and the group rotation protocol. Report the ordering of treatments for within-subject designs. Any piggybacking of other protocols should be reported. Report any use of experienced subjects or subjects used in more than one session or treatment. | N/A |
| Report time span: How long did each experiment last? How many sessions were subjects expected to attend? If there were multiple sessions, how much time passed between them? | Single online session |
| Report total number of sessions conducted and number of subjects used in each session. | One individual session for each respondent (online) |
| Report whether deception was used. | No |
| Report treatment fidelity: Evidence on whether the treatment was delivered as intended. | Yes (online platform; no known technical errors) |
| Were incentives given? If so, what were they and how were they administered? | Payments to participants via Mechanical Turk platform |
| E. *Results* | |
| 1. Outcome measures and covariates | |
| Provide precise definitions of all primary and secondary measures and covariates. | Appendix |
| Clearly state which of the outcomes and subgroup analyses were specified prior to the experiment and which were the result of exploratory analysis. | All specified prior to study except as noted in the text |

*(continued on next page)*

| Item | Location |
|---|---|
| 2. CONSORT participant flow diagram | |
| Number of subjects initially assessed for eligibility for the study. | 3,003 (Study 1), 2,816 (Study 2) |
| Exclusions prior to random assignment and reasons for the exclusions. | 479 participants dropped out of Study 1 prior to beginning the survey (i.e., at the consent form) or were excluded due to participation in a pretest; 301 participants dropped out of Study 2 on the consent page or were excluded due to participating in Study 1 or the pretest. |
| Number of subjects initially assigned to each experimental group. | Study 1: 835 control, 852 unredacted, 837 redacted; Study 2: 835 control, 839 unredacted, 841 redacted |
| The proportion of each group that received its allocated intervention and the reasons why subjects did not receive the intended intervention. | N/A (all participants received allocated interventions as far as we know) |
| The number of subjects in each group that dropped out or for other reasons do not have outcome data. | See discussion of missing outcome data below |
| The number of subjects in each group that are included in the statistical analysis, and the reasons for any exclusions. | No other exclusions |
| 3. Statistical analysis | |
| Researchers will conduct statistical analysis and report their results in the manner they deem appropriate. We recommend that this reporting include the following: | |
| Note whether the level of analysis differs from level of randomization and estimate appropriate standard errors. | N/A (individual-level randomization and analysis) |
| If there is attrition, discuss reasons for attrition and examine whether attrition is related to pretreatment variables. | No known attrition (short, single-session studies) |
| Report other missing data (not outcome variables): | |

*(continued on next page)*

| Item | Location |
|---|---|
| -Frequency or percentages of missing data by group. | N/A (see below for outcome data; treatment assignment observed for all respondents; no other control variables used in analysis) |
| -Methods for addressing missing data (e.g., listwise deletion, imputation methods). | Listwise deletion |
| -For each primary and secondary outcome and for each subgroup, provide summary of the number of cases deleted from each analysis and rationale for dropping the cases. | Cases dropped due to missing data by outcome measure and study: mechanical failure (S1: 3, S2: 2), government involved (S1: 3, S2: 6), shot down (S1: 5, S2: 2), thorough investigation (S1: 13, S2: 6), government coverup (S1: 15, S2: 11), average beliefs (S1: 34, S2: 27). |
| For survey experiments: Describe in detail any weighting procedures that are used. | No weights used |
| F. *Other information* | |
| Was the experiment reviewed and approved by an IRB? | Yes |
| If the experimental protocol was registered, where and how can the filing be accessed? | Pages 3, 10 |
| What was the source of funding? What was the role of the funders in the analysis of the experiment? | Acknowledgments (Dartmouth College Office of Undergraduate Research) |
| Were there any restrictions or arrangements regarding what findings could be published? Are there any funding sources where conflict of interest might be an issue? | No |
| If a replication data set is available, provide the URL. | Replication data will be made available at the *Journal of Experimental Political Science* website after publication. |

(Note: All page numbers above correspond to the non-typeset text that will be made available at `http://www.dartmouth.edu/~nyhan/redactions-conspiracy.pdf`.)

# References

Jansen, Bart. 2015. "Watchdog: TSA gave expedited screening to convicted felon." *USA Today*, March 19, 2015. Downloaded September 1, 2015 from `http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/03/19/tsa-pre-check-felon/25034075/`.

Landay, Jonathan S., and Michael Doyle. 2014. "Obama officials, Senate intelligence panel spar over deletions from torture report." McClatchyDC, August 4, 2014. Downloaded September 1, 2015 from `http://www.mcclatchydc.com/news/nation-world/national/national-security/article24771430.html`.