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CONSPIRACY THEORIES AS A COMPONENT OF POPULIST RHETORIC

What are the functions of conspiracy theory rhetoric used by leaders of populist movements? Whereas many scholars have demonstrated a consistent relationship between conspiracy theory beliefs and support for populist candidates, the mechanisms that explain this relationship remain under-examined. This exploratory study moves in this direction by coding conspiracy theory rhetoric in a large corpus of speeches by Donald Trump using a qualitative content analysis in order to uncover the functions of such references for forging and retaining a strong relationship with the broader populist movement. We argue that conspiracy theory rhetoric could serve both a ‘demonization’ function, for attacking and delegitimizing opponents, and a ‘mobilization’ function, that can be used to forge a more concrete ‘bloc’ of supporters. Early results point to a significant amount of evidence of demonizing functions in Trump’s rhetoric, such as attacking individual politicians, stereotyping the opposing camp, and delegitimizing political institutions, as well as mobilizing functions, such as coordinating the attention of followers, and reinforcing group identity. Furthermore, conspiracy theory rhetoric of all kinds are found primarily in campaign speeches, and are nearly absent in interviews and prepared speeches, implying that Trump refers to them primarily when speaking directly to his supporters.

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Introduction

The January 6th riots at the US Capitol building have brought about a newfound interest in political science circles in the relationship that populist movements around the world have with conspiracy theory beliefs. Previous research has shown that conspiracy theory belief and populist attitudes are consistently correlated with each other (Castanho, Vegetti, Littvay, 2017, Ivaldi, 2021; Sawyer, 2021b) and often lead to support for populist candidates (Mancosu, Vassallo, and Vezzoni, 2017; Sawyer, 2021b). While evidence has been demonstrated pointing towards conspiracy theories as a significant ‘demand’ factor of populist support, this study intends to analyze this relationship between conspiracy theory belief and support for populist leaders from the perspective of the leader in order to investigate the functions of conspiracy theory rhetoric for building a populist movement. Scholars have previously focused on individual functions of conspiracy theories, and put forth the idea that these beliefs “disrupt the trust” (Bergmann, 2018), and cast doubts on expert knowledge (Ylä-Anttila, 2018), however, recent empirical studies also point to them playing a prominent mobilizational role as well (Hameleers, 2020; Sawyer, 2021). What are the functions of conspiracy theory rhetoric for populist leaders, and how are they used to build populist movements?

We argue that conspiracy theories in populist candidates’ rhetoric are multifaceted, and do not function simply to demonize and delegitimize the ‘Other.’ Instead, there is also another prominent mobilizational logic to conspiracy theory rhetoric that is used to frame the conflict between the populist movement and their opponents, reinforce group identity, and rally supporters for collective action. We demonstrate this by performing a qualitative content analysis of speeches by Donald Trump, a prominent case of populist conspiracism, during the 2020 presidential election. Our results demonstrate evidence for both *conspiratorial demonization* and *conspiratorial mobilization*, especially in contexts in which Trump had direct, unmediated contact with his audience, such as during campaign rallies. Our study adds to the literature on populism and conspiracism by contributing to our understanding of how populist candidates use conspiracy theory rhetoric and provides empirical evidence for each function.

Populism and Conspiracy Theories as Delineators of Ingroup-Outgroup Relations

Intergroup dynamics have been a well-studied notion in social sciences. One of the most known approaches that aims to understand the intergroup relations was the Social Identity Theory that was offered by Tajfel and Turner (1979). In this theory, the socio-cognitive processes behind social identifications were explained with the minimization of the social world into groups through social categorizations and assigning individuals to groups through social comparisons (Hogg, Terry & White, 1995; Hogg & Terry, 2000). With these processes, people also assign themselves into certain groups and adopt these groups as social identity definition in our self-concept (Treppe & Loy, 2017). However, these identity definitions are considered as a dynamic process rather than being a stable entity (Hornsey, 2008; Turner et al., 1994). Therefore, depending on the context, some identities can become evident. When an identity is salient, the group related to that identity is considered to be the in-group (“us”) and the people are not classified to be in the in-group are regarded as the out-group (“them”) (Reicher, Spears & Haslam, 2010). Through this process, the difference between groups and similarity within groups is exaggerated when forming them (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). From the theory, it is known that people tend to favor their in-group and evaluate it with favorable attributions

(Tajfel, 1982). The members of the out-group, on the other hand, are evaluated as a prototype of the out-group rather than a person, due to the depersonalization processes (Hogg & Terry, 2000).

In the literature, the Social Identity Theory has been used to explain many behaviors, cognitions, and phenomena, including belief in conspiracy theories. Therefore, previously in the literature, the conspiracy theories that include an outgroup that are conspiring together to harm the in-group has been labelled as “intergroup conspiracy theories” (Cichocka, et al., 2016). Such beliefs concerning an out-group can be about another country (Cichocka et al., 2016; van Prooijen & Song, 2021), or about a racial or ethnic group within a country (Crocker et al., 1999; Golec de Zavala & Cichocka, 2012; Van Prooijen, Staman, & Krouwel, 2018). Consistent with Tajfel and Turner’s Social Identity theory (1979), such conspiracies include in-group favoritism by evaluating the in-group with positive attributes while perceiving the out-group as a hostile entity. Thus, it has been demonstrated that such conspiracy beliefs can be predicted by collective narcissism or a perceived threat (van Prooijen & Song, 2021, Mashuri & Zaduqisti, 2015, Cichocka et al., 2016).

The functions of conspiratorial rhetoric have their origins in group relations. Given the anti-elitist and people-centric components of populism, conspiracy theories are intended to differentiate one’s “in-group,” considered to be “pure” in nature, from the “evil outgroup,” and politicize the conflict between them. Conspiracy theories act, in many ways, like partisan cues; partisans have a tendency to subscribe to the conspiracy theory beliefs that bolster their in-group and malign the out-group. This body of literature points to conspiracy beliefs not simply being a psychological trait of certain individuals with higher levels of conspiracism, but a marker of partisan identity, similar to “issue ownership” (Smallpage, Enders, and Uscinski, 2017). Partisanship has been argued to operate according to a “perceptual screen” through which individuals process information (Campbell et al., 1980). Group identities foster a sense of belonging and influence the extent to which people view themselves as virtuous actors and opposing camps as disingenuous (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler, 2004; Claassen and Ensley, 2016). Due to certain psychological phenomenon, such as motivated reasoning, partisans are more likely to adapt to the issues, and beliefs, if party leaders attempt to “own them”. In Smallpage, Enders, and Uscinski’s (2017) study, respondents from an American MTurk sample consistently identified specific conspiracy theory beliefs as either a “Republican” or “Democratic” conspiracy theory. Moreover, when asked which groups were more likely to “work in secret against the rest of us,” partisans of one American political party work more likely to choose the opposing political party.

