

# The Language of Violence and Division: How Conspiracy Theories Drive Far-Right Extremism

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I declare that this research was approved by the SPAIS Ethics Working Group.

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## Abstract

This study investigates how far-right conspiracy theories contribute to political violence and societal divisions within the US, particularly following the 2020 Presidential election and the January 6<sup>th</sup> Capitol riots. Through thematic analysis of social media posts on platforms Telegram and X, it explores how conspiracy rhetoric and certain framing strategies justify the use of violence against perceived enemies. The research found that both violent and divisive language is prevalent amongst online far-right communities, with the highest frequency and intensity of posts falling around the time of January 6<sup>th</sup>. Telegram hosted more extremist content compared to X, suggesting cross platform differences in extremist content. Donald Trump played a central role in the conspiracy-fuelled narratives by using long-term mobilisation strategies. This research supplements existing literature by highlighting how conspiracy driven rhetoric normalises and justifies political violence and division. The findings from the research emphasise the need for balanced moderation policies for social media platforms that protect free speech but also try to limit extremism and radicalisation.

# Introduction

In recent years, the US has seen a surge in far-right conspiracy theories (AlShehhi and Serhal, 2024), particularly in times of political instability such as the 2020 Presidential election and the COVID-19 pandemic. These conspiracy theories have not only gained traction online, but they have also become present within mainstream politics and discourse (Douglas et al., 2019) and have also had direct links to the increasing levels of political violence (Enders, Klostad and Uscinski, 2024). With the re-election of Donald Trump and worsening partisan divides (Oberlander, 2024), research on the real-world dangers of misinformation and conspiracy belief is vital in order to protect democratic institutions (Lewandowsky et al., 2023) and prevent radicalisation, by highlighting the mobilising effect conspiracy theories can have. This research particularly explores how far right conspiracy theories contribute to political violence and division within the US. Although there is an abundance of research and literature on far-right conspiracy theories and the dangers of misinformation (Booth et al., 2024; Jolley, Marques and Cookson, 2022), there is still a need for detailed analysis of how violent and divisive rhetoric manifests into violence within far-right online communities. By examining the language used within these spaces, this research aims to explain how the use of certain online narratives can turn into real world acts of violence and the impact this has on division within the US.

To address the research question of how far-right conspiracies contribute to political violence and division within the US, a sample of 100 social media posts from platforms Telegram and X were analysed for the presence of language that directly or implicitly incited violence and language that caused divisions through dehumanising and 'othering'. The specific timeframe used to select posts through selective sampling was November 2020- January 2021, as this time was particularly relevant to my research question as the January 6<sup>th</sup> capitol riots were a direct consequence of conspiracy belief (Corte, 2023). The research is grounded in the conceptual frameworks of post-truth and hyperreality. A post-truth era describes a time where verifiable facts and truths have lost their importance (O'Callaghan, 2020) which has aided the spread of far-right conspiracies. The concept of 'hyperreality' derived from Baudrillard (1981), describes a situation where alternative 'simulated' realities become more influential than reality itself. Looking at the intersection of simulated realities and 'post-truth' with regards to conspiracy theories helps to explain how conspiracy theories can shape people's perception of reality, leading to increased likelihood of the justification or usage of violence, and division.

This study is significant because it builds upon the existing knowledge regarding the effects of misinformation and how belief in misinformation can lead to online radicalisation and extremism (Roberts-Ingleson and McCann, 2023). Whilst there is existing research on conspiracy theories and their links to violence and division (Enders, Klofstad and Uscinski, 2024; Rottweiler and Gill, 2020), there remains a need for more focused empirical analysis of the specific language used within far-right online spaces. By providing detailed analysis on how the rhetoric used by the far-right has mobilising effects and encourages violence and division, this study builds upon the knowledge of online extremism and the effects of online communication in radicalisation. By using the conceptual frameworks of 'post-truth' and 'hyperreality' the study examines the relationship between simulated realities, misinformation and the real-world impacts this may have, which fills a gap in the literature, but also offers important recommendations for social media platforms and governments to try and combat online radicalisation and the dangerous consequences that comes with it.

Chapter one of the research reviews the existing literature surrounding the spread of conspiracy theories and how violence emerges from conspiracy belief. Chapter two focuses on the conceptual frameworks of post-truth and hyperreality, particularly the causes of post-truth, how a post-truth era aides' belief in conspiracy theories and the impacts this has on violence and polarisation. Additionally, Baudrillard's hyperreality (1981) will be explored and applied to the far-right conspiracy group QAnon and the consequences of these simulated realities will also be explored. Chapter three outlines the methodology used to select and analyse the data and chapter four presents the findings and results from the data. Chapter five discusses the findings and results in relation to existing research and a broader context, looking particularly at the moral framing of violence, cross platform differences in extremist content, the intersection of populist and conspiratorial discourse, the impact of Trump and political violence and division post January 6<sup>th</sup>. Finally, chapter six concludes with a summary of the key findings and insights, the implications of the study and recommendations for future research and social media platform policy based on these insights.

## Literature Review

Far-right conspiracy theories have become increasingly visible and influential within US politics, particularly since the election of Donald Trump in 2016. These narratives, which range from election rigging to the 'Great Replacement', have permeated mainstream politics in the US through a shift to the right, but also have

been the basis for increasing levels of political violence (Belton, Mulholland and Murphy, 2025) and partisan divides (Smallpage, Enders and Uscinski, 2017). This literature review aims to examine the existing research on how far-right conspiracies contribute to violence and polarisation in the US, focusing particularly on how they spread and how violence emerges from conspiracy belief.

One key area of focus within the literature is the spread and appeal of conspiracy theories within far-right communities. Cosentino (2020) argues that the globalisation of alt-right theories can be blamed on the use of online chat platforms 4chan and 8chan which create a global network of like-minded White ethnonationalists. Similarly, Baele, Brace and Coan (2021) compare far-right chat platforms but conclude that while these platforms do in fact create subcultures which supports the research by Cosentino (2020), the subcultures are not coherent, and the multitude of different platforms create sub-subcultures which differ in levels of extremity. Research by Cinelli et al. (2022) similarly looked at the role of online platforms in the spread of conspiracy theories but focused on more mainstream platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and found that social media algorithms create echo chambers which act as a key element regarding communication and conspiracy theories. My research aims to build upon this by looking at the violent and divisive rhetoric on Telegram and X surrounding key events such as the 2020 presidential election and the January 6<sup>th</sup> capitol riots to explore how far-right users mobilise conspiracy rhetoric to incite violence and reinforce partisan divides.

The body of research investigating the link between conspiracy theories and violence is expanding and scholars argue that these beliefs often construct moral frameworks where violence is justified as a form of self-defence or patriotic duty (Basit, 2021; Belton, Mulholland and Murphy, 2025). Enders, Klofstad and Uscinski (2024) examined support for individual conspiracy theories and found that there was strong correlation between conspiracy theories and support for political violence, with support for violence being highest amongst the lesser-known conspiracies. This is supported by Vegetti and Littvay (2021) whose research also concludes that those who believe in conspiracy theories are more likely to endorse political violence. However instead of focusing on individual conspiracy theories in their research, they build on pathway theories of radicalisation to reach their conclusions. Whilst research by Rottweiler and Gill (2020) also supports the notion that increased belief in conspiracies has positive correlations with support for political violence, their research focuses more on individual characteristics such as self-control as contributing factors and determine that those who exhibit lower self-control and have a weaker sense of morality are more likely to endorse violent action. Collectively, these studies suggest that far-right conspiracies go beyond the online sphere and can have real-world consequences, however further research is needed to discover

the sole influence of conspiracies on violence without considering other factors such as personality traits or political discontent.

## Conceptual frameworks

To get a holistic understanding of how far right conspiracies were able to get from the fringes of the internet, into mainstream media and politics, theoretical concepts of 'hyperreality' and 'post-truth' will be explored. Using these concepts in the context of violence is something that is missing in existing research and will not only aid the explanation of the mainstreaming of far-right conspiracies but will also supplement later findings in the research and can be used effectively to explain why conspiracies have gained the ability to incite violence and divisions within society in the US.

## The causes of post-truth

A 'post-truth' era is one in which facts have less importance and significance than personal beliefs (O'Callaghan, 2020). In a post-truth era, there is a prioritisation of belief over empirical facts and discourse becomes shaped by what *feels* true rather than what is empirically verified (Stitzlein, 2023). Essentially, facts no longer take precedent over opinions and this concept is becoming increasingly important to research with the growing number of elected far-right politicians and leaders globally, as studies show that those on the right are more likely to spread misinformation than those on the left of the political spectrum (Zhu and Pechmann, 2024; Törnberg and Chueri, 2025). Post-truth and the erosion of fact is evident in political discourse, particularly in the US through not only an increased level of misinformation through fake news and social media (Lewandowsky, Ecker and Cook, 2017) but also through the increasing levels of mistrust in politicians and institutions (Aggeler, 2024).

