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Reporting Summary

Nature Research wishes to improve the reproducibility of the work that we publish. This form provides structure for consistency and transparency in reporting. For further information on Nature Research policies, see our Editorial Policies and the Editorial Policy Checklist.

Statistics

For all statistical analyses, confirm that the following items are present in the figure legend, table legend, main text, or Methods section.

n/a	Confirmed	
☐	☒	The exact sample size (*n*) for each experimental group/condition, given as a discrete number and unit of measurement
☐	☒	A statement on whether measurements were taken from distinct samples or whether the same sample was measured repeatedly
☐	☒	The statistical test(s) used AND whether they are one- or two-sided *Only common tests should be described solely by name; describe more complex techniques in the Methods section.*
☐	☒	A description of all covariates tested
☒	☐	A description of any assumptions or corrections, such as tests of normality and adjustment for multiple comparisons
☐	☒	A full description of the statistical parameters including central tendency (e.g. means) or other basic estimates (e.g. regression coefficient) AND variation (e.g. standard deviation) or associated estimates of uncertainty (e.g. confidence intervals)
☐	☒	For null hypothesis testing, the test statistic (e.g. *F*, *t*, *r*) with confidence intervals, effect sizes, degrees of freedom and *P* value noted *Give P values as exact values whenever suitable.*
☒	☐	For Bayesian analysis, information on the choice of priors and Markov chain Monte Carlo settings
☒	☐	For hierarchical and complex designs, identification of the appropriate level for tests and full reporting of outcomes
☐	☒	Estimates of effect sizes (e.g. Cohen's *d*, Pearson's *r*), indicating how they were calculated

Our web collection on statistics for biologists contains articles on many of the points above.

Software and code

Policy information about availability of computer code

Data collection	Data was collected using the Qualtrics survey software. No custom codes were developed.
Data analysis	Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS v25. The code used to analyse the datasets is publicly available via PsychArchives (https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.8252).

For manuscripts utilizing custom algorithms or software that are central to the research but not yet described in published literature, software must be made available to editors and reviewers. We strongly encourage code deposition in a community repository (e.g. GitHub). See the Nature Research guidelines for submitting code & software for further information.

Data

Policy information about availability of data

All manuscripts must include a data availability statement. This statement should provide the following information, where applicable:

- Accession codes, unique identifiers, or web links for publicly available datasets
- A list of figures that have associated raw data
- A description of any restrictions on data availability

The data supporting the findings reported in the manuscript and the source data of Figures 1-3 are publicly available via PsychArchives (https://doi.org/10.23668/psycharchives.8253).

Field-specific reporting

Please select the one below that is the best fit for your research. If you are not sure, read the appropriate sections before making your selection.

☐ Life sciences ☒ Behavioural & social sciences ☐ Ecological, evolutionary & environmental sciences

For a reference copy of the document with all sections, see nature.com/documents/nr-reporting-summary-flat.pdf

Behavioural & social sciences study design

All studies must disclose on these points even when the disclosure is negative.