As was alluded to earlier, however, conspiracy theory beliefs are not neutral in terms of their provoking political behavior, but instead are a mobilizing factor for collective action. One such behavior has been identified by the “conspiracy theories are for losers” literature, which points to their role in promoting ingroup unity and helping to explain why out-of-power groups “lose” against the in-power establishment (Uscinski and Parent, 2014). With the polarization, belief in intergroup conspiracy theories can be expected to increase due to biases emerging from distinguishing the in-group from the out-group, such as Republicans versus Democrats (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Therefore, it was found that the belief in a conspiracy regarding the opposite political party increase, as people polarize in their political ideologies (Van Prooijen et al., 2015). Similarly, with these beliefs, an increase in radicalization (Bartlett and Miller, 2010) and political extremism (Van Prooijen, Krouwel, & Pollet, 2015) can be expected.

While conceptualizations often differ, all definitions of populism have at their core a belief in people-centrist, anti-elitist, and Manichean visions of the world.⁴ Populist movements rest upon more than a simply constituency, or voting-bloc, but are based on a political identity. This identity, which forms around a virtuous community of the “good people” juxtaposes itself to the ‘elite,’ deemed the “enemies of the people.” This can be seen in the case of the Swiss People’s Party; Bornschieer, et al. (2021), has shown that the populist radical right in Switzerland largely see rural voters as embodying the “Swiss people,” while the “elite” are signified by the urban educated population. Affective polarization between different societal cohorts is a common side effect of populist movements. This is often the case because of their divisive rhetoric, Manichean perspective on politics, their support for controversial issues and legislation ignored by the political ‘establishment,’ their “bad manners” political style, and their complicated relationship to liberal democracy (Arbatli and Rosenberg, 2020; Enyedi, 2016; Handlin, 2018; Kaltwasser, 2017). This often leads to ‘anti-populism,’ or the mainstream establishment fighting “fire with fire” by employing the same binary moral categories for their populist opponents (Kaltwasser, 2017). Polarization of this type often leads to conspiratorial ideation in populist movements, often by way of process of motivated reasoning, that seek to understand and interpret the actions of their establishment opponents.

As with the populist worldview, conspiracy theories also hold similar components to them which make them conceptually cohesive to populist attitudes. Like populism, conspiracy theories have a clear anti-elitist element to them, though, depart from typical claims of moral corruption to allege that they are engaged in a secret plot against the people. Conspiracy theories also include a role for the ‘pure people’; non-believers are considered to be so innocent that they are ‘blind’ to the plot, while the ingroup view themselves as morally righteous due to their possession of ‘secret knowledge.’ It is only by convincing the non-believers of the existence of the plot that the people are ready to join the community of believers in their struggle. Finally, both have a fundamentally simplistic perspective of the world, which envisions only forces of ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ Previous research has shown that the two are consistently correlated with each other (Castanho, Vegetti, Littvay, 2017, Ivaldi, 2021; Sawyer, 2021b) and often lead to support for populist candidates. While evidence has been demonstrated pointing towards conspiracy theories as a significant ‘demand’ factor of populist support, this study intends to analyze this relationship between conspiracy theory belief and support for populist leaders from the perspective of the leader in order to investigate the functions of conspiracy theory rhetoric for building a populist movement.

We argue that conspiracy theory rhetoric is related to the construction of in-groups and out-groups insofar as they aid in the delineation of the ‘pure’ people from the ‘conspiring’ elites. These functions generally fall within two broad categories which we refer to as *conspiratorial demonization* and *conspiratorial mobilization*. A key component of the “radicalization multiplier” identified by Bartlett and Miller (2010) is formation of solid ingroups.⁵ The belief in a constant threat from nefarious

⁴ This study takes the ideational approach as its conceptual framework (see Mudde, 2004), which views populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.” While aspects of the political-strategic and socio-cultural approaches are also clearly related to the general latent construct, we argue that these are merely tendencies that manifest themselves as a result of the underlying worldview.

⁵ While Bartlett and Miller (2010) wrote mainly on the topic of extremist groups, the January 6th riots at the US Capitol building makes us reconsider whether populist movements can also be affected by the “radicalization multiplier”. Studies by psychologists have shown that the more strongly a person believes in conspiracy theories, the more likely they are to resort to hostility when their views are threatened (van Prooijen, 2018). Belief in conspiracy theories has shown to

outsiders hardens a sense of identity. In part, it forces the believers to come to terms with critiques of their group and develop retorts to each of them in turn. The conspiracy theory can lead to a sort of “siege mentality” through the “sinister attribution error” that attributes blame to every social actor in the outgroup and moves the group to sustain an existential struggle against them (Brown, 2003, pp. 203-26). Conspiracy theories, for example, often target not only the main conspiring actors, but also those that collude with them, such as the government, financial institutions, and the media. By way of group polarization, whereby the group shuts itself off from outsiders and critical information and constantly reinforces the fear, mistrust, and danger of the other, members of the group turn to group-think; like-minded members discuss and reinforce each others’ beliefs, rendering them all more likely to be confident and self-assured in their beliefs and take up more extreme positions that they otherwise would not have if they had been subject to critique (Baron, 1996). These two functions are described in turn.

Conspiratorial Demonization. Populists use conspiracy theories to target the “enemies of the people” who should be defeated in the realm of politics if any return to normal can come about (Bergmann, 2018, p.110). Conspiracy theories merge with the anti-elitist dimension of populism to demonize, “Other,” and attribute blame to political opponents by depicting the political establishment, elitists, and minority groups as not simply illegitimate or immoral political actors, but evil, amoral, and threatening. The belief that a group of elites or other outsider plots and conspires against the people is a rhetorically useful way to attack political opponents. Fenster (2008), refers to conspiracy theories as a “populist theory of power,” an “ideological misrecognition of power relations, calling believers and audiences together into being as ‘the people’ opposed to the secret, elite ‘power bloc’.” This allows the powerless a simplified means to expose the powerful and attempt to redistribute these power relations. As with populism’s Manichean division of society between the loosely defined “people” and “establishment,” conspiracy theories easily fit within this ideological framework to provide the individual with an easily understandable narrative with which to criticize and “Other,” the establishment, and counter the “regime of truth”. The notion that the opposition is “evil” renders supporters uncompromising in their mission to struggle against political opponents and willing to use any means necessary to do so (Hofstadter, 1965). These moralized notions of politics have been shown to lead people to forsake material gains, oppose compromises with competitors, and punish those politicians who do (Ryan, 2016), providing the populist with a core constituency that they can mobilize against opponents.