Trust in traditional institutions has declined, particularly among Republicans. In 2024, only 11% of Republicans trusted the government to do what it is right, while just 40% trusted national news outlets (Pew Research Center, 2024). Comparatively, in 2016, 70% of Republicans trusted news from national outlets (Eddy, 2024). The decreasing levels of trust in traditional institutions and the increased levels of trust in social media as a news outlet is significant and concerning as research shows that social media algorithms create echo chambers (Cinelli et al., 2021) that produces content

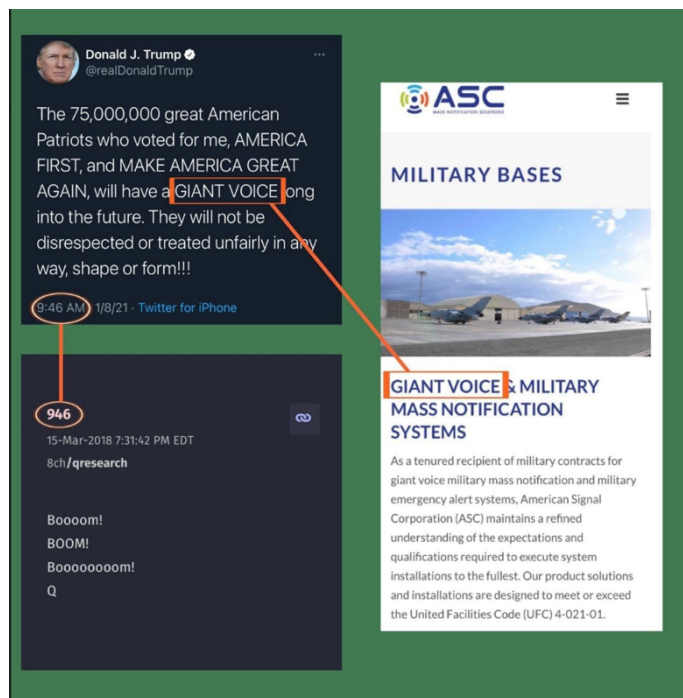
that simply reinforces existing beliefs and biases. In a post-truth era, this allows for the spread of misinformation to be rampant and the belief in shared truths to decline further because users are often shielded from contradictory facts (Ecker et al., 2022) which in turn, deepens ideological divides. Declining confidence in traditional sources of knowledge such as science, the media, and the government creates a vacuum where alternative theories and rejections of truth thrive (Harambam, Grusauskaite and de Wildt, 2022). When this vacuum is filled by political actors like Donald Trump who weaponize distrust, political power is realigned around contested realities which is problematic in itself because people have alternative understandings of the truth. Later in the research the impacts of post-truth on violence and polarisation will be explored in further detail, more specifically the real-world consequences of the ideas explored in this section.

## Post-truth and conspiracy belief

The human need for an explanation is not a new phenomenon but in today's post-truth world where objective facts and truths are increasingly contested, conspiracy theories have emerged as an alternative to those who are disillusioned with mainstream narratives (Leonard and Philippe, 2021). It is widely accepted that conspiracy theories are extremely common in today's society, especially in political discourse (Collins, 2018; Douglas et al., 2019; Uscinski et al., 2022) and in a post-truth environment, the drivers of conspiracy belief are amplified. In the US, 53% of Republicans believe that voting machines were programmed to change votes in the 2020 election and 54% believe that Obama was not born in the States (Orth, 2023). Research shows that not only are those on the right more likely to spread misinformation (Zhu and Pechmann, 2024; Törnberg and Chueri, 2025), but they are also more likely to believe it (Garrett and Bond, 2021).

Conspiracy belief fulfils the human need for meaning and purpose (Prooijen, 2022) by offering certainty in a collapse of truth by reducing complex issues into a simplified theory. Naturally, humans detect patterns (Mattson, 2014), but in a society that is overloaded with accessible information, false connections are made between unrelated events, and coincidences are seen as 'proof' of conspiracies. This is exemplified by Figure 1 and by a popular conspiracy theory during the COVID-19





**Figure 1- post shared on Telegram**

pandemic in 2020 which theorised that 5G towers spread the virus, with maps that showed the distribution of covid cases and the installation of 5G towers being shared on social media (Flaherty, Sturm and Farries, 2021). In times of crisis, conspiracy theories offer a sense of control in uncertain times because they offer alternative explanations (Prooijen and Douglas, 2017) which explains why people were quick to believe the 5G conspiracy.

Additionally, conspiracy theories appeal to cognitive biases in humans (Gagliardi, 2023), particularly confirmation bias where we seek information that aligns with our existing beliefs (Nickerson, 1998) and proportionality bias where we assume large events must have equally large causes (Bortolotti, 2023). A clear example of a theory that caters to proportionality bias is the 'Great Replacement' conspiracy, where immigration driven demographic shifts are falsely reframed as a plot to eradicate the white population. The theory completely ignores other factors that contribute to immigration such as lack of opportunity and conflict (European Parliament, 2020) but instead creates a narrative about secret elitist plans to explain demographic changes. Confirmation bias then solidifies these beliefs as people will engage with content that confirms their existing beliefs while ignoring opposing evidence (Modgil et al., 2021). Social media algorithms amplify this because they reproduce material that is similar to that in which you are already interacting with (Narayanan, 2023), meaning users rarely see conflicting evidence against their current beliefs. This creates a cycle of misinformation where exposure to extreme content escalates and opposing facts and opinions are systematically filtered out through algorithms. Later in the research, cross platform differences in extremist content will be discussed and analysed to explore how platform moderation shapes the intensity of conspiratorial and extremist discourse.

## The impacts of post-truth on violence and polarisation

Post-truth systems that are characterised by a lack of trust in traditional sources of knowledge and the spread of misinformation through social media echo chambers create the conditions for far-right conspiracies to evolve from fringe beliefs into real world acts of violence. Conspiratorial worldviews in a post-truth era legitimise violence by framing outside groups as existential threats (Farinelli, 2021).

Stochastic terrorism is the 'public demonisation of a person or group resulting in the incitement of a violent act' (Angove, 2024). The incitement of violence surrounding the January 6<sup>th</sup> Capitol riots is arguably a form of stochastic terrorism as mass communication was used via social media and rallies to incite violence without specific orders (Nederveen et al., 2024). Prior to the riots a long-term rhetoric that dehumanised groups in society was used by Trump (Jardina and Piston, 2023) and the far-right to create division and subtly incite violence. Muirhead and Rosenblum (2019, p.61) argue that Trumps' presidency style is full of 'divisive conspiracism' which aims to put groups against each other, instead of uniting people and this can be seen in his repeated use of derogatory language aimed at racial minorities, women and trans people (Oladipo, 2024). When analysing the language used within Trump's January 6<sup>th</sup> rally speech, the repeated use of the phrase 'fight like hell' is used to mobilise people into fighting for Trump and his cause. Within the speech there is constant reinforcement that the election was 'stolen' despite this conspiracy being debunked (Eggers, Garro and Grimmer, 2021) and whilst the language used by Trump is not directly commanding people to commit violent acts, it is subtly evoking emotions and mobilising people to take action against perceived threats to democracy.

His supporters' rejection of verifiable truths reflects a broader epistemic crisis (Friedman, 2023) and by the summer of 2021, 72% of Republicans believed the election was stolen (Agiesta and Edwards-Levy, 2023) despite empirical evidence telling them otherwise. The cult-like behaviour of Trump supporters mirrors tribal epistemology where partisan loyalty overrides empirical evidence (Brooks, 2020) which is a defining feature of post-truth politics. This erosion of shared reality and truths not only deepens polarisation between groups but also allows leaders to weaponize misinformation, as we have seen in the Trump case. The January 6<sup>th</sup> riots show how the rejection of shared facts and truths can transform ideological extremism into real-world violence, which threatens democratic institutions and the idea of democracy as a whole.

## Baudrillard's 'Hyperreality'

The term 'hyperreality' was developed by Jean Baudrillard (1981) and his idea is that in a postmodern and technological society, the ability to distinguish between fiction and a simulation of reality and reality itself is being lost. In his key work *Simulacra and Simulation*, he distinguishes between a simulacrum which is a copy of something that no longer has an original, and a simulation which is when models entirely replace reality and society begins to function within the models, forgetting what is actually true (1981, p.1). Another main component of Baudrillard's theory is the four stages of the image, from real to hyperreal which he calls 'The Sacramental Order':

1. It is the reflection of basic reality.
2. It masks and perverts a basic reality.
3. It masks the absence of basic reality.
4. It bears no relation to any reality whatsoever.

(Baudrillard, 1981, p.6)

When an image reaches stage four, it becomes pure simulacrum and bears no resemblance to reality whatsoever. This is significant when researching far right conspiracies because they often operate as simulacra and are constructed realities that have no fact or relation to reality (Donegan, 2020).

## QAnon as a Simulacrum

This concept can be used to explain how conspiracy theories have become widespread and embedded into the political culture in the US. Baudrillard's theory can be applied to QAnon, a fringe right-wing online conspiracy group. 4 in 10 of Republicans who have heard of QAnon think it is a good thing for the US (Pew Research Centre, 2020) and there is even public support for the group from Republican politicians like Marjorie Greene (Chait, 2021). In terms of Baudrillard's 'Sacramental Order' (1981:6) QAnon is a full simulacrum with no resemblance to reality whatsoever and its ideas and arguments have no basis in fact (Marwick and Partin, 2022) yet those who interact with the group and are followers of QAnon believe baseless theories over verifiable facts and events (Holoyda, 2022). The 'drops' which are posts from 'Q' that followers believe hold important information regarding the 'plan'. The self-referential reality that Baudrillard describes is applicable to QAnon because they have created an online bubble where followers will only believe truths from inside the groups and outside evidence such as mainstream news and expert knowledge is deemed as 'fake news'. Lewandowsky and Cook (2020) describe this as the 'self-sealing' nature of conspiracy theories where any evidence disproving a theory may be interpreted as further evidence of a conspiracy.

