

Who Endorses COVID-19 Conspiracies?

Research Report: PCIS-001 | February 12, 2022

Research Question

Institutional responses to COVID-19 have been global in scope and have impacted nearly every aspect of peoples' lives, from travel to schooling to business. Before too long, a cacophony of opinions—informed, semi-informed and uninformed—soon took off and spread throughout our information ecosystem. In this report, we look at the prevalence of differing conspiracy beliefs about COVID-19, from the unconfirmed but possible to the highly unlikely. Based on the summary report of the US National Intelligence Council (2021), we here assume the “lab leak” and coverup conspiracy to be relatively possible and juxtapose this with two fringe conspiracies: (1) that the COVID vaccines contain computer chips that aid government surveillance and (2) that officials are hiding that the vaccine causes magnetic reactions.

Methodology

Data Source

- Paranormal and Conspiratorial Ideation Study (“PCIS,” collected in July-August 2021)

Data Quality Control

- All participants in this dataset passed attention, response time, fraud, duplication, and bot checks.

Participants

- 3,073 adults in the United States
- Average Age = 46.47 years (*SD* = 19.38 years)
- 53.3% Female
- 58.1% White; 21.4% Hispanic; 14% Black; 6.4% Asian

Measures

- Endorsement:** Survey respondents were asked whether they agree with the following statements. Answer options ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” using a 7-point Likert scale.
Statements:
 - COVID-19 was developed in a Chinese lab and Chinese officials have covered it up.
 - The COVID-19 vaccine contains tiny computer chips to help make government surveillance of people easier.
 - Political and medical elites are hiding the truth about how the COVID-19 vaccines cause magnetic reactions.

Summary of Findings

- Over two thirds of Republicans in our sample agreed with the claim that COVID-19 began as a Chinese conspiracy, compared to about a third of Democrats and Independents (see Fig. 1).
- Though overall rates of belief were low, Republicans and Democrats were equally likely to agree that (1) the COVID-19 vaccine contains tiny computer chips, and that (2) institutional elites are not admitting that vaccines cause magnetic reactions (see Fig. 1).
- Relative to women, men were slightly more likely to believe that COVID-19 began as a Chinese conspiracy and that the COVID-19 vaccine contains surveilling computer chips (See Fig. 2).
- Black and Hispanic respondents in our sample had higher rates of belief in two of our three conspiracies. For example, around a quarter of Black participants agreed that the COVID-19 vaccine contains computer chips that aid the government in surveillance (See Fig. 3).
- People with higher levels of educational attainment were less likely to agree that vaccines contain computer chips or cause magnetic reactions (See Fig. 4).

Take-Home Message

- Of the three COVID-19 conspiracies we measured, the most widely believed was that COVID-19 is a Chinese conspiracy. Regarding the other two conspiracies, political affiliation, race and educational attainment emerged as important predictors of endorsement.

Do you have an interpretation of this you want to share? Email it to us (research@skeptic.com) and it may be included in the Fall issue of Skeptic Magazine.