Conspiratorial Mobilization. Whether it is through tweeting (Kramer 2017), mass rallies, interactive online platforms, or “going to the people,” the constant interaction with the people is common to populist politicians and serves as the source of its strength in the political realm in so far as it provides them with cultural authenticity. This “permanent campaigning” helps the leader to retain a consistent connection to the people and reaffirm their identity with them (Urbinati 2019). By positioning oneself as opposed to the conspiring “enemies of the people,” the populist leader uses this narrative to direct the attention of supporters, reinforce common values, rally supporters to engage in collective action, and demonstrate authenticity as being “on the side of the people” in this epic showdown. A common feature of the populist’s performative repertoire is what Moffitt (2019) refers to as the “performance of crisis” which plays on the distrust of and anger at establishment politics as well as the fear of the Other by passionately dramatizing a situation in which the people are believed

correlate strongly with increased hostility (Abalakina-Paap, et al., 1999) as well as other traits that correlate with hostility such as disagreeableness and narcissism (Cichočka, et al., 2016) or justification of violence (Jolley and Paterson, 2020).

to be under threat. By referencing perceived crises, the authentic populist leader can become a force that common people can rally behind to struggle against powerful conspiring forces. In this respect, conspiratorial narratives can serve an important communicative function for promoting relevant “demand” factors necessary for the support for populist candidates and provide a solution to the collective action problem when attempting to mobilize their support in the political arena. “Weaving” these narratives together, as described in Zuquete’s conceptualization of “Missionary Politics,” permits a charismatic populist leader to rally a core group of supporters to their side.⁶ The image of the evil conspiring elite serves to give the bond between the leader and their supporters an intensity that permits them to be mobilized for “heroic missions” through the voting booth or through protests (Weyland 2017). By attacking “enemies of the people,” and confronting the “counter-church” of political opponents (Vassiliou 2017), the leader not only demonizes their opponents in such a way that leads their supporters not only to hate, but also develop a sense of urgency which necessitates their political defeat. The image of the authentic populist “defender of the people, who is “at the same time the expression, guide and ‘savior’ of the people” (Taguieff 2007, p. 10), endows himself with saint-like characteristics.

We should emphasize, of course, that this theory does not claim that the leader “manipulates” their followers, as past populist scholars have argued, by using conspiracy theories. When referring to an “instrumental value” for conspiratorial rhetoric, we refer to the influence that the populist leader, in whom the people place their trust, has in molding their content, redirecting towards certain actors and institutions, and amplifying their message at certain key moments in public discourse. For there to be “manipulation,” the “reason that is given to adhere to the message must have nothing to do with the content of the message” (Breton, 2002, p. 80). Because of the certainty with which most conspiracy theorists hold their beliefs, it is less a question of manipulation in order to deceive, but instead manipulation in order to convince (Taïb, 2010). Many conspiracy theories are produced and maintained among communities of believers, activists, “spin-doctors,” that co-produce narratives together. By demonstrating that the populist leader is an authentic “true believer,” the leader can “tap into” already existing conspiracist communities and “crowdsource” narratives with a hive mind of loyalists who are willing to develop the narrative of the alleged conspiracy for them. In a sense, this relationship is more akin to the famous French proverb “I must follow them, as I am their leader,” where both the leader and the masses develop their movement together in a more holistic fashion and, consequently, are influenced by the direction that each other take.

Methodology

Any study wishing to analyze the relationship between a populist leader and their followers are obliged to examine both ‘supply’ and ‘demand.’ The supply side of the equation is essential for understanding the connection between the populist leader and their supporters. As the relationship is symbiotic, the absence of the former means that the populist attitudes in the latter will remain latent (Mudde and Kaltwasser (2018). With this in mind, it is relevant to explore these mechanisms within a national context between a populist leader and supporter. While many populist leaders merge conspiracism with their usual populist rhetoric at certain periods in their career (Kubát and Mejstřík,

⁶ Zuquete (2008) defines Missionary Politics as: “.. a characteristic form of political religion that has at its center a charismatic leader who leads a chosen people gathered into a moral community struggling against all-powerful and conspiratorial enemies, and engaged in a mission toward redemption and salvation.”

2020; Bergmann, 2018), the American President Donald Trump is a well-noted classic case of populist conspiracism (Bergmann, 2018; Hameleers, 2020; Sawyer, 2020). In this regard, according to Seawright and Gerring's (2008) forms of case-studies, this would fall into the category of a "typical" case of conspiracist populism. Based upon this assumption, a typical case allows for an open-ended probe of the connection between these two variables "within" the case, and, in the case of Donald Trump, who has remained a political figure for over a decade, large amounts of data sources permit an analysis of the full-range of usages of conspiracy theory rhetoric that may serve explain this mechanism.

Analysis involves the usage of qualitative content analysis in order to categorize and describe the ways in which conspiracy theories are used by Donald Trump to advance his political agenda; attacking political opponents, and positioning himself as a populist defender of the "good people." Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) is a methodology which allows the researcher to analyze political rhetoric, and is advantageous insofar as it allows one to reduce data, focus on selected topics in the data, and describe the data in terms of these topics (Schreier, 2012). The process for conducting analysis through QCA involves selecting the material, building a coding frame, dividing the data into units of coding, trying out the coding with more than one coder, evaluating and changing the coding frame as needed, and finally interpreting the results of the analysis. A team of six coders was recruited to read through each speech and code instances of conspiracy theory rhetoric. Once the final texts were submitted, a second coder reviewed the texts to reduce the subjective factor while coding. Where there were disagreements, the two coders came to a consensus on how the segment of the text should be coded.

Units of Analysis and Textual Data Sources

For the purposes of this study, the rhetoric of the populist leader, Donald Trump, as the primary unit of analysis. Source material for Donald Trump's speeches and media interviews were acquired from the REV.com website which archives many of his public appearances (REV, 2020). In total, there are around 52 of such appearances that were recorded, however, for the purposes of this study, only those appearances from when Donald Trump launched his Presidential campaign in 2020 to the day that he exited the Presidency on January 20th, 2021, will be used for this study.

Our sample takes speeches from the year 2020 when Donald Trump was both President and running for reelection, so as to capture a broad range of contexts in which Trump could use conspiratorial rhetoric. In terms of the context, it is reasonable that the function of conspiratorial rhetoric used by Trump could differ based on whether Trump is a private citizen, a candidate for office, and in the office of the Presidency. In terms of the medium, conspiratorial rhetoric may differ based on whether Trump chooses to speak directly to his supporters in campaign rallies, to his online Twitter audience, to the broader American public in an indirect fashion in press briefings and interviews.

Segmentation and Context Units

Segmentation, the way in which the textual sources are divided into coding units that fit into the coding frame, is an important step for implementing QCA. In lieu of a strategy of segmenting according to formal criteria, such as a paragraph, a question, a response to an interviewer, we have opted for a thematic criterion for segmentation, based on the changes in topic. In this respect, each

coding unit corresponds to the mentioning or discussion of a theme (Schreier, 2012, p. 136-8), and begins and ends when the theme does. The criteria for a coding unit was that it should include *mentions* of conspiracies or *reference* to already-existing ones. We have opted for this more expansive strategy so as to capture the large number of conspiratorial references made by Trump that are inferred, yet not made fully explicit. In order to distinguish between a conspiracy theory belief and other similar beliefs, the conceptualization provided by van Prooijen, a “belief that a number of actors join together in secret agreement, in order to achieve a hidden goal which is perceived to be unlawful or malevolent,” was applied.

According to qualitative content analysis methodology, units of coding cannot fall into two different main and sub-categories. These are intended to be mutually-exclusive. Regulations for the coding units were created in order to avoid having a coded unit fall into two different categories. Where conspiratorial rhetoric could logically fit within more than one category, either these sentences were broken up into two separate coding units if it was sufficiently long enough, or the most obvious sub-category was used at the expense of others.