In this simulacrum, opposing evidence doesn't weaken a belief in the conspiracies, it strengthens them (O'Mahony et al., 2023). For example, one of the theories within QAnon and the far right is 'The Storm' which refers to major social conflict that will happen prior to the 'Great Awakening' (Copeland, 2021) which will expose elitist crimes such as satanic rituals involving the blood harvesting of children (Wong, 2021). Despite many warnings of the 'Storm' on the different online forums, it never came and members of this self-referential reality interpret this as all being part of a wider plan. This is known as belief perseverance, which is the 'tendency to cling to one's initial belief even after receiving new information that contradicts the basis of that belief' (Baumeister and Vohs, 2007). In simulated realities, where individuals are increasingly insulated from factual information (Stockemer and Bordeleau, 2024) a self-contained view that may become more extremist and justify violence as rational or necessary within their version of reality becomes more likely. This is explored further in the discussion, looking in more detail at the justification and moral framing of violence in extremist far-right online communities.

Particular language that was used on QAnon forums such as 4chan can also be interpreted as being hyperreal when applying Baudrillard's theory. Frequently used terms such as 'WWG1WGA' which is an abbreviation of 'Where We Go One We Go All' are completely meaningless outside of the simulacra created but within it, this coded language is important to the group to create a collective identity that separates them from outgroups or 'non-believers' (Douglas, Sutton and Cichocka, 2017). This creates a divide between insiders and outsiders and is a form of polarisation which is a common populist strategy (Jenkins, 2023) that can have real-world effects on polarisation and violence.

## The consequences of simulated realities

Within online 'simulated realities' like QAnon, shared realities and truths begin to erode and are replaced with alternatives, creating a closed system where disconfirmation only deepens belief (Zuckerman, 2019). When conspiracy narratives detach fully from reality and become pure simulacra (Baudrillard, 1981), there are real world consequences. Trust in institutions diminishes because followers dismiss mainstream media, governance and science as 'deep state' actors. More than 1 in 3 Americans believe that the 'deep state' is working to undermine Trump (Newall, 2020) which means within these simulated realities with alternative facts, democratic discourse becomes impossible, as democracy relies on the public sharing reliable knowledge and information (Farrell and Schneier, 2018). Democratic elections aren't

seen as being legitimate which can be exemplified by the January 6<sup>th</sup> capitol riots and politics itself loses legitimacy within these realities that have no bearing with reality.

In the simulated reality, trust in institutions diminishes, attitude towards democracy changes and violence emerges. Due to the narrative of the 'deep state' created in this simulated reality trust in original sources of truth diminish. Fifteen percent of Americans believe that 'Satan worshipping paedophiles run the government and media (Naughtie, 2021) and 1 in 4 Americans do not have confidence in scientists (Tyson and Kennedy, 2024). The simulacrum can become more real than reality because it is the dominant perception of reality and so even when presented with verifiable facts about democracy and election results, this is another addition to the plot and conspiracy. This diminishes democracy within the group and leaves no room for debate, as those who have an alternative perception of reality lose trust in verifiable fact (Popescu-Sarry, 2023). This alternate perception of reality can lead to violence being morally justified (Enders, Klostad and Uscinski, 2024). In 2016, the 'Pizzagate' gunman open fired in a restaurant he believed was the core of the elitist child trafficking ring (BBC News, 2017), despite this being a baseless theory. The simulated online far-right realities align with Baudrillard's theory that they no longer bear any resemblance to reality, with the alternative reality becoming their new source of truth and as seen in 2016, this has the potential to radicalise people into more extremist action.

## Methodology

To effectively establish the links between conspiracy belief and political violence as well as deepening divisions within society in the US, a mixed methods approach has been taken. The qualitative method being used is digital ethnography which is the analysis of digital content (Delli Paoli and D'Auria, 2021) that allows for the study of societal changes due to the online world (Martinez et al., 2023). This is necessary to decode the narratives used by far-right conspiracy theorists online and analyse violent rhetoric in the conspiratorial content. This approach is particularly appropriate with regards to this research question because it shows not only how conspiracies incite violence and provide pathways to radicalisation, but also how people are mobilised through social media.

## Data collection

To collect the data, a group from the social media platform Telegram with over 98 thousand members was used, more specifically looking at posts from November 2020 to January 6<sup>th</sup> 2021, as this is an important and violent time in US political history with the November election and the January 6<sup>th</sup> Capitol riots. Selective sampling was used to select with posts that specifically used language that either directly incited violence, justified it or used divisive rhetoric, with memes being excluded. On X, I used the advanced search feature to look at posts specifically from the November 2020-January 2021 timeframe that featured one of the hashtags: #StopTheSteal #SaveAmerica #MarchForTrump #MAGA or had reference to Trump or the events between November 2020- January 2021 in order to narrow the search for relevant posts. Additional keywords and phrases were also used to find specific posts such as 'rigged election', 'traitors', 'fight' and this meant that the posts were appropriate for this research question. From the data collected, an initial coding process was to separate the posts into either inciting or justifying violence and divisive/polarising language. From this, key recurrent terms were grouped into subcategories:

THEME	DEFINTION	KEYWORDS AND PHRASES	EXAMPLE FROM THE DATA
<b>Direct Violence Incitement</b>	Blatant, unambiguous language that urges or glorifies violence	Fight, hang, kill, death	"WE HAVE IT ALL AND WE WILL HANG THEM ALL. TREASON IS THE REASON FOR HANGING SEASON. NO MERCY."
<b>Implicit Violence Incitement</b>	Language that implies or justifies violence without direct language, more ambiguous	Act, pain, stand ready, protect	"A dark winter is here and the time to stand back and stand by is over. We need to take action like our lives depend on it, because they do."

<b>Dehumanising and Othering</b>	Language that dehumanises perceived enemies or separation between and in-group and an out-group	Scum, rats, traitors, swamp, satanic, patriots	“WHO ARE THE SWAMP? ALL THE COMMUNIST SICKOS THAT ENDORSE REPTILLIAN BEIJING BIDEN.”
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Posts are numbered 1-100 and the full dataset with details of the platform and date can be found in the Appendix in Tables 1 and 2.

## Ethical considerations

By using publicly available social media posts, no consent from participants was required. No private content or private group-chats has been analysed, and social media platform regulations have been followed in terms of the use of data. The confidentiality and privacy of those who posted the content is maintained through the removal of usernames, with posts simply being numbered from 1-100.

## Justifications and limitations

Digital ethnography as a qualitative approach was more appropriate in this research project as it analyses natural behaviour online (Murthy, 2008) where conspiracy theories thrive. This research method also eliminates the risk of social desirability bias, where participants give more socially desirable responses for self-preservation (Mathieu, 2021). Within their natural online environment this is less likely to occur. Due to the nature of my research question in that it discusses violence, it is unlikely that participants would openly want to justify violence or talk about committing acts of violence, whereas online, users feel more protected to talk freely (Simi and Windisch, 2020). The limitations of the research that is being carried out is that whilst it addresses the correlation between conspiracy rhetoric and violence, it cannot directly prove that that is the standalone cause of political violence in the US or that it is the standalone cause of polarisation. Further research is needed to determine the direct relationship between conspiracy belief and use of violence. Additionally, the most extreme examples were selected in the sampling process, so findings may not be representative of typical discourse, however they exemplify general trends.



## Findings and results

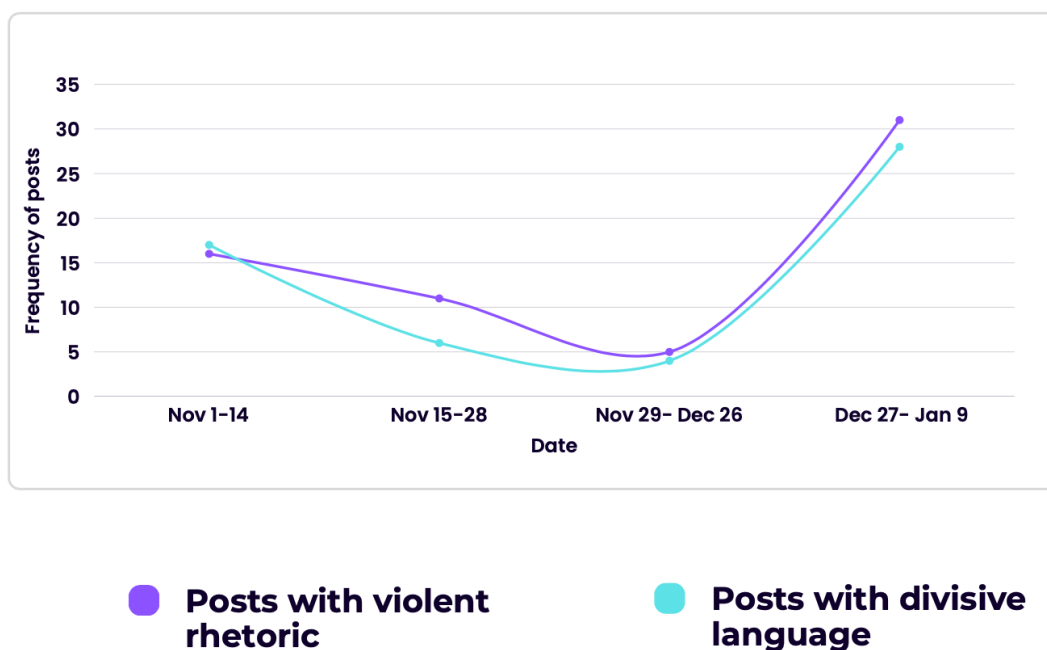


Figure 2- Line chart showing the frequency of posts with either violent or divisive rhetoric between November 2020-January 2021