Study description	We conducted eight studies with quantitative experimental designs. As part of an online questionnaire, participants were randomly assigned to one of several conditions (an overview of conditions per study is given in Supplementary Table 2). Participants either received no information about the wind farms, received only information in favour of building the wind farms or received information both in favour of and against building the wind farms. We measured participants' intention to vote in favour of building the wind farms in a (fictitious) local referendum as well as their conspiracy beliefs (i.e., conspiracy mentality and specific conspiracy beliefs).
Research sample	Study 1: German citizens recruited via Clickworker (mean age = 36.21, 69 female, 70 male, 3 other); sample chosen for convenience Study 2: German citizens recruited via Clickworker (mean age = 37.13, 137 female, 136 male, 2 other); sample chosen for convenience Study 3: German citizens recruited via Clickworker (mean age = 34.21, 186 female, 172 male, 3 other); sample chosen for convenience Study 4: German citizens recruited via Clickworker (mean age = 29.90, 198 female, 206 male, 12 other); sample chosen for convenience Study 5: German citizens recruited via Prolific (mean age = 28.12, 209 female, 202 male, 8 other); sample chosen for convenience Study 6: German citizens recruited via Prolific (mean age = 28.51, 129 female, 112 male, 8 other); sample chosen for convenience Study 7: German citizens recruited via Clickworker (mean age = 40.42, 70 female, 119 male, 4 other); sample chosen for convenience Study 8: German citizens recruited via Respondi (mean age = 44.87, 1067 female, 1046 male, 2 other); representative sample (i.e., nationally quota-balanced for age, gender, education, and region) More details on sample characteristics are given in Supplementary Table 1. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and they were payed for partcipation. Payment differed between studies but was generally above the minimum wage in Germany.
Sampling strategy	Studies 1 to 7: convenience; Study 8: national quota-balanced sample. No a priori power analyses were conducted for the studies. Instead, we aimed at a minimum sample size of n = 75 to 150 participants per condition (depending on the study) and preregistered rules for sequential testing (according to Lakens, 2014) in order to guarantee a sufficient statistical power to detect a minimum effect size of interest (d > 0.2). The planned number of participants was preregistered for every study and we sticked to these plans.
Data collection	All data was collected in online studies with participants using their personal computer. No researcher or assistant was present at the data collection.
Timing	Data was collected at the following dates. Study 1: 4th of October 2021 Study 2: 29th of October 2021 Study 3: 25th to 27th November 2021 Study 4: 13th December 2021 Study 5: 17th to 18th January 2022 Study 6: 8th to 11th March 2022 Study 7: 15th of March 2022 Study 8: 18th to 28th March 2022.
Data exclusions	As preregistered, we included participants in our analyses if they fulfilled the following criteria: being at least 18 years old, speaking German fluently (because study materials were largely text-based), not failing the attention check items included in the survey, not taking the survey multiple times, not being psychology students (because they are familiar with psychological study procedures and might be suspicious about our hypotheses), and not being identified as statistical outliers in the main analysis (based on studentised deleted residuals, see preregistrations). In Study 8, however, we did not apply the language and psychology criteria in order to not compromise the representativeness of the sample. For the same reason, we did not analyse the data of 75 participants in Study 8 who were additionally recruited due to a sampling error of the recruiting agency. Based on these criteria N = 301 participants from the original samples were excluded (Study 1: n = 10; Study 2: n = 24; Study 3: n = 36; Study 4: n = 34; Study 5: n = 28; Study 6: n = 22; Study 7: n = 4; Study 8: n = 143).
Non-participation	Information unavailable. Data of participants who declined their participation were not written by the survey software but deleted immediately.
Randomization	In all studies participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions (information on participants per condition can be assessed in Supplementary Table 2).

Reporting for specific materials, systems and methods

We require information from authors about some types of materials, experimental systems and methods used in many studies. Here, indicate whether each material, system or method listed is relevant to your study. If you are not sure if a list item applies to your research, read the appropriate section before selecting a response.

Materials & experimental systems

n/a	Involved in the study
☒	☐ Antibodies
☒	☐ Eukaryotic cell lines
☒	☐ Palaeontology and archaeology
☒	☐ Animals and other organisms
☐	☒ Human research participants
☒	☐ Clinical data
☐	☐ Dual use research of concern

Methods

n/a	Involved in the study
☒	☐ ChIP-seq
☒	☐ Flow cytometry
☒	☐ MRI-based neuroimaging

Human research participants

Policy information about studies involving human research participants

Population characteristics	See above
Recruitment	Participants (Studies 1 to 7) were recruited via the participant platforms Clickworker and Prolific. Participants sign up voluntarily on these platforms and usually have a higher education level, are younger, and are more politically left-leaning compared to the general population. To ensure representativity of our results, we conducted a large final study (Study 8) via the recruiting agency Respondi who guaranteed quota that matched age, gender, education, and region of the German population.
Ethics oversight	All studies were conducted in line with the ethical guidelines for psychological research of the American Psychological Association and the German Research Foundation and received ethical approval by the institutional ethics board of the Leibniz-Institut für Wissensmedien (Tübingen, Germany; LEK 2019/001)

Note that full information on the approval of the study protocol must also be provided in the manuscript.

Dual use research of concern

Policy information about dual use research of concern

Hazards

Could the accidental, deliberate or reckless misuse of agents or technologies generated in the work, or the application of information presented in the manuscript, pose a threat to:

No	Yes
☒	☐ Public health
☒	☐ National security
☒	☐ Crops and/or livestock
☒	☐ Ecosystems
☒	☐ Any other significant area

Experiments of concern

Does the work involve any of these experiments of concern:

No	Yes	
☒	☐	Demonstrate how to render a vaccine ineffective
☒	☐	Confer resistance to therapeutically useful antibiotics or antiviral agents
☒	☐	Enhance the virulence of a pathogen or render a nonpathogen virulent
☒	☐	Increase transmissibility of a pathogen
☒	☐	Alter the host range of a pathogen
☒	☐	Enable evasion of diagnostic/detection modalities
☒	☐	Enable the weaponization of a biological agent or toxin
☒	☐	Any other potentially harmful combination of experiments and agents