Additional coding for *context units* was done to label each conspiratorial reference according to its content and context. Given that the functions of conspiratorial rhetoric may change depending on the medium or audience in which it is being mentioned to, code for each of these mediums was performed. These were divided into campaign speeches, meetings, prepared speeches, and press conferences (see Table 1). Next, the utilization of conspiratorial rhetoric could also vary according to the wider context in which the speech is made. The functions of the rhetoric made while Trump is out of power may differ completely from when Trump is campaigning and when Trump was president. Thus, coding was done to differentiate between these different temporal eras. Finally, different conspiracy theories imply different content, and consequently, different functions. The Birtherism conspiracy, which alleges that Barack Obama and other interested parties were secretly covering up his place of birth outside of America, is different in terms of function from those alleging that a “Deep State” was out to destroy the presidency of Donald Trump. The first is likely used to attack an opponent while the latter functions as a means to increase feelings of persecution. We account for this in my coding by adding the type of conspiracy theory.

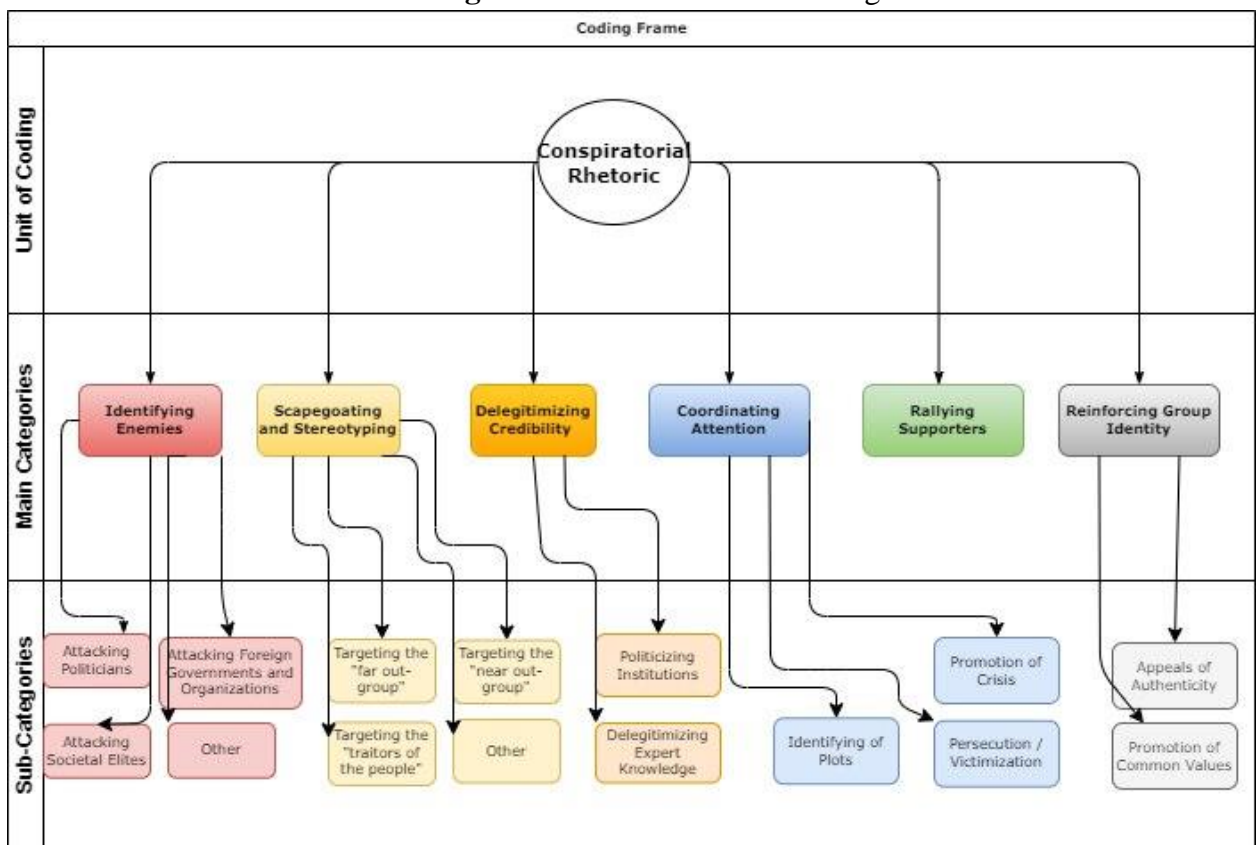
Table 1. Sample of Texts

Type of Speech	Number of Texts	Percent of Total Corpus
Campaign Speech	13	25
Meetings	13	25
Prepared Speech	13	25
Press Conference	13	25
Total	52	100

The Coding Frame

The first stage of coding involves the creation of relevant ‘Main Categories’ of conspiratorial rhetoric. For this, passages were first filtered according to the main functions of conspiracist rhetoric argued in this study: *Conspiratorial Demonization* and *Conspiratorial Mobilization*. To recall the reader back again to the central argument, by conspiratorial demonization, we refer to the usage of conspiratorial rhetoric as a means to delegitimize opponents, cast them as dangerous “enemies of the people,” and provoke strong negative feelings in their followers against them. By conspiratorial mobilization, we mean the process by which conspiratorial rhetoric is used to rally supporters to the side of the populist by positioning themselves as a “defender of the people” against the “evil-doers.” Consequently, my main categories reflect this (see Figure 1 below). Conspiratorial rhetoric in the coded texts were divided into the following main-categories: Identifying Enemies, Scapegoating and Stereotyping, Delegitimizing Credibility, Coordinating Attention, Rallying Supporters, and Reinforcing Group Identity.⁷ From there, each of the passages were reviewed by the coders to confirm whether the text contains mention of one of these two main categories. The second stage involves diving into the content of each category by further dividing each category into Sub-Categories in order to provide more context to the rhetoric. In the following section, each main-category, and their sub-categories, are described in greater detail. These categories are summarized in Table A.1 in the Appendix. For the data analysis, the main categories of conspiracy theories were then described based on the sub-categories with the highest percentage of content in order to provide a more qualitative understanding of the rhetoric.

Figure 1. Flowchart of the Coding Frame



⁷ Conspiracy theory rhetoric that fit none of these categories were included in the category “miscellaneous.”

Conspiratorial Demonization

Among the main-categories related to the process of conspiratorial demonization, we envision three principle ways in which this primary mechanism operates. First, is through the *identification of enemies*. This is the most straight-forward effect of conspiratorial rhetoric; considering that conspiracist mentality is associated with prejudice towards high-power groups (Imhoff, and Bruder, 2014), the populist can attempt to cast their *political opponents*, whether they be competing candidates for office, powerful elite figures, or international organizations, as corrupt, immoral, or evil, with the intention of spreading distrust and driving supporters away from them, and evoking feelings of urgency in followers to do something. These can be categorized according to three primary groups. The first are the populist's political opponents. As an opponent of the populist, and by extension the "will of the people," conspiracy theories about a candidate can have positive benefits for the populist by turning away voters from their opponent. Anecdotally, the claims that were made about Hillary Clinton's alleged "murders" of whistleblowers and political opponents led to her losing support in areas where these beliefs were prominent (Sawyer, 2020, 2022). Similarly, conspiracy theories also target other *powerful elites*, such as George Soros, or *foreign governments and international organizations*, such as the United Nations or the European Union, in order to cue voters to be wary of individuals and organizations that have diverging interests from the group. Part of the success of Viktor Orban's ability to reverse the democratic gains made in previous decades has been his ability to demonize not only the European Union, whose political model rests on humanistic and multicultural values that conflict with that of the radical right, but also George Soros, who has been the face of the pro-immigrant politics in the union. The benefits of demonizing individuals with conspiracy theories also emanates from their ability to simplify social phenomena, such as the excesses of the modernization process. Returning again to the example of Donald Trump's reference to Clinton's "secret meetings" with international banks that seek to destroy "U.S. sovereignty in order to enrich these global financial powers" (Trump, 2016), these messages necessarily simplify the contradictions of globalization and the neoliberal mode of production in a way that supporters can easily understand by personifying them in one's opponent.