Thematic analysis of 100 far-right social media posts from platforms Telegram and X over the time period of November 2020 to January 2021 revealed three dominant rhetoric patterns. Direct incitement of violence appeared in 33% of posts, typically featuring the words 'fight' and 'hang'. Some used graphic imagery:

Example 1

**"This is it MAGA Patriots**

**Trump either wins the election or America will descend into urban warfare campaigns so bloody and brutal it will make the Civil War of 1861 to 1865 look like a day in the park."**

-Post #17, Telegram, 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2020

Example 2

**"Nothing will change until bill gates and his fuxking mates are pulled out of their houses and beaten to death. This needs to happen."**

-Post #51, Telegram, 9<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2020



There were differences in the frequency and intensity of graphic imagery and violence between Telegram and X which will be explored further in the discussion, but the generally, Telegram hosted more extremist content. Figure 2 shows that posts inciting violence were the most frequent in the two weeks surrounding the January 6<sup>th</sup> capitol riots which is significant because it suggests that as divisive and violent rhetoric heightened, people became more mobilised into using real world violent action.

Language that implicitly incites violence, which is more ambiguous and less direct, featured in 31% of posts, which also included justifications for the usage of violence:

Example 3

**“Unjustified violence should be condemned but sometimes war is necessary to protect liberty. Our founding patriots understood the difference and defined the difference! This narrative is evil and Marxist. #StopTheLies #StopTheSteal #Freedom”**

-Post #59, X, 7<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2021

Example 4

**“The ppl who call for @realDonaldTrump to be removed are fearing for their lives. They will pay for their betrayal to him and the American Patriots. The storm is here. Be prepared.”**

-Post #89, X, 15<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2020

Common phrases used were ‘drain the swamp’ and ‘the storm’ which resemble Baudrillard’s hyperreality framework (1981) where within simulated realities, alternative language is used that separates the ingroup from the outgroup. Whilst the examples above and the common phrases don’t directly incite violence, there is a more indirect reference to violence, or the removal of perceived enemies, which is still significant.

The dehumanising and ‘othering’ rhetoric was the most prevalent theme, appearing in 55% of posts. This included animalistic and demonising language:

Example 5

**“TRUMP WONT ALLOW THE ELECTION WILL BE STOLEN BY THE COMMUNIST DEEPSTATE RATS”**

-Post #27, Telegram, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 2020

Example 6

## **“SAVE THE CHILDREN FROM THE FAR LEFT DEEPSTATE SCUMBAG DEMON RATS”**

-Post #36, Telegram, 18<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2020

The division between ‘us’ and ‘them’, which is a popular strategy within populism used to mobilise (Cabot et al., 2021) was prevalent throughout the data. Whether that be in the form of the hashtag ‘WeThePeople’ or a battle between ‘patriots’ and ‘traitors’, there was repeated use of divisive language, aimed at putting two groups up against one another. The term ‘patriot’ was found in 22% of posts which is significant because it depicts those who believe in the far-right ideology as the ‘true’ Americans who are trying to protect their country and anyone that disagrees with this is seen as a ‘traitor’ to their country:

### Example 7

**“Now this is what a real Patriot looks like! Way to stand tall for our freedoms and that we’ll never back down. In fact, we’ve just begun to fight! #PatriotParty #WeThePeople”**

-Post #69, X, 8<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2021

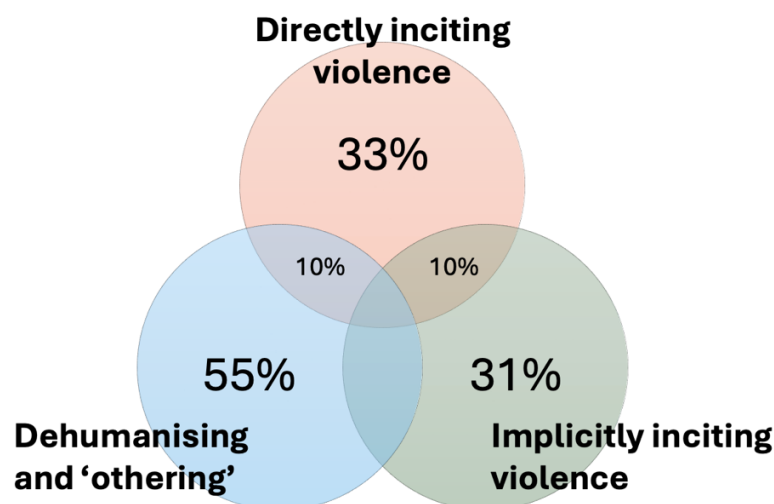


Figure 3- Overlap between thematic categories within the data (% of posts out of the sample)

Figure 3 shows that in 20% of the data sample, there was an overlap with posts that used language that both directly or implicitly incited violence and was dehumanising or othering.

Example 8

**“Fuckin eat shit and die you satanist fucks!”**

-Post #8, Telegram, 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2021

Example 9

**“Do the Deep State criminals out to steal president Trump's reelection with fraudulent ballots realize how many heavily armed MAGA patriots with world-class military accessories will show up at the white house if anyone makes a move to ILLEGALLY remove president Trump? It will be BIBLICAL.”**

-Post #18, Telegram, 1<sup>st</sup> Nov. 2020

This patterning of rhetoric creates a clear pathway for radicalisation and the use of violence which will be explored further in the discussion.

## Discussion

### Violence

Political violence is a key outcome of far-right conspiratorial rhetoric (Kleinfeld, 2021), often featuring language that frames violence as not only justified, but sometimes necessary to protect the nation and its values. This is clearly reflected in the data sample, where 33% of posts directly incite violence and 31% implicitly incite violence. Whilst the selective sampling method used meant posts that used violent language were purposely selected, the findings still reflect wider trends, with far-right discourse becoming increasingly extremist and violent (Marvine, 2023). The data suggests that violent and extremist viewpoints are becoming normalised within the online communities and when language advocating for violence appears more frequently, it becomes less shocking (Leuprecht, Skillicorn and Kernot, 2024) and more accepted which, in this case, allows for violence to be framed as legitimate or necessary as a response to political discontent.

## Moral framing of violence

A significant finding of the research was the prevalence of the justification of the use of violence, with violence often being framed as something that was morally acceptable and even necessary in the fight against perceived enemies:

**“LMAO Democrats are clearly about to steal the election**

**If that happens, Season 2 will be Patriots kicking Q to the curb and getting out their guns**

**When that happens the Democrats will finally be gone for good America and the World will be saved”**

-Post #24, Telegram, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 2020

**“For me it is the only option. If I only had the power...It would be an honour for me to fight side by side against these morons.”**

-Post #33, Telegram, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2020

In the examples above, violence is seen as necessary to ‘save’ the world and America and the ‘only option’ is to fight. Within the far right in the US, being a ‘patriot’ is something that the community shares which separates them from the ‘outgroup’ and places them as the protectors of America. Keller (2009) explores the concept of loyalty and what it means to be a ‘patriot’ and argues that the loyalty that comes with being a ‘patriot’ makes people justify ‘comforting but unjustified beliefs whilst deceiving themselves about their source’ (2009, p53). Whilst written in 2009, Keller’s ideas can be applied to the current mindset of Trump’s supporters and the US far-right in a post-truth era. There is the rejection of fact and a sense of loyalty that cannot be broken which was present within the data. A majority of the posts in the data sample declare some kind of loyalty to Trump and his rigged election conspiracy with hashtags in support such as #FightforTrump and #StopTheSteal which supports research by Webber et al. (2020) who argues that right wing ideologies that emphasise loyalty may find it easier to frame political violence as morally acceptable compared to other ideologies. Similarly, Matsunaga (2024) found that right-wing populist voters are more likely to support political violence than mainstream voters and non-voters. This suggests that loyalty and the right-wing ideology both played crucial roles in the usage and justification of violence as morally acceptable or necessary as a patriotic duty.

## Cross-platform differences in extremist content

The use of graphic imagery and more extremist language was prevalent on Telegram, suggesting that the platform hosts more extremist dialogue amongst users which supports the studies by Squire and Newton (2024) and Walther and McCoy (2021) that discovered Telegram as a platform not only hosted more extremist content, but also pushed extremist content through its algorithms. Telegram's structure as a platform allows groups that you can subscribe to which host like-minded ideas, and the site has limited content moderation (Herasimenka et al., 2022) which allows for the spread of conspiracy theories and the rhetoric that comes with conspiratorial thinking, due to the lack of external and opposing viewpoints (Jongbloed, 2024) that comes with the closed-community aspect of the platform. On X however there was less violent imagery and more repetition of 'fight' and 'fighting' for Trump and against perceived enemies who they believe rigged the presidential election. Data was collected from the timeframe of November 2020 and January 2021 and at this time, X was known as Twitter and had greater levels of regulation with regards to misinformation and content moderation (Hutchinson, 2024) which explains why users with more extremist viewpoints turned to alternative platforms such as Telegram. This is supported by research that outlined that the average number of subscribers from the most popular US right-wing communities on Telegram 'increased by 1600% in January 2021 alone' (Chalker, Wray and Olajide, 2024).