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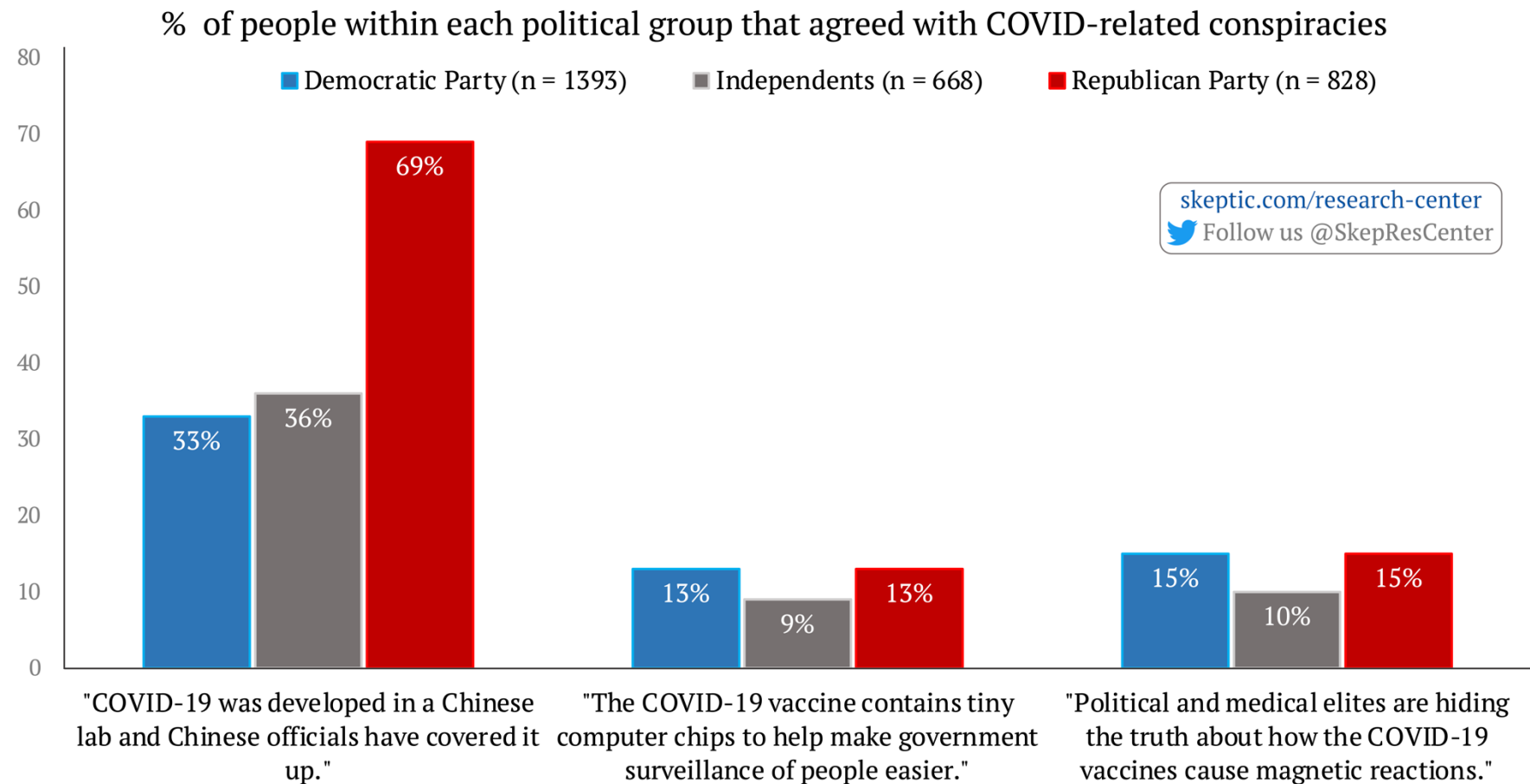
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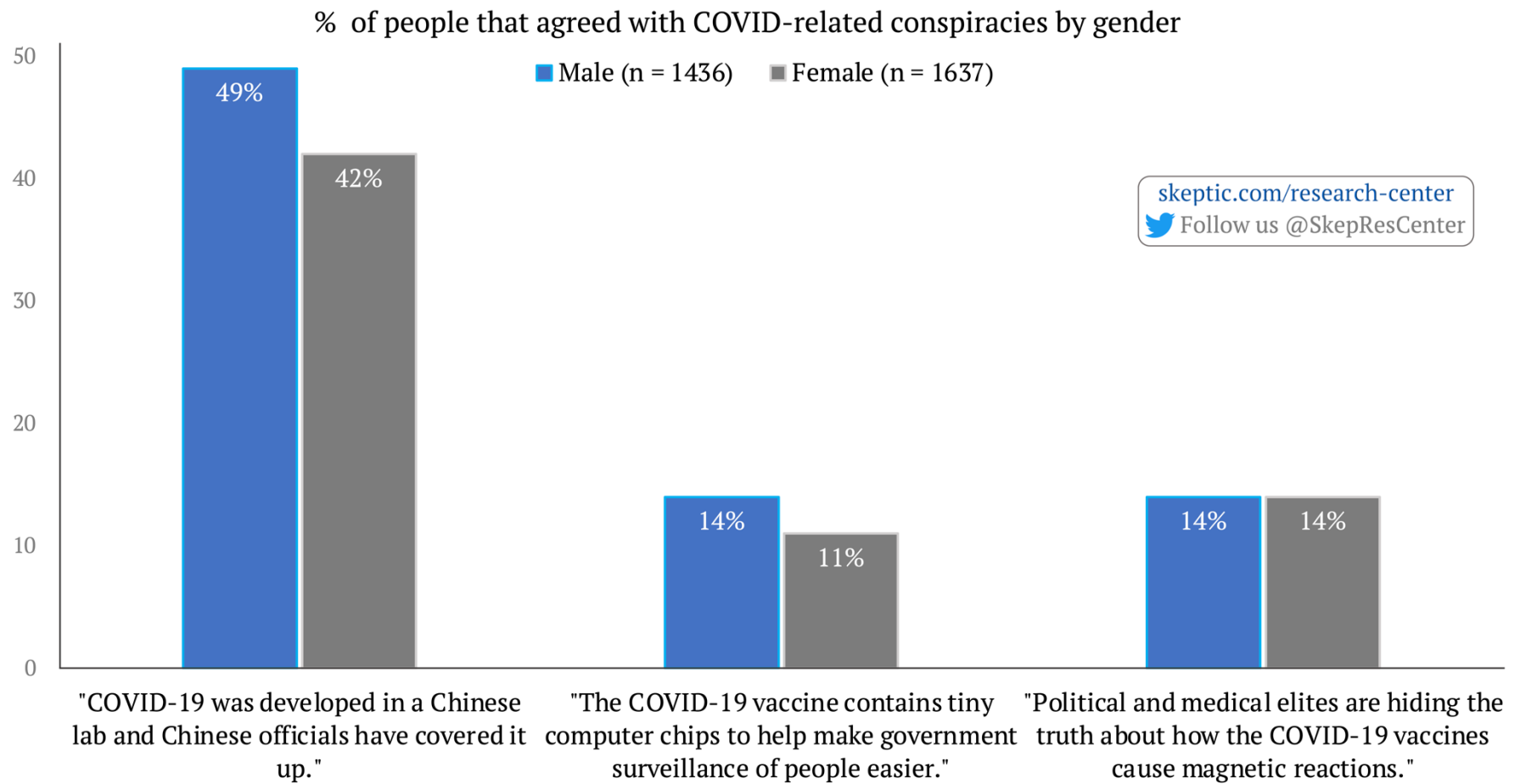
Saide, A., & McCaffree, K. (2022). Who Endorses COVID-19 Conspiracies?. Skeptic Research Center, PCIS-001.