The second mechanism can be categorized according to a *stereotyping or scapegoating* logic. Here, minority groups, members or supporters of the opposition, and other societal cohorts, are cast as being "manipulated" by the plotters, "willfully ignorant" of the plot, or a part of the plot themselves. In this way, large swaths of society become "Othered" and separated from the "true people" due to stereotypes that attach to their identity as a group. In his analysis of conspiracy theories in the language of political extremists, Baele (2019) argues that conspiratorial narratives perpetuated by these groups incorporate several archetypal groups into their belief systems, which can be categorized according to their proximity to the "good people." The first group is the "pure in-group," that "defends" itself according to the narrative, while adjacent to this group is the "contaminated in-group," who are not necessarily in agreement with the pure in-group regarding the existence of the plot, yet do not actively oppose the pure in-group. The first group of enemies that may be subject to stereotyping from the populist come with those who actively resist the pure in-group, deemed the "traitors." If not for having been "turned against" the pure in-group, members of the traitors would be in support of their mission against the out-group. The final two enemies consist of the out-group; among those of the "close out-group," members of this cohort who actively carry out the plot against the pure in-group remain within the society of the in-group, whereas the "far out-group" is located

abroad, out of reach of the in-group.⁸ Previous experimental studies have shown that exposure to certain conspiracy theory narratives can promote prejudice towards religious and ethnic minorities (Jolley, Meleady, and Douglas, 2020; Šrol, Čavojová and Mikušková, 2022; Swami, 2012) While ultimately, we do not claim that conspiracy theories necessarily promote violence (though past research has, indeed, demonstrated this tendency to be prominent among radical and extremist groups (see Rousis, Richard, and Wang, 2020), they are used to spread distrust, and distinguish oneself from the “enemy,” which consequently, promotes political conflict and polarization (see Sawyer, 2021a).

The final demonizing act attempts to delegitimize certain epistemological truths. Conspiracy theories have the power to challenge the “prevailing understanding” constructed by what French philosopher Michel Foucault referred to as the “regime of truth” or the “general politics of truth,” which declares which theories are subject to recognition by society as “true” and which ones are to be disregarded. By this, Foucault was referring to the “ensemble of rules according to which the true and the false are separated and specific effects of power attached to the true” (Foucault and Rabinow, 2010, p. 74). It is this very same “regime of truth” that can immediately deflate the veracity of a belief by attaching one of the many pejorative labels to it, such as “conspiracy theory,” “misinformation,” or “populist.” In this respect, the conspiracy theorist is more cognizant of the sentiment that politics is not a battle “on behalf” of truth, but instead, a battle “on the status” of truth (Foucault and Rabinow, 2010, p. 74). By linking certain sources of information, such as those from the media, scientists, academics, bureaucrats, or investigators to perceived “plots,” these actors can have their *credibility delegitimized*, thus making it possible to disregard what they say with a sleight of hand. Experimental studies demonstrate that conspiracy theory beliefs can promote distrust of epistemological sources of information, such as the government (Kim, & Cao, 2016), and decrease their perceived credibility (Bogart, and Thorburn, 2006; Imhoff, Lamberty, & Klein, 2018), leading them to place their faith in alternative sources of information (Imhoff, Lamberty, & Klein, 2018). Conspiratorial beliefs are one way in which populists may counteract the “regime of truth.” Moreover, certain *expert “truths”* originating from experts can be deflected due to their origins with the disingenuous institution. If the source of the information cannot be trusted, then ultimately, the truth that emanates from them are placed in doubt; countless studies during the pandemic have demonstrated that conspiracy theory belief led people to social distance less (Bierwiazzonek, Kunst, Pich, 2020) and vaccinate less (Jolley and Douglas, 2014). Other studies find similar effects when on belief and behavior when exposed to climate change, AIDS, and Big Pharma conspiracy theories (Bogart and Bird, 2003; Bogart, and Thorburn, 2006; Lamberty, and Imhoff, 2018; van der Linden, 2015). Where individual conspiracy theorists are hostile to the power of informational sources, only prominent populist politicians are in a position to lead the charge against them and propose a counter-narrative based on ‘common-sense’ or perceived empirical facts (Yla-Antilla, 2018). In building the relationship with the people, delegitimizing informational sources aids in the spread of ideological hegemony; the more the news media, the scientists, or government are discredited, this creates a vacuum that can then be filled with the ideological content, or common sense notions, of the populist movement.

⁸ Taking the anti-Semitic conspiratorial narratives of the Nazi’s as an example, Baele (2019, p. 717) provides the following groups as a demonstration of his classifications: Far out-group - “World Jewry” and Bolsheviks; Close out-group - German Jews; Traitors - Non-Nazi Germans; Contaminated in-group - “*Mischling*”; Pure In-Group - Aryan Germans.

Conspiratorial Mobilization

The second main category, conspiratorial mobilization, can operate by way of three specific mechanisms according to the framework.

First, the alleged conspiracy can, at its most basic level, become a means to draw attention to an issue and explain current events. Conspiracy theories have an innate argument for causality; a powerful group of individuals is secretly responsible for certain important events. This provides the believer with an explanation for an event, and the populist leader, a means with which to construct a narrative that *identifies plots* and interprets the actions of “enemies” to their supporters. A great many conspiracy theory beliefs are fundamentally unfalsifiable in nature, and seek to explain the totality of world events, this facilitates the explanatory process. This meaning-making process is especially important for conspiracist-based movements. Believers often form tight-knit communities of like-minded people that reinforce group identity by searching for and providing ‘evidence’ of a plot, rehearsing answers to shared questions and anticipating critiques from outsiders, denigrating the perceived conspirators, and promoting a ‘path to redemption.’ If the common community that is formed between believers provides them with a group attachment, spreading fear of and denigrating the ‘Other’ form mobilizes supporters by creating a sense of alertness or urgency in believers. The exposure to conspiratorial narratives serves as a prominent framing technique that justifies and promotes an anti-systemic worldview, as well as its associated behaviors (Jolley, Douglas, Leite, and Schrader, 2019; Jolley, and Paterson, 2020; Šrol, Čavojevová and Mikušková, 2022). Conspiratorial rhetoric may also mobilize supporters by *promoting crises* around a certain political phenomena, actor, or event, leading supporters to identify problems, coordinate their attention and collective action, and evoke feelings of urgency that ‘something must be done.’ Crises are a regular part of populist discourses and can often take the form of alleged secret plots (Moffit, 2019). Finally, if demonizing perceived enemies of the people is one side of the coin, promoting a narrative of *victimization and persecution* involving the in-group, that explains their misfortune, is meant for the development of grievances. The creation of a “victimization complex” is an important component of conspiratorial beliefs that promote a ‘siege mentality.’ By nature of the “pure ingroup” being “under attack” according to the narrative of the conspiracy theory belief, a victimization complex arises among the group members, which leads them to commit to action to prevent the plot from being carried out (Baele, 2019). Conspiracy theories framed as a threat or attack on “sacred values,” such as democratic rights, individual liberties, cultural practices, or religious faith, can prime believers for political mobilization to stop the very real threat to themselves and their community.