Whilst posts from Telegram were more explicitly violent and extremist in nature, both platforms contributed to a broader trend of violent rhetoric within the far-right. Conspiracy beliefs based on the rigged election transformed into calls for action which illustrates how online discourse can translate into real-world violence and is intensified by a lack of moderation within social media platforms. This is illustrated in Figure 2, where the highest frequency of posts featuring violent rhetoric was in the fortnight surrounding the events of January 6<sup>th</sup>. This also signifies how conspiracy belief contributes to political violence in the US; violent rhetoric that stemmed from a conspiracy about the 2020 election led to real-world violence and parallels in online violent rhetoric and offline violence are shown in the data through Figure 2.

## Division

The research question being investigated asks how belief in conspiracy theories contributes to political violence and division with the US and the divisive rhetoric

present in 55% of the data sample featured language that was dehumanising and ‘othering’. Dehumanising language strips away the humanity of the subject and often provoking negative emotional responses and justifying hostility toward the dehumanised group (Utych, 2018). This language causes further polarisation in society and within politics (Vasist, Chatterjee and Krishnan, 2023) and the language used within a majority of the posts in this rhetoric theme is derogatory, framing perceived enemies as inferior:

**“#Democrats are Demonic! “We Don’t Do Prayer! They are lost they have NO Common Sense and Morality! Illegals are not U.S Citizens... Trans Women are Men, Kids should not be Transgender! Climate Change does not cause wild fires poor Government and Leadership does! We need to recall them instead of paying for their salaries! In GOD I pray that this will happen in the future!”**

-Post #54, X, 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2021

**“I know I am stereotyping but I dislike all Democrats they lie, cheat and if you disagree with them you’re a racist. They will be the first to bitch when Biden takes this country down the shitter! And mark my words he will!”**

-Post #99, X, 8<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2021

The effect of the rhetoric used in the posts above is a reinforcement of the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ dynamic. This suggests that the language used online is creating larger divides within the US which is reflected in research by the Pew Research Centre that found ideological divisions over cultural issues are wider in the US than other Western democracies (Silver, 2021). Partisan divides are also wider than ever in the US, with 89% of Republicans sharing the view that if Biden won the 2020 election, there would be lasting harm to the country (Dimock and Wike, 2020). Within the dataset, the polarising mindset is reinforced through the clear distinction between ingroups and outgroups and conspiracy theories act as the basis through which perceived enemies are framed as evil or dangerous.

## **‘Us’ versus ‘them’ rhetoric**

The distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ in the data was present in two forms. Firstly, ‘patriots’ were made out to be the ‘true Americans’ and Democrats as Americans who didn’t care about the country or its’ future:

**“75 million DOMESTIC PATRIOTS who fear our great Republic is under attack will not tolerate being ‘shamed’ or take a knee by the radical left, RINOs or gutless GOP #fightback”**

-Post #70, X, 8<sup>th</sup> Nov. 2020

The rhetoric surrounding the use of the word ‘patriot’ to describe the ingroup comes with an element of superiority compared to the inferior Democrats who, according to the narratives created by the far-right conspiracy community, don’t care about America or election integrity. Social identity theory highlights that individuals derive part of their identity from the group they feel a part of which leads to a preference for their ingroup over other groups (Islam, 2014). The implication of the preference for the ingroup in this context is emotional hostility towards the outgroup which intensifies polarisation further. As determined earlier, online rhetoric has real-world consequences in terms of violence and the same applies here and research shows that online extremist narratives can be linked to real-world hate crimes (Castaño-Pulgarín et al., 2021).

Another way the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was clear within the data was the use of labels like ‘traitors’, ‘rats’, or ‘scum’ when referring to the outgroup:

**“Blm/antifa scum, trying to distabilize society again”**

-Post #2, Telegram, 6<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2021

**“LEFT WING TRAITORS I FOUND OUT WHERE THE DEEPSTATE SCUMBAG DEMOC RATS SENT THE MISSING TRUMP VOTES 🍿🐸🇺🇸 NO MERCY.”**

-Post #28, Telegram, 2<sup>nd</sup> Nov. 2020

These terms serve as tools to delegitimise the outgroup and reduce them to enemies of the people rather than a legitimate opposing ideology, which aligns with populist strategy (Kyle and Gultchin, 2024) that relies on this divisive narrative of ‘othering’ and denouncing political opponents (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017, pp.1–3). Populist strategy often dehumanises the enemy in order to justify authoritarian politics (Osana, 2020) and this turns conspiracy theories into a powerful narrative device that fuels the idea that democracy is under attack by hidden forces which in turn justifies extremist action to defend the nation. This is seen throughout the dataset, where the conspiracy of election rigging made it seem like democracy and free and fair elections were at risk, hence justifying the use of violence on January 6<sup>th</sup>. Populism as an ideology is anti-pluralist (Lewkowicz et al., 2023) and the rejection of pluralism intensifies polarisation by presenting the outgroup as

fundamentally opposed to the 'true' Americans and therefore the 'ingroup' do not accept the legitimacy of opposition. In a post-truth era where online echo chambers reduce exposure to opposing truths (Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2022), the legitimacy of opposition declines further which poses a threat to democracy.

The intersection of populist and conspiratorial discourse in a post-truth era removes belief in fact and deepens polarisation which creates a pathway for radicalisation. Figure 3 demonstrates that 20% of the total sample featured both divisive *and* violent language. Research shows that when violence is paired with dehumanisation, moral barriers to violence are more effectively overcome (Rai, Valdesolo and Graham, 2017), so thematic overlaps found in the data are significant as they exemplify how violence becomes justified; by reducing others to 'less than' or not human, violence becomes easier to use and incite. This intersection is important when considering pathways to radicalisation as it shows how people may move from political discontent to a mindset that justifies the use of violence or believes that violence is necessary. Conspiracy belief increases an individual's perception of threats (Heiss et al., 2021) and this leads people to see themselves as defenders of truth (Lantian et al., 2021) or 'patriots' whose mission is to save the country from perceived enemies:

**“When politicians become tyrants, the people will fight to save democracy  
#MarchForTrump”**

-Post #60, X, 7<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2021

As these narratives become part of some users' everyday discourse on platforms that host an increased level of extremist content like Telegram (Squire and Newton, 2024) barriers to violence diminish and extremism and radicalisation becomes more of a threat. To counter far-right radicalisation, hate speech and divisive language must be addressed but more importantly, the underlying conspiracy fuelled right-wing ideology must be confronted and dismantled.

## The impact of Trump

Donald Trump had an undeniable contribution to the violence that occurred on January 6<sup>th</sup> and when looking at the findings from the data sample it is clear that language he used had direct influence on the language used by his supporters. Trump was referenced in some way in over 38% of the posts in the data sample which is significant because it shows his central role in the events surrounding January 6<sup>th</sup>. The prevalence of direct mentions to Trump in the data may be due to the selective sampling method that was used, however when looking at the wider



context of the timeframe, the findings simply exemplify the impact of Trump, not exaggerate it.

Arguably, Trump has played a central role in legitimising far-right conspiracies (Edsall, 2022), through endorsements of theories and rhetoric that denounces traditional sources of truth. Earlier it was established that a post-truth era creates cycles of misinformation which allows for conspiracy theories to gain more traction and spread rapidly (Diaz Ruiz and Nilsson, 2022). Additionally, in a post-truth era people are less likely to believe in traditional media and instead use social media as their main source of news (Brenan, 2024) which is problematic because it allows for fake news to be widespread. In his rally speech on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Donald Trump makes multiple references to mainstream media:

**“The media is the biggest problem we have as far as I’m concerned, single biggest problem. The fake news and the Big tech.”**

- (Trump, 2021)

**“We don’t have a free and fair press. Our media is not free, it’s not fair. It suppresses thought, it suppresses speech and it’s become the enemy of the people. It’s become the enemy of the people. It’s the biggest problem we have in this country.”**

- (Trump, 2021)

This is problematic because when the President himself is telling his supporters not to trust the mainstream media, it is likely that trust in institutions as a whole will keep diminishing. By discrediting the media and positioning himself as the sole source of truth, Trump legitimises conspiracy theories by creating an environment where alternative theories are more readily accepted. This mirrors the idea of hyperreality that was discussed earlier where alternative theories thrive in simulated realities, which is what the far-right have created in an era where truth is rejected.

More recently, Trump has continued to legitimise conspiracies and has allowed for them to have a direct effect on policy (Narea, 2025). For example, he recently granted white South Africans asylum in the states under the basis that they were facing discrimination, which has been debunked and proved to be baseless (Contreras, 2025). This policy decision reflects the influence of the discredited white genocide or ‘Great Replacement’ theory, which has been a major conspiracy within the far-right (Rose, 2022) and by embedding these narratives into government policy,

Trump legitimises fringe ideology which validates extremist viewpoints amongst his supporters. The potential implications of this are significant because as previously established, people are being mobilised and using violence to fight against perceived enemies and threats and normalising these ideas through policy has the potential to push extremism further. Ebner (2023) supports this and argues that the long-term impacts of conspiracies penetrating mainstream politics may be as severe as the reversal of human rights and democratic values which arguably is currently happening in the US (Ayee, 2024).

