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Title	“The Ireland Last approach”: the ‘playbook’ and discursive strategies of Irish far-right influencers
Authors	Fattibene, Gabriella
Publication date	2025-12-31
Original Citation	Fattibene, G. 2025. “The Ireland Last approach”: the ‘playbook’ and discursive strategies of Irish far-right influencers. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.
Type of publication	Doctoral thesis
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Download date	2026-11-04 13:15:40
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/18869

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"*The Ireland Last approach*": The 'playbook' and discursive strategies of Irish far-right influencers

Thesis presented by

Gabriella Fattibene, B.A., M.A.

ORCID: 0000-0003-1004-9185

For the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

University College Cork
Department of Sociology & Criminology
Head of Department: Dr. Tracey Skillington
Supervisors: Dr. Orla Lynch & Dr. James Windle
2025

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Declaration

"This is to certify that the work I am submitting is my own and has not been submitted for another degree, either at University College Cork or elsewhere. All external references and sources are clearly acknowledged and identified within the contents. I have read and understood the regulations of University College Cork concerning plagiarism and intellectual property."

Digital signature of the candidate: Gabriella Fattibene

"*The Ireland Last approach*": The 'playbook' and discursive strategies of Irish far-right influencers

Abstract

Although there is minimal far-right political presence in Irish government, the far-right in Ireland operate as an online network. This network includes online figureheads or 'influencers' who create content about far-right ideology as it relates to Ireland. Far-right influencer content enjoyed a boost of visibility during the COVID-19 pandemic due to coverage of popular anti-lockdown and anti-vax conspiracy theories, but it is still unclear how other aspects of far-right ideology and conspiracy theory are adapted to an Irish context.

This thesis examines 61 videos or 31 hours of footage from four prominent Irish influencer accounts on the video hosting platform Odysee posted between December 1, 2022 – February 28, 2023. Through the lens of Social Identity Theory, this thesis applies content analysis and critical discourse analysis to examine how far-right influencers are adapting far-right ideology for an Irish audience and the discursive strategies they use to construct meaning in online spaces. The results represent a 'playbook' of strategies used by far-right influencers that construct a new form of exclusionary Irish nationalism, represent Irish identity as under threat, evoke nostalgia for mythic past, and ultimately, create calls to action.

Keywords: *conspiracy, far-right, influencers, Ireland, online, social media*

Chapter 1: Introduction

On 23 November 2023, early reports of a stabbing in a schoolyard in Dublin began circulating, eventually confirming that one of the victims was a primary school child, who was critically injured. Outrage at the tragedy quickly picked up, but it was not long before messages and social media posts began alleging that the perpetrator was a 'non-national' (Carroll, 2023b).

Beneath the undercurrent of national tragedy, a familiar discursive thread arose blaming Ireland's 'mass-immigration' policy for putting native Irish children in danger, and warning that Ireland will witness more of these tragic events as long as it allows immigration into its cities (O'Connor, 2024). This type of messaging was not new, at least not in Ireland (Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021). Other tragic events over the past five years have garnered a similar incendiary response – the murder of Ashling Murphy in 2022 (Brennan & McConnell, 2022) was also met by early allegations that the perpetrator was a 'non-national' and Irish women were not safe in the presence of male migrants. In December 2020, the shooting of Nigerian-Irish George Nkencho by armed Gardaí (Irish police) and the resulting public outcry prompted far-right Telegram groups to instruct their followers to 'make memes, dig up stats, turn on your VPN and get trolling' (Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021; Siddiqui, 2022). This followed a pattern of events in which local events were 'highjacked' by far-right groups to support a narrative that immigration was responsible for Ireland's social ills (Darius & Stephany, 2020).

However, the environment in Dublin the night of 23 November 2023 was tinder dry. By early evening, hundreds of people had gathered in Parnell Square where the incident had occurred earlier in the day (Maguire, 2023). Within a matter of hours, the crowd had grown and migrated to some of Dublin's busiest streets, lighting a Garda car on fire and beginning

to loot shops. By the end of the night, numerous cars, buses, and a tram had been set alight and vandalised, and multiple businesses looted. Over 60 Gardaí were assaulted and the damage was estimated to total €20 million. It has since been called one of the most violent riots in modern Irish history (Carroll, 2023b; Hilliard, 2023; Lally et al., 2023).

Though there had been scattered far-right sentiment and small, relatively disorganised anti-immigration protests previous to the Dublin riot, the public struggled to grasp where this outpouring of anti-immigration sentiment had come from and how such a violent protest had come to fruition mere hours after the event (Hosford & Loughlin, 2022; McDermott, 2023).The answer to this lies in the complicated – but pervasive - nature of far-right discourse in Ireland, and the evolving phenomenon of what can, at times, seem like a leaderless movement of far-right influence online (Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021; Thorleifsson, 2022). Indeed, the far-right movement has relied on the trope of the 'leaderless resistance'[1] as a virtue of the movement rather than a hallmark of disorganisation and isolation (Kaplan, 1997). According to Kaplan (1997) other far-right movements have adapted leaderless resistance as a *strategy*, relying on shared ideological values and individual motivation rather than structured hierarchy, making these movements particularly difficult to dismantle.