Another ‘mobilizing’ mechanism relate to the constant attempts to promote group cohesion by *reinforcing group identity*. In order to retain their identity with ‘the people,’ populist leaders often ‘go to the people,’ either through direct contact through media, or by way of permanent campaigning. Conspiracy theory rhetoric can aid this process by allowing the populist leader to juxtapose their qualities, or those of the movement, with those of their opponents, allowing them to demonstrate the legitimacy of their cause. Reference to conspiracy theories can serve as a way for populist leaders to “own” an issue, demonstrate to the people that the populist is the only political actor concerned about an issue, and is ready to struggle with the entire establishment over it. In so doing, they demonstrate *authenticity* as an outsider to the political establishment. From Orban’s attacks on George Soros, to Éric Zemmour’s obsession with an alleged “Great Replacement,” populist candidates often add such narratives to their political “brand” in order to position themselves as a “real alternative.” This was the case, for example, in 2016, when Donald Trump used Birtherism to significant effect, to attract

an electorate of sympathizers to vote for him during the 2016 GOP primary over other Republican candidates (Sawyer, 2021b). Another mechanism can be to extend these positive characteristics to the movement as a whole, and juxtapose the objectives and values of the movement with the immorality of their opponents.

The final main-category with a mobilizing logic are attempts by the populist leader to *rally supporters* to engage in collective action, such as participating in elections or gathering for political demonstrations. By implying that the elite and their representatives are inherently ‘evil,’ the populist leader may use this rhetoric as a call to action to put a stop to these evil forces. Franks, Bangerter, and Bauer’s (2013) conception of the “quasi-religious mentality,” for example, places special emphasis on conspiracy theories framed as conflicts that risk “sacred cultural values” such as freedoms, religious beliefs, or cultural traditions as a key ingredient for motivating intense commitment towards collective action. In certain cases, conspiracy theory belief has been associated with higher tendencies to participate in elections (Yongkwang, 2019) and political protests (Imhoff and Bruder, 2014; Mari et al., 2017), such as in the case of the 2020 ‘Stop the Steal’ demonstrations, and the Querdenker anti-health measure protests during the coronavirus pandemic (Sawyer, 2021a).

Results

Table 2. Proportion of conspiracy theory rhetoric by main and subcategories

<i>Main-Categories and Sub-categories</i>	<i>%</i>
Identifying Enemies	24.7
<i>Attacking Politicians</i>	73.6*
<i>Attacking Societal Elites</i>	21*
<i>Attacking Foreign Governments and Organizations</i>	0*
<i>Other</i>	5.2*
<i>Total</i>	100*
Scapegoating and Stereotyping	0.09
<i>Targeting the “far out-group”</i>	14.2*
<i>Targeting the “near out-group”</i>	0*
<i>Targeting the “traitors of the people”</i>	85.7*
<i>Other</i>	0*
<i>Total</i>	100*
Delegitimizing Credibility	17.3

<i>Politicizing Institutions and Experts</i>	50*
<i>Delegitimizing Expert Knowledge</i>	50*
<i>Total</i>	100*
Coordinating Attention	35.8
<i>Identification of Plots</i>	71.4*
<i>Promotion of Crisis</i>	14.3*
<i>Persecution / Victimization</i>	14.3*
<i>Total</i>	100*
Rallying Supporters	0.02
Reinforcing Group Identity	12.2
<i>Appeals of Authenticity</i>	20*
<i>Promotion of Commonly Held Values</i>	80*
<i>Total</i>	100*
MISC	0
Total	100

Note. The percentages indicated with “” refers to proportion of references within each sub-category.*

The results of our analysis can be found in Table 2.

Coordinating Attention

Of all of the main categories, most conspiratorial rhetoric fell into the category of Coordinating Attention, which consisted of 35.8% of the entire sample. This is of interest because it implies that much of the conspiratorial rhetoric deployed by Trump was neither to attack “enemies,” nor to explicitly rally them to support him. Instead, much effort was made to alert supporters of the existence of a plot, explain the catastrophic consequences of such plots, and promote the idea that Trump and his movement were unfairly maligned by establishment forces. By far, the vast majority of these

references were Trump's intentions to *identify plots*, which consisted of 71.4% of all sub-category codes in this sample. Trump made a large effort to 'connect-the-dots' and 'ask questions' involving perceived conspiracies. A prominent example was the case of the mail-in-ballots used in the 2020 Presidential election due to the coronavirus pandemic. While mail-in-ballots are not necessarily connected to election fraud, and there is very little evidence demonstrating as much, Donald Trump questioned the reliability of voting at a distance by using rhetorical questions and appeals to common sense.

"The Democrats are also trying to *rig the election* by sending out tens of millions of mail in ballots, using the China virus, as the excuse for allowing people not to go to the polls. Hey, we have a virus coming, we have to send... Think of it, California. He's going to be sending out millions and millions of ballots. Well, *where are they going? Where are these ballots going? Who's getting them? Who is not getting them?* Little section that's Republican. *Will they be stolen from mailboxes, as they get put in by the mailman? Will they be taken from the mailman and the mailwoman? Will they be forged? Who is signing them? Who's signing them? What are they signed at a kitchen table and sent in? Will they be counterfeited by groups inside our nation? Will they be counterfeited maybe by the millions by foreign powers who don't want to see Trump win?* Because nobody has been tougher on trade or making our country great again. Nobody. No mail in ballots is a disaster for our country. It's going to end up in a big fight."

Other examples included attempts by Trump to demonstrate evidence for the Ukraine-Burisma conspiracy, and link the alleged corruption to Hunter Biden, the son of his Democratic opponent in the election.

The next two sub-categories were equally as prominent, consisting of 14.3% of the codes from the main category. The first of these were attempts by Trump to demonstrate that he and his movement were being *persecuted*, and subject to unfair treatment from conspiring Others. The perceived conspirators are most often bureaucratic agencies that Trump perceives as having unfairly targeted conservative organizations, presenting himself, and other conservative groups, as being victims.

"They're also giving the IRS *the power to destroy people*, just like they tried to do with the Tea Party, Christian organizations. And just like *they've always been trying to do to me*, yeah, you see that. We fight like hell. We all fight like hell."

Identifying Enemies

The second largest main-category was identifying enemies, which centered around attacking specific politicians, elites, or foreign governments. By far, the largest subcategory of this grouping was attacking politicians, consisting of 73.6% of all codes within this category. This is likely a reflection of Trump entering the electoral campaign for the presidency, and the Democratic Party's selection of Joe Biden as their nominee. Many of these claims were a direct attack on Biden.