Despite being acquitted of inciting the January 6<sup>th</sup> riots (Fandos, 2021), when looking at the language and rhetoric used by Trump between his election loss and riots, it is clear that he did mobilise his supporters into committing acts of violence, even if he did not explicitly tell them to use violence. Earlier, stochastic terrorism was explored with reference to the language used by Trump in his January 6<sup>th</sup> speech, but the techniques Trump used to eventually incite violence was a longer-term strategy with continued usage of militaristic and emotion evoking language. In his speech at a MAGA rally in Georgia in December 2020, Trump reinforces the idea that it is the responsibility of him and his supporters to protect America from perceived threats to democracy:

**“We're fighting, we're going to fight like you never saw before, thank you. We can't let what happened three weeks ago, we can't let it happen. Note, it's beyond me. We can't let it happen. And somewhere there's going to be a champion, you're a champion, somewhere there's going to be a champion that's going to do what's right.”**

-(Trump, 2020)

**“Proud citizens like you helped build this country, and together we are taking back our country. Our fight to drain the Washington swamp and reclaim America's destiny has just begun. We will not bend. We will not break. We will not yield. We will never give in. We will never give up and we will never back down. We will never, ever surrender because we are Americans and our hearts bleed red, white, and blue.”**

-(Trump, 2020)

**“They'll terminate religious liberty, cancel free speech, and force you to fund extreme late-term abortion. And there will be nothing to stop them. If they don't get in, there's going to be nothing to stop them. You have no idea how bad it will be. There will be nothing.”**

-(Trump, 2020)

Amman and Meloy (2021) outline that with regards to stochastic terrorism, an act of violence is more likely to occur due to the rhetoric of a public figure and January 6<sup>th</sup> exemplifies this. Trump's repeated use of the rhetoric of a 'fight' between the true Americans and those who 'stole' the election and the description he gives of what will happen if his supporters don't 'fight' against perceived enemies whilst not directly inciting violence, undoubtedly had an impact on the use of violence seen on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January. These rhetorical patterns mirror those found on far-right online spaces (Wahlström, Törnberg and Ekbrand, 2020) which can be seen in the data which was analysed earlier. The defensive framing of 'fighting back' against imagined enemies reinforces narratives seen within the simulated reality of QAnon and when these narratives are enforced by the President, fringe ideas become legitimised.

## Post January 6<sup>th</sup>

After the political violence seen during the January 6<sup>th</sup> riots, surveys found that most Americans opposed the use of political violence (Kafura, 2021) however political violence and far-right extremism is still a threat post- January 6<sup>th</sup>, despite most of the population opposing the use of political violence. In 2022, Nancy Pelosi's husband was attacked with a hammer by someone who believed she was part of the conspiracy to steal votes from Trump in the 2020 election (Drenon, 2023) which is another example of the dangers of far-right conspiracy theory belief. In addition, after January 6<sup>th</sup>, polarisation within the US worsened (Parker and Eisler, 2023) so instead of the violence being a lesson, it turned into something that only made the problem of division and violence worse. Both sides of the partisan divide had different versions of the events that happened during the riots (Kafura, 2022), with 30% of Republicans believing that the riots were carried out by opponents of Trump. This narrative was present in the dataset, with a common theme of deflection and placing the blame on others, creating a new conspiracy entirely:

**“The raids on the Capitol all started with BLM and Antifa members (many from the Philly area) and included Capitol police or those posing as Capitol police.”**

-Post #50, Telegram, 9<sup>th</sup> Jan. 2021

This post hoc conspiracism mirrors Lewandowsky and Cook's (2020) idea of the 'self-sealing' nature of conspiracy theories where any evidence disproving a theory may be interpreted as further evidence of a conspiracy. In this case, many of those on the far-right believed this was a further conspiracy against Trump, instead of

simply reconsidering their views about the event. The entrenched nature of their beliefs makes deradicalisation more difficult (Sutton and Douglas, 2022) and mirrors Baudrillard's final stage of the 'Sacramental Order' (Baudrillard, 1981) where their version of reality bears no resemblance to actual reality. As well as their entrenched beliefs, online algorithms reinforce these ideas and narratives by pushing extremist content (Whittaker et al., 2021) which creates an environment where their beliefs are unchallenged, leaving the potential for radicalisation and violent action in the future.

## Conclusion and recommendations

To summarise, this research aimed to investigate how far right conspiracy theories contribute to political violence and division within the US which is becoming increasingly important to understand with misinformation becoming increasingly accessible and influential (Del Vicario et al., 2016). Violent and divisive rhetoric was present throughout the data, peaking around the January 6<sup>th</sup> riots. On both Telegram and X, conspiracy theorists framed violence as morally justified and sometimes necessary, to win the fight against perceived enemies. The justification of violence for a cause, which in this case was to 'preserve' democracy and save the country, portrays political violence as being a duty and therefore acceptable. The populist strategy of creating a division between the ingroup and outgroup (Uysal, Jurstakova and Uluşahin, 2022) was used in the form of dehumanising and 'othering' language, which featured in over half of the data sample. Opponents were depicted as 'traitors', 'rats', and 'scum' which lowered the moral barriers to violence (Rai, Valdesolo and Graham, 2017) and made it easier to justify violence towards them. Telegram hosted more extremist content from users in their imagery and intensity of language, which suggests platforms like Telegram which host a lot of extremist groups, need stricter monitoring and more aggressive policies when it comes to graphic or violent language. Whilst it is important to reduce extremist content on platforms like Telegram that push that content further (Walther and McCoy, 2021), it is important that freedom of speech is also protected and to achieve this, platforms could implement more transparent moderation processes as well as investing in content analysis that can flag continued extremist viewpoints from individual users in order to try and prevent radicalisation.

This research makes several contributions to the existing literature surrounding the topic. By comparing the cross-platform differences in extremist content, it highlights how platforms with limited moderation allow for potentially radicalising rhetoric compared to more mainstream platforms, which allows for recommendations to be made to platforms specifically. This research also demonstrates that after the events

of January 6<sup>th</sup>, despite being pushed from mainstream social media platforms (Conger, 2021), conspiracy-based narratives simply adapted to the events instead of diminishing, taking more space on other platforms (Chalker, Wray and Olajide, 2024). This is significant because it suggests that that far-right conspiracy belief is rigid and hard to divert people away from so further research is required to explore specific successful methods that would help to de-radicalise individuals that are stuck in far-right simulated realities. Another valuable contribution from this research is the qualitative discourse analysis which provides insights into how language and framing strategies, through both the moral framing of violence and the divisive 'us' versus 'them' framing, increase the likelihood of violence justification. By analysing the construction of 'us' versus 'them' divisions through the dehumanisation and 'othering' of opposing individuals and the moral framing of violence as a patriotic duty this research supplements existing research that explores how conspiracy belief mobilises people into violent action (Belton, Mulholland and Murphy, 2025).

Within the findings and through examination of language used in his speeches in the build-up to January 6<sup>th</sup>, it is clear that Donald Trump plays a central role in far-right conspiratorial narratives. He portrayed himself as the sole defender of truth and democracy and over time used narratives and language that had a mobilising effect on his supporters. In his speech in Georgia, he particularly described the dangers of what would happen if the opposing side won the election, as well as denouncing traditional sources of media (Trump, 2020). He was directly mentioned in 38% of the data which is important because it shows the loyalty of supporters and research by Keller (2009) highlighted that loyalty can often make individuals justify comforting but unjustifiable beliefs while deceiving themselves about their source, which can be applied to January 6<sup>th</sup>. The rioters were able to justify what happened because they were comforted by the reason they were doing it- because of overriding loyalty for Trump. Rather than acting as an event that could be learnt from, the Capitol riots were framed as being part of the conspiracy against Trump, which reflects the self-sealing nature of conspiracy theories (Lewandowsky and Cook, 2020).

The broader implications of this research are important to acknowledge when considering the continued threat of far-right conspiracy belief. This study shows how conspiracy theories in a post-truth era survive and become increasingly part of mainstream politics in the US and highlights the use of divisive and violent language online can normalise violence and make it seem more justified. This has serious implications for democracy because as highlighted by Farrel and Schneier (2018), democracy relies on the public sharing reliable knowledge and facts. The study also

highlights the evolutionary nature of far-right online groups that are able to survive after events like January 6<sup>th</sup> by reinterpreting the event into their own conspiratorial narrative, moving further away from reality and further into their alternative reality. This suggests that political violence is not a reaction to major events, but actually an ongoing issue that has the potential to escalate at any time. Based on this, social media platforms have the responsibility to disrupt the echo chambers on platforms caused by algorithms (Cinelli et al., 2021) and promote a range of information, instead of content that reinforces users' existing beliefs. Additionally, baseless theories should be flagged as potential fake-news or misinformation on *all* platforms, not just mainstream ones which could potentially encourage critical thinking from users consuming the content.