Figure 1



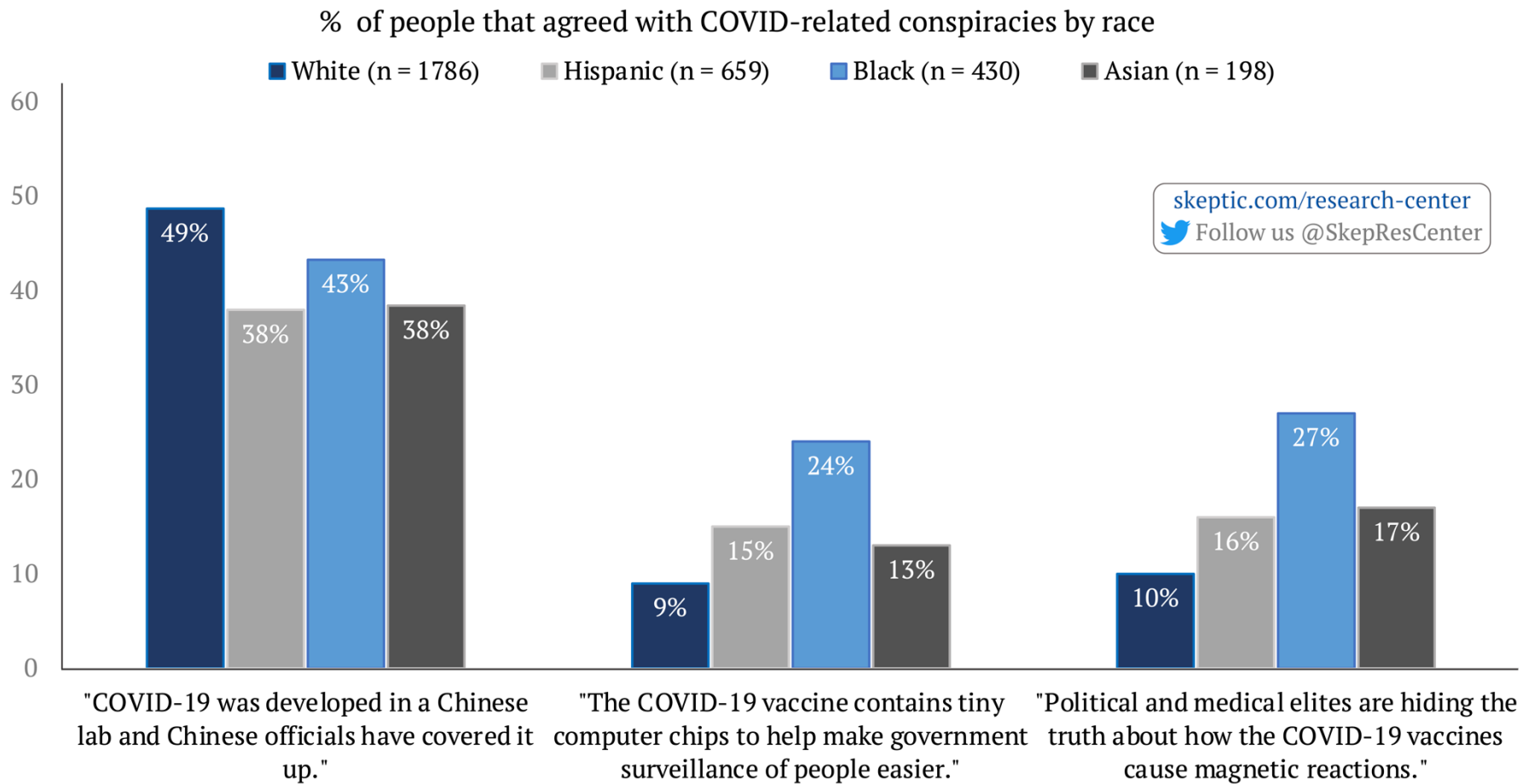
Note: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. Data comes from PCIS Report #1.