"Joe Biden has *launched a foreign invasion* of his own country. Come on in. He said, "Come in." This is a *sick thing* that's happening to our country. Not even

explainable. I used to say it was incompetence, but it is that. But you know what it really is? I don't know. *It's almost like evil.* They *want this to happen*, because they're paying \$6 million a day to contractors to not finish the wall, which could be finished very rapidly. They're paying millions of dollars a day to contractors. And do I know tractors. They're making a fortune. They're making more money now than they would ever make if they built it. But they're paying millions and millions of dollars a day, a week, a month to these contractors not to build the wall.”

Delegitimizing Credibility

The next largest main category of coded content found in the textual documents were attempts by Trump to delegitimize the credibility of institutions or ‘truths’ produced by institutions, which consisted of 17.3%. Both subcategories received an even amount of coded material. The first subcategory, Politicizing Institutions and Experts, primarily consisted of attacks on two main institutions: the media and the FBI. As has long been the case, Trump frequently referred to the media as the “fake news,” and claimed that the entire profession was set on unfairly maligning him and his movement. At certain points, the claims extended into broader claims that alleged that the Democrats and the media were collaborating to tarnish Trump’s political career. The other sub-category involved attempts by Trump to delegitimize epistemological truths produced by expert and institutional sources. As the media are a major institution of the “regime of truth,” Trump spent much of his time attacking not only the media as an institution, but also the stories they broadcast to the American public. Conspiracy theory rhetoric was strategically used for this purpose. By associating a piece of information, or lack of attention to a story, with the allegation that the media were conspiring against him, Trump could effectively deflect many of the claims made by journalists.

“And the *fake news*, these guys will never report that. They’ll never report it. They *don’t even like showing the crowd*. They always show my face. They never show the crowd. But you know what? The people can hear the crowd. The people can hear the crowd. They know. That is not the sound of 200 people. One of their prime candidates today, they worked a big deal. They had exactly 104 people, and the fake news said, “It was a nice crowd. Very nice.” If I had one empty seat here, one empty seat in this massive arena, they’d say, “He didn’t sell out.””

Reinforcing Group Identity

The next main category in terms of prominence in the data is reinforcing group identity, wherein Trump referred to alleged conspiracies in order to demonstrate the moral superiority of himself and his movement by juxtaposing the evil character of the plotters with that of the “good people.” 80% of the coded text in this main category consisted of attempts to demonstrate *commonly held values*. The most common pattern observed in this sub-category is the emphasis on the group's collective dedication to stand up against the conspiracy. The narratives in this category, in a way, include an effort to incorporate group dynamics into the process by using conspiracy theories. In the given example, we can observe this situation as an attempt to create an image of a morally desirable in-group against the evil out-group.

“*While the extreme left has been wasting America’s time with viral hoaxes, we’ve been killing terrorists, creating jobs, raising wages, enacting fair trade deals, securing our border, lifting up citizens of every race, color, religion, and creed.*”

Another sub-category addressed for “reinforcing group identity” is the *demonstration of authenticity*, which consisted of 20% of the codes for the main category. In this sense, this type of rhetoric can be characterized with the narrative of differencing Trump from other people by mentioning his endeavors to disclose the truths. For instance, in the example below, we can see the narrative in which he is described as an outsider actor who reveals the truth and sheds light on the alleged conspiracy.

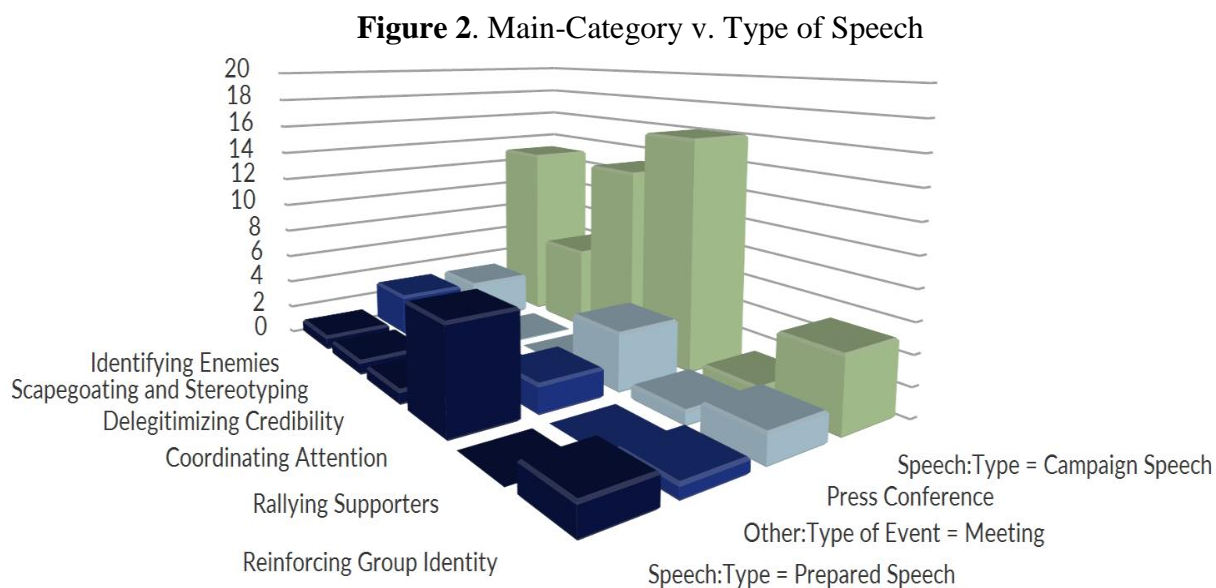
“And it never really stopped. We’d been going through this now for over three years. It was evil. It was corrupt. It was dirty cops. It was leakers and liars. And this should never ever happen to another president, ever. I don’t know that *other presidents would have been able to take it*. Some people said no, they wouldn’t have, but I can tell you at a minimum you have to focus on this because it can get away very quickly. No matter who you have with you, it can get away very quickly. It was a disgrace. Had *I not fired James Comey*, who was a disaster by the way, it’s possible *I wouldn’t even be standing here* right now. We caught him in the act. Dirty cops, bad people. And *if I didn’t fire James Comey, we would have never found this stuff*. Because when *I fired that sleazebag, all hell broke out. They were ratting on each other. They were running for the hills.*”

Discussion

As shown in the previous section, using a dataset of Donald Trump speeches from the 2020 presidential election, our results that both demonizing and mobilizing logics apply to the usage of conspiratorial rhetoric by populist candidates. In terms of conspiratorial demonization, Trump spent much of his energy demonizing political candidates and other societal elites, and delegitimizing institutional sources of ‘truth,’ such as journalistic outlets and the organization of the election. As for mobilizing supporters, Trump dedicated most of his efforts to ‘connecting-the-dots’ and demonstrate evidence of alleged conspiracies in an attempt to frame the conflict between himself and his opponents in a conspiratorial fashion, though, Trump also used them to reinforce group identity by promoting common values and identifying members of the in-group. Our principal conclusion, thus, is that the function of conspiratorial rhetoric is more multi-faceted than simply attacking opponents, and can also serve the role of fostering relations with supporters as well.