Whilst the research provided some significant findings that supplement existing literature, there are potential limitations of the study. This study focused only on platforms Telegram and X, so the findings may not be representative of every platform, and communication could look different on other platforms such as Facebook and Reddit. However, research by Sipka, Hannak and Urman (2022) reached similar conclusions in that platforms such as Parler, which featured lower levels of moderation featured more hateful language than mainstream platforms like Twitter, which suggests that the findings from this study may represent wider trends. Additionally, the timeframe that was used for this research represents a particularly violent and divisive moment in US political history, so further research around everyday far right discourse is needed to determine whether the rhetoric is as intense or frequent in everyday communication.

Ultimately this study has made contributions to the knowledge surrounding the influence of far-right conspiracies on political violence and division in the US and it highlights the potential risks of unmoderated violent rhetoric on online platforms such as Telegram. If there is a continued lack of effort from the US government and social media platforms to tackle the spread of misinformation, there is a direct threat to democracy and a potential for further far-right radicalisation.

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## Appendix

**Table 1- Data retrieved from Telegram**

Post #	Directly inciting violence (DV) Implicitly inciting violence (IV) Dehumanising and othering (D,O)	Date	Post
1	IV, O	05/01/21	Congress will betray; patriots will need to RESCUE the President
2	O,D	06/01/21	Blm/antifa scum, trying to distabilize society again
3	IV	06/01/21	Let.s get those MotherF%#&@*s
4	DV	06/01/21	A STATE IS ABOUT TO FLIP! TRUMP PROMISES TO FIGHT LIKE HELL!
5	IV, O	06/01/21	You Are Ready, Military Is Ready, Patriots Are Ready For 1/6/21
6	DV	06/01/21	Go President TRUMP!! fight the darkness, and bring the light!! 💪

7	D	06/01/21	LUCIFERIAN TRAITOR: MIKE PENCE
8	DV, D	06/01/21	Fuckin eat shit and die you satanist fucks!
9	IV	07/01/21	Things are going to get VERY SERIOUS for the next while, with "scary" things occurring, as they HAVE TO
10	O	07/01/21	Biden has committed fraud and is a pawn of a number of countries that tried to replace him with Trump
11	D,O	07/01/21	No rule of law for the people of our country, only for invaders
12	IV	07/01/21	God bless Trump🙏🇺🇸 Make the bastards PAY👊
13	DV	07/01/21	In this World you are either a loser as forced by the system or you are a natural born fighter. Fighters don't lose. They are ten steps ahead of their opponents next move. They know where the fist is going to come from and act accordingly.

14	O	08/01/21	America will officially be an enemy occupied zone with the swearing in of Joe Biden on the 20th of Jan.
15	DV	08/01/21	WE HAVE IT ALL AND WE WILL HANG THEM ALL. TREASON IS THE REASON FOR THE HANGING SEASON. NO MERCY.
16	DV	08/01/21	It's time to fight for freedom!
17	DV, O	01/11/20	This is it MAGA Patriots Trump either wins the election or America will descend into urban warfare campaigns so bloody and brutal it will make the Civil War of 1861 to 1865 look like a day in the park.
18	DV, O	01/11/20	Do the Deep State criminals out to steal president Trump's reelection with fraudulent ballots realize how many heavily armed MAGA patriots with world-class military accessories will show up at the white house if anyone makes a move to ILLEGALLY remove president Trump? It will be BIBLICAL.
19	IV	01/11/20	MAGA patriots will explode on to the scene with unparalleled organizational leadership and weaponry.

20	O	01/11/20	No other president could have taken the Deep States witch-hunt beatings Trump has taken in the last four years
21	O	01/11/20	if Biden gets elected BLM will probably loot and riot until white people have to wipe their ass's and not to mention the circus Antifa will bring to the table.
22	IV	02/11/20	THE FINAL BATTLE. FOR GOD AND HUMANITY. PREPARE YOURSELF PATRIOTS! GOD WINS. TRUST THE PLAN. WHERE WE GO ONE WE GO ALL. THE STORM IS ARRIVED
23	DV	02/11/20	WHEN POTUS ACTIVATES WITH ONE WORD ALL THE PATRIOTS AROUND THE WORLD WE WILL FIGHT FOR HUMANITY. NO FEAR.
24	IV, O	02/11/20	LMAO Democrats are clearly about to steal the election If that happens, Season 2 will be Patriots kicking Q to the curb and getting out their guns When that happens the Democrats will finally be gone for good America and the World will be saved
25	O	02/11/20	Dems collude with CIA to launch intelligence operation that ALTERS voting machine results in Pennsylvania and other swing states
26	D,O	02/11/20	CHILD RAPIST AND HUMAN TRAFFICKER HUNTER BIDEN

27	D	02/11/20	TRUMP WONT ALLOW THE ELECTION WILL BE STOLEN BY THE COMMUNIST DEEPSTATE RATS
28	D,O	02/11/20	LEFT WING TRAITORS I FOUND OUT WHERE THE DEEPSTATE SCUMBAG DEMOC RATS SENT THE MISSING TRUMP VOTES 🍿🐸🇺🇸 NO MERCY.
29	DV	02/11/20	Keep fighting! Never give up! My President! It is time we fight for you!
31	D,O	06/11/20	WHO ARE THE SWAMP? ALL THE COMMUNIST SICKOS WHO ENDORSE REPTILIAN BEIJING BIDEN.
32	O	08/11/20	GOOD VS EVIL
33	IV,O	08/11/20	For me it is the only option. If I only had the power...It would be an honour for me to fight side by side against these morons.
34	DV	18/11/20	PATRIOTS ARE WILLING TO FIGHT FOR OUR FREEDOM
35	IV	18/11/20	DRAIN THE SWAMP!!



36	D	18/11/20	SAVE THE CHILDREN FROM THE FAR LEFT DEEPSTATE SCUMBAG DEMON RATS
37	O, IV	19/11/20	The result of the election is obvious! Patriotism won by far. We will not accept any other ruling from the Supreme Court or any other entity We will fending the truth,... VERITAS. Consider it as an actual threat!
38	DV	21/11/20	GET READY FOR THE FIGHT
39	IV	23/11/20	💣 PAIN IS COMING 💣
40	D,O	24/11/20	SEE THE FARLEFT SCUMAG TRAITORS!
41	IV	24/11/20	A day of reckoning is coming for election thieves
42	IV	25/11/20	PAIN IS COMING

43	IV	25/11/20	BUCKLE UP PATRIOTS. TAKE YOUR OATH. STAND FOR YOUR FREEDOM. NO FEAR. NO PAIN NO GAIN.
44	O, D	28/11/20	THE DEEPSTATE MAINSTREAM MEDIA ARE TRAITORS AND IS A F# VIRUS!
45	D,O, DV	28/11/20	THE UN IS IN CHILD SEXTRAFFICKING, RAPE AND MURDER. LET'S HANG THESE NWO BASTERDS. NO MERCY. THE FIGHT IS REAL
46	DV	29/11/20	HANGING SENTENCE FOR TREASON AGAINST PRESIDENT LOCK THEM UP
47	DO	01/12/20	Absolute criminal swamp creature (s)
48	DO	01/12/20	TRAITOR JOE BIDEN AND HIS DEMON SWAMP.
49	DV, DO	03/12/20	DRAIN THE SWAMP. THIS IS A F* REPTILIAN. PATRIOTS IN CONTROL. IF YOU WANT A FIGHT YOU CAN GET A FIGHT. NO MERCY.
50	DO	09/01/21	The raids on the Capitol all started with BLM and Antifa members (many from the Philly area) and included Capitol police or those posing as Capitol police.

51	DV, DO	09/01/21	Nothing with change until bill gates and his fuxking mates are pulled out of their houses and beaten to death. This needs to happen.
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**Table 2- Data retrieved from X**

Post #	Directly inciting violence (DV) Implicitly inciting violence (IV) Dehumanising and othering (D,O)	Date	Post
52	DV	06/01/21	FIGHT FOR TRUMP FIGHT FOR TRUMP FIGHT FOR TRUMP <a href="#">#StopTheSteal</a> <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a>
53	O	06/01/21	<a href="#">#StopTheSteal</a> The violence was Antifa
54	DO	06/01/21	<a href="#">#Democrats</a> are Demonic! "We Dont Do Prayer! They are lost they have NO Common Sense and Morality! Illegals are not U.S Citizens, People should not shop lift, Addicts do not need the state to give them free needles, People should not shop lift with no penalties, Trans Women are Men, Kids should not be Transgender! Climate Change does not cause wild fires poor Government and

			Leadership does! We need to recall them instead of paying their salaries! In GOD I pray that this will happen in the future!
55	O	07/01/21	The insurrectors at US Capitol weren't Trump supporters, they were ANTIFA disguised as Trump supporters! Obviously, Trump supporters were set up to blame the <b>violence</b> on them & to derail their <a href="#">#MarchForTrump</a> / <a href="#">#StopTheSteal</a> cause!
56	DV	07/01/21	TODAY we <b>FIGHT</b> for our FREEDOM. <a href="#">#MarchForTrump</a>
57	O	07/01/21	the <b>violence</b> is coming from antifa and paid violent thugs like we have seen in city after city: they infiltrate peaceful trump supporters
58	O	07/01/21	Hey, <a href="#">@newsmax</a> The <b>violence</b> is being instigated by Mantra, disguised as supporters of our great <a href="#">@POTUS</a> They handed out detailed instructions on what to do to make sure <a href="#">#WeThePeople</a> are blamed. You morons fell for their trick. <a href="#">#StopTheSteal</a>

