

Why Are Area 51 Conspiracy Theories So Popular? Here's What Psychologists Say

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Here's hoping there are aliens at Area 51. For one thing: they probably have cool spaceships. For another, the extraterrestrials are said to have arrived in 1947, so if they were going to eat us, they likely would have done so by now. Finally, answer this question: What's more interesting, a world with aliens or a world without them?

Area 51 has been much in the news lately, ever since the June 27 launch of the Facebook page named [“Storm Area 51, They Can’t Stop All of Us.”](#) The crowdsourced semi-satirical raid on the secretive Air Force base is scheduled for Sept. 20 at 3:00 a.m. So far, 1.9 million people have said they're going, and another 1.4 million have clicked that they're interested, attracted by the page's decidedly straightforward appeal: “Let's see them aliens.”

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In some ways, Area 51 rumors have a lot in common with every other conspiracy theory throughout history. According to [a 2017 paper in *Current Issues in Psychological Science*](#) by psychologist Karen Douglas of England's University of Kent and her colleagues, nearly all conspiracy theories satisfy three basic needs: they provide understanding and certainty, they create a sense of control and security, and they improve a believer's self-image.