Figure 2



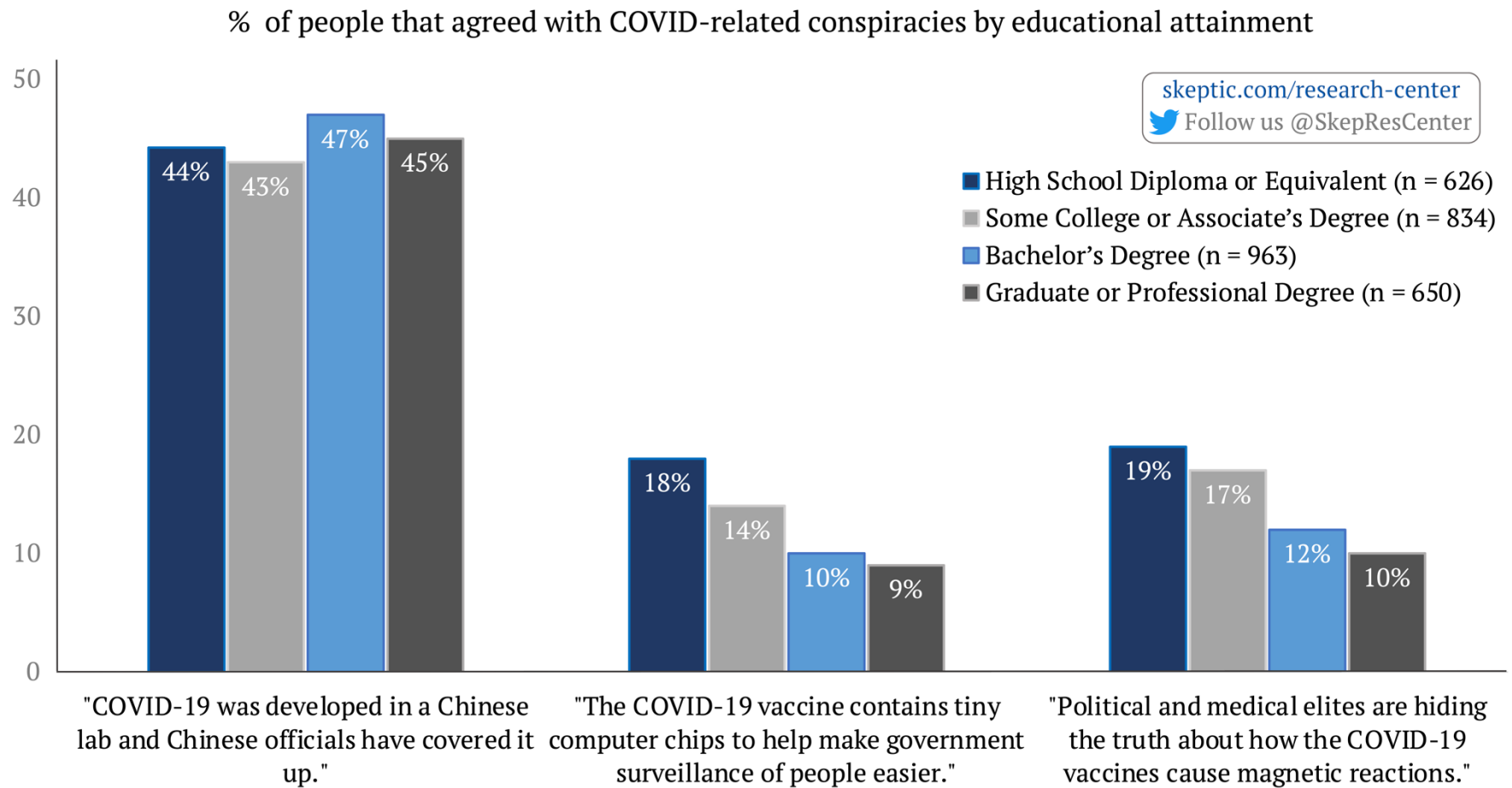
Note: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. Data comes from PCIS Report #1.

Figure 3



Note: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. Data comes from PCIS Report #1.

Figure 4



Note: Percentages rounded to the nearest whole number. Data comes from PCIS Report #1.