59	IV, O	07/01/21	<p>Unjustified violence should be condemned but sometimes war is necessary to protect liberty. Our founding patriots understood the difference and defined the difference! This narrative is evil and Marxist.</p> <p><a href="#">#StopTheLies</a> <a href="#">#StopTheSteal</a> <a href="#">#Freedom</a></p>
60	DV	07/01/21	<p>When politicians become tyrants, the people will <b>fight</b> to save democracy</p> <p><a href="#">#MarchForTrump</a></p>
61	IV	15/11/20	<p>A dark winter is here and the time to stand back and stand by is over. We need to take action like our lives depend on it, because they do</p>
62	O, IV	14/11/20	<p>Good American Patriots have stormed the Swamp to rally for <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a></p> <p>! You can feel the energy in the air. We will not give up. We will not back down! I'll see you at Freedom Plaza at Noon for <a href="#">#MarchForTrump</a>!</p>
63	IV	14/11/20	<p>RELEASE THE KRAKEN!!!!</p>

64	O	16/11/20	WE THE PEOPLE had a massive showing in Washington, DC for the <a href="#">#MarchForTrump!!</a> THANK YOU patriots for your love & commitment to <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> & election integrity!
65	O	27/12/20	BIDEN Biggest Idiot Democrats Ever Nominated Say Yes if Agree?
66	IV	07/01/20	<a href="#">#RiseUp</a> <a href="#">#SaveAmerica</a> <a href="#">#ResistTyranny</a> <a href="#">#MAGAForever</a> 1776 When tyranny becomes law, Rebellion becomes duty.
67	DV	07/01/21	Keep fightin' the fight!! <a href="#">#SaveAmerica</a>
68	O	08/11/20	My fellow Americans... <a href="#">#MAGA</a> <a href="#">#Trump</a> <a href="#">#BidenWillNeverBePresident</a> <a href="#">#StormIsUponUs</a> <a href="#">#1776Again</a>

69	O, DV	08/11/20	Now, this is what a real Patriot looks like! Way to stand tall for our freedoms and that we'll never back down. In fact, we've just begun to fight! <a href="#">#PatriotParty</a> <a href="#">#FightBack</a>
70	O	08/11/20	75 million DOMESTIC PATRIOTS who fear our great Republic is under attack will not tolerate being "shamed" or take a knee by the radical left, RINOs, or gutless GOP. <a href="#">#fightback</a> i
71	IV	08/11/20	Got news for ya sis!! We ain't conceding either!! The American Patriots are about to rise up!!
72	IV	13/11/20	It's about to get real yall! We either stand up NOW!!... Or lose our Country for good!
73	O, DV	08/11/20	The war begins on Monday. Liberals, commies, assorted radical America-haters- you bit off more than u can chew. U underestimated <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> . Poor Basement Biden. Got teased. Got hopes up. Gonna be a YUGE letdown.

74	DV	13/12/20	<p>WE ARE WITH YOU MR. PRESIDENT TRUMP</p> <p>100% KEEP FIGHTING      KEEP FIGHTING</p> <p>KEEP FIGHTING      KEEP FIGHTING</p> <p>KEEP FIGHTING      KEEP FIGHTING</p> <p>KEEP FIGHTING      KEEP FIGHTING</p>
75	DV	09/01/21	<p>This is my President, This man has been through so much. Has fought for America. We will not give up. We will not stand down. We will <b>fight</b>.  <a href="#">@realdonaldtrump</a></p>
76	O	08/01/21	<p>ATTENTION  <a href="#">@MAGA</a>  YOU ARE BEING LIED TO! The  <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a>  concession was staged by ANTIFA. Its FAKE. Dont believe it like the sheeple. You can tell, it doesnt even look like the REAL Donald Trump. <a href="#">#FAKENEWS</a></p>



77	DV	01/01/21	See my post about <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> not conceding, and fighting hard. Big battle in 1/6/21. That post from last night will soon go over 3 million views on Twitter and Parler. THREE MILLION. More proof the <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> Army wants him to <b>fight</b> . Do NOT concede.
78	DV	05/01/21	<b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP! FIGHT FOR TRUMP!</b> <b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP! FIGHT FOR TRUMP!</b> <b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP! FIGHT FOR TRUMP!</b> <b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP! FIGHT FOR TRUMP!</b> <b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP! FIGHT FOR TRUMP!</b> <b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP! FIGHT FOR TRUMP!</b> <b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP! FIGHT FOR TRUMP!</b> <b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP! FIGHT FOR TRUMP!</b>
79	IV	08/12/20	If <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> activates the American Patriots... Its game over.. <a href="#">#WeThePeople</a>
80	O	07/01/21	This is socialist/Marxist/communist propaganda blitz, pre-planned, w/media complicity. If u cant see that ur blind, deaf, dumb, or part of scam. Intended to destroy <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a>

			, discredit & intimidate GOP & re-make USA into Venezuela overnight w/no one willing to fight.
81	DV	31/12/20	General <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> your Trump Army of 74 million awaits your orders. We are ready to back your play. Get ready fir wildest & most interesting January in history of USA.
82	O, DV	20/12/20	I know <input type="checkbox"/> <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> <input type="checkbox"/> better than anyone. I wrote #1 bestseller "Trump Rules." I'm telling u he's not leaving. This will be <b>fight</b> of century. F Democrats. U stole election. We're not leaving. Whatcha gonna do? Civil war about to begin?
83	DV	06/11/20	Trump has literally FOUGHT for US and this COUNTRY over the last 4 years and ENDURED so much.. and the first sign of turbulence yall want to give up!?!? GET A GRIP!! TIME TO <b>FIGHT!!</b> <a href="#">#America</a>
84	IV	09/01/21	What could be <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> 's final act of defiance in the remaining 10 days? This is a genuine question because I am intrigued to see how he'll <b>fight</b> back. He's a wounded tiger, and nothing is more

			dangerous than a wounded beast. <a href="#">#WeAreTrump</a>
85	O, DV	09/01/21	Pres. Trump knew this was gonna happen to him and to all of us patriots. Having lost a twatter account back in June, is aggravating. But the <b>fight</b> for Trump and liberty lives on. The world is watching. KEEP FIGHTING FOR  THE AMERICAN REPUBLIC  <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a>
86	O	09/01/21	NEVER VOTE GOP BACKSTABBING <b>TRAITORS</b> EVER AGAIN!!! All talk no action... GOP are nothing but illusionist ohh they talk a good talk but in the end they are cowardly  worms who do nothing! Not even about clearly stolen elections! No balls none No courage and no integrity!!!
87	O	08/01/21	Meaningless! No one will watch! Patriots find other things to do rather than be insulted by fraudsters, Pedos, Communist, Anti-American parade! We are ashamed of the ceremony to a

			rigged election & coup which overtook our nation.
88	IV, O	09/01/21	<p>If articles of impeachment are filed against <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a></p> <p>Monday we should storm the capital until all traitors are dealt with.....Legally?</p>
89	IV	15/11/20	<p>The ppl who call for <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> to be remove are fearing for their lives. They will pay for their betrayal to him and the American Patriots. The storm is here. Be prepared.</p>
90	IV	02/01/21	<p>MY FELLOW AMERICAN'S, THE STORM IS HERE MULTIPLE VECTORS OF ATTACK ON THE U.S. HAS LED TO THE FINAL RED LINE Remember-President Trump has known all things from the beginning and he will not relent to finish the good work he has begun NOTHING CAN STOP IT</p>

91	IV	09/01/21	<a href="#">#WeThePeople</a> take back our Country
92	IV, O	09/01/21	This , it's <a href="#">#WeThePeople</a> that own the capital. I hope they are scared. <a href="#">#DrainTheSwamp</a>
93	O	09/01/21	(in reply to Joe Biden) Then turn your son and yourself in you treasonous son of a bitch!! <a href="#">#cheater</a> <a href="#">#maga</a> <a href="#">#WeThePeople</a> <a href="#">#Trump</a> <a href="#">#Patriots</a>
94	O, IV	09/01/21	Drain the swamp!! <a href="#">#Patriots</a> <a href="#">#Trump</a> <a href="#">#WeThePeople</a> <a href="#">#fucktwitter</a> <a href="#">#fuckbiden</a> <a href="#">#MAGA</a>
95	DV	08/01/21	and is still fighting back, trust the plan!! <b>Fight for Trump!</b>
96	DV	09/01/21	Flood our senators and representatives with <b>FIGHT FOR TRUMP. FIGHT FOR TRUTH.</b> FIGHT FOR AMERICA!
97	O	09/01/21	But they will continue to allow little bitch ass Antifa punks to rally and call to arms on their platform. But yeah the <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a>

			is the villain. Good job commies. Good job
98	IV	13/11/20	Americas love President Trump and continue to fight for him every single day. <a href="#">#MillionMAGAMarch</a>
99	O	08/01/21	know I am stereotyping but I dislike all Democrats they lie, cheat and if you disagree with them you're a racist. They will be the first to bitch when Biden takes this country down the shiiter! And mark my words he will! <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> you did the best you could!
100	DV	14/11/21	Replying to <a href="#">@realDonaldTrump</a> We must STOP THE STEAL! We are fighting for you!