Another nuance of interest is related to the contextual setting in which Trump expressed conspiracy theories. In order to control for differences in settings, an equal number of speeches were chosen from each type of speech: campaign speeches, prepared speeches, meetings, and press conferences. Our results show that there was a significant amount of variation in the settings in which conspiracy theories were expressed; Donald Trump was more likely to refer to a conspiracy theory in campaign speeches than any other types of speeches (see Figure 2). Instead of having his message mediated by journalists or newscasters, Donald Trump preferred to refer to alleged conspiracy theories when speaking in front of supporters so as direct, unmediated access to his audience. This

provides further evidence to the fact that conspiracy theory rhetoric is essential for framing conflicts with the supporters of populist candidates and mobilizing them for elections and demonstrations.



Conclusion

The relationship between populist movements and conspiracy theory belief has been a well documented topic in the literature (Castanho, Vegetti, Littvay, 2017, Ivaldi, 2021; Sawyer, 2021b; Mancosu, Vassallo, and Vezzoni, 2017; Sawyer, 2021b), though, while a number of scholars have examined the possible functions of the conspiratorial rhetoric used by populist leaders, this has yet to be investigated empirically. The current paper focused on this relationship from the perspective of the populist leader and investigated the functionality of the usage of conspiracy theories in their rhetoric. For this purpose, a sample of 52 speeches given by Donald Trump, who we regard as a “typical case” of populist conspiracism, were examined to understand the instrumentality behind the usage of the conspiratorial narratives. In brief, we argue that in addition to their ability to demonize political opponents and “enemies of the people,” as noted by several scholars, conspiracy theories also serve a mobilizational logic that serves to construct “a people,” reinforce group cohesion, and promote collective action. In this respect, intergroup dynamics underlay the conspiratorial discourse of populist leaders. We refer to these two basic functions as *conspiratorial demonization* and *conspiratorial mobilization*.

Using a qualitative content analysis, the current study categorized references to conspiracy theories in 6 main-categories and 12 sub-categories according to their function. The results indicate that Trump spent the most time attempting to demonstrate evidence of alleged conspiracies and ‘connect-the-dots,’ in order to frame the conflict between himself and his opponents according to a conspiracist dichotomy for his audience. Other prominent categories include the demonization of political opponents and societal elites, the delegitimization of epistemological sources of information, and reinforcing group identity, demonstrating evidence for both demonizing and mobilizing logics.⁹

⁹ On the other hand, a surprising result is that “rallying supporters” and “scapegoating and stereotyping” appear to be the least prominent main-categories.

Additionally, when the categories of conspiracy theory usage were compared with the contextual settings, the results demonstrate that Trump was disproportionately more likely to refer to alleged conspiracy theories when speaking directly to his followers during campaigns, and less so when having his message mediated or confronted by journalists and newscasters.

Yet, it should be noted that the current research has only examined the rhetoric of former US President Donald Trump as a representative for conspiratorial populism. Even though this case allowed us to observe the full range of possible functions of conspiratorial rhetoric, it remains unclear to what extent these functions are generalizable to other populist leaders. Therefore, the external validity appears as a limitation of the research. To cover this lacking point, further research may be applied with the rhetoric of populist leaders from various national contexts and ideological backgrounds to explore if the examined mechanisms are either a common feature of populist movements or limited to Donald Trump and his own.

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Appendix

Table A.1. Summary of Main and Sub-Categories

Main - Categories	Sub-Categories	Classification Criteria
Identifying Enemies	<i>Attacking Politicians</i>	Trump targets <u>specific</u> opposing <u>politicians</u> , <u>members of a political party</u> , or other powerful <u>political individuals</u> and casts them as untrustworthy, corrupt, disingenuous, or evil.
	<i>Attacking Societal Elites</i>	Trump targets <u>specific</u> <u>cultural, economic, or state (not politicians) elites</u> and casts them as untrustworthy, corrupt, disingenuous, or evil.
	<i>Attacking Foreign Governments and Organizations</i>	Trump targets <u>specific</u> <u>foreign governments</u> or <u>international organizations</u> and casts them as untrustworthy, corrupt, disingenuous, or evil.
	<i>Other</i>	Trump targets <u>specific</u> targets that do not fall into the above categories
Scapegoating and Stereotyping	<i>Targeting the “far out-group”</i>	Trump specifically targets <u>foreign groups of people abroad</u> , such as citizens of other countries or migrant groups, as being a “part of the plot” as a means to demonize them as a whole.
	<i>Targeting the “near out-group”</i>	Trump specifically targets <u>domestic groups of people within the US</u> , such as minorities, immigrants, and other domestic undesirable populations, as being a “part of the plot” as a means to demonize them as a whole.
	<i>Targeting the “traitors of the people”</i>	Trump specifically targets <u>non-minority groups of people within the US</u> , such as liberals, leftists, centrist Republicans or other political groups, as being a “part of the plot” as a means to demonize them as a whole.
	<i>Other</i>	Trump specifically targets <u>groups of people</u> , that do not fall into the above categories.
Delegitimizing Credibility	<i>Politicizing Institutions and Experts</i>	Trump targets the <u>credibility</u> of an <u>institution</u> by claiming they have been “ <u>weaponized</u> ” by political opponents.

	<i>Delegitimizing Expert Knowledge</i>	Trump targets the <u>credibility</u> of a “truth” produced by an <u>institutional source</u> by casting the source as untrustworthy, corrupt, disingenuous, or evil due to their alleged role in a conspiracy.
Coordinating Attention	<i>Identification of Plots</i>	Trump tries to justify the existence of, or refers to specific evidence to ‘prove’, an alleged conspiracy, <u>without specific calls to action.</u>
	<i>Promotion of Crisis</i>	Trump refers to the “catastrophic” consequences of an alleged conspiracy, <u>without specific calls to action.</u>
	<i>Persecution / Victimization</i>	Trump promotes a sense of individual or collective <u>persecution</u> , or being “under attack,” <u>without specific calls to action.</u>
Rallying Supporters		Trump attempts to persuade supporters to support him, and/or engage in collective action (voting, protests) in a <u>specific call to action.</u>
Reinforcing Group Identity	<i>Appeals of Authenticity</i>	Trump makes himself seem to be an “ <u>authentic</u> ” <u>outsider</u> by speaking about an issue no one else will discuss or address with policy.
	<i>Promotion of commonly held “Sacred Values”</i>	Trump makes juxtaposes the “ <u>good</u> ” <u>values</u> that his movement stands for with the “ <u>bad</u> ” <u>conspiracy</u> of the Other.
MISC		For conspiracy theories that do not fall into any of the other categories.

Note. For the data analysis, the main categories of conspiracy theories were then described based on the sub-categories with the highest percentage of content in order to provide a more qualitative understanding of the rhetoric.

Table A.2. The frequency of codes for Main-Category v. Type of Speech

Type of the speech	The Main-Categories						Total
	Identifying Enemies	Scapegoating and Stereotyping	Delegitimizing Credibility	Coordinating Attention	Rallying Supporters	Reinforcing Group Identity	
Prepared Speech	1	1	1	7	0	2	12
Meeting	3	0	0	2	0	1	6
Press Conference	3	0	0	4	1	2	10
Campaign Speech	13	6	13	16	1	5	54
Total	20	7	14	29	2	10	82

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