The reality is that far-right sentiment in Ireland is not new. Much like that witnessed across Europe (Feischmidt & Hervik, 2015; Ravndal, 2018), it has been circulating and even mainstreamed nearly from the formation of the State (Garner, 2007; McDonnell, 2008; Smith, 2008). This process of 'mainstreaming,' widely documented in the literature on the far-right, occurs when ideas which were previously considered extreme become normalised and incorporated into 'acceptable' democratic discourse (Brown et al., 2023; Miller-Idriss, 2018; Tetrault, 2025). This mainstreaming can occur through the public discourse (e.g. calls

[1] The term itself became popularised with the 1992 publication of white supremacist Louis R. Beam's essay 'Leaderless Resistance,' months before the Waco siege.

for clampdowns on immigration), the media (e.g. amplification of the messaging of far-right influencers), and fringe or dominant political parties (e.g. adopting increasingly right-wing policy measures in response to extremist calls to action). More often than not, the process involves a confluence of all of these measures (Brown et al., 2023). Specifically evidenced in Ireland, Garner (2007) points to the major political parties' absorption of anti-immigration rhetoric as an example of this mainstreaming process, which culminated in the 2004 Citizenship Referendum, resulting in the removal of *jus soli* or automatic citizenship for those born in the Republic of Ireland (Irish Statute Book, 2004).

While this kind of far-right sentiment in Ireland may not be new, the far-right ecosystem is changing. It is increasingly international and online, which has certain affordances for contexts without a legacy of far-right politics and little far-right political representation (Baele et al., 2020; Conway et al., 2019; Lewis, 2019). This thesis explores the Irish far-right ecosystem, focusing on the video content of four prominent influencers by examining 31 hours of Irish far-right influencer content on the video hosting platform Odysee. Though many of these influencers have been deplatformed from mainstream platforms like YouTube (Bohan, 2020), they have migrated to fringe platforms like Odysee, which are seen as less restrictive in terms of removing content (Tuck et al., 2023). Though these influencers still engage in 'softening' techniques to present their content as less extreme, the objective is to observe their content in its most natural, least restrictive form accessible (Brown et al., 2023; Tuck et al., 2023).

There are several methodological considerations when researching the far-right. Firstly, the far-right cannot be treated as a monolith. In reality, far-right is an 'umbrella term' - and far-right movements in other jurisdictions typically incorporate multiple separate groups and individuals with distinct but broadly compatible ideologies such as white nationalism, populism, anti-elitism, and anti-liberalism. (Mudde, 2002; Mudde, 2019; Pirro,

2023). Political scholars often disagree on what key factor makes a movement 'far-right,' but the work of Mudde (2019), one of the most widely cited scholars in the field, describes far-right politics as those which endorse and combine the broader concepts of exclusion such as racism or ethno-centrism, anti-democracy, and 'traditionalist' views of society. More specifically, Mudde (2019) argues that a political party or movement can be considered far-right if they endorse three of the following five features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and belief in the strong state. This broad definition can lead to many iterations of far-right ideologies or groups, all with different priorities or goals, which may at times look very dissimilar. For example, and perhaps symptomatic of the peculiarities of Irish political and social history, Mudde has flagged two major political parties on the island as far-right by this definition: the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) in Northern Ireland and Sinn Féin (SF) (Mudde, 2007). Though these parties are considered centre-right and centre-left, respectively, their focus on traditionalist ideals, nationalism, belief in a strong state, and ethno-centrism fit into Mudde's (2019) categorisation. The idea that two different and opposing parties can fit Mudde's (2019) taxonomy does not delegitimise his definition, rather demonstrates how complex and ingrained far-right ideology is in the Irish political system and how diversely it can manifest.

Further complicating this issue is the idea that 'far-right' has become a pejorative term in today's political landscape, with many figures who openly endorse aspects of this ideology still shirking the label (Brown & Mondon, 2020; Cannon & Murphy, 2024). Therefore, it is sometimes a methodological issue to identify discourses, figures, or politics as 'far-right' as the definition is rarely agreed upon and even more rarely used as a self-identifier.

For the purpose of this thesis, Mudde's (2019) definition is used as the basis for identifying far-right ideology. Though the four influencers analysed in this project reject the

label of 'far-right' outright, they endorse an ideology that involves exclusionism, anti-democracy, and a traditionalist, backward-looking view. They also all promote *extreme* far-right conspiracy theories – that is, narratives that reject democracy and rely so much on exclusionism and traditionalism that they call for immediate action (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2019; Hardy & Henschke, 2024). This thesis will examine that while influencers are careful to avoid anything that could legally be considered hate speech, they use strategically ambiguous language to create fear and tension, and signal impending doom. This is an accelerationist technique, though a careful one (Hardy & Henschke, 2024; Kriner, 2022). Using these discursive strategies, they advocate for the collapse of modern, 'progressive' Ireland in order to return to the mythic nation of the past (Anderson, 1983).

Ireland has long been neglected in terms of far-right studies because of its perceived lack of far-right political presence (McDermott, 2023; O'Malley & Fitzgibbon, 2014), which made the 2023 Dublin riots a particularly startling flashpoint for some. While Mudde (2007) identifies SF as a far-right party in the Republic, there is also a number of more 'fringe' far-right parties in Ireland who take explicitly anti-immigration stances.[2] However, their politicians have routinely polled under 2% in major elections, with a small but negligible margin of growth over the past five years (Gallagher, 2020a; Ireland First, 2025; Irish Freedom Party, 2025; McDermott, 2024; The National Party, 2025). At the time of writing, only a few independent candidates have managed to be elected to official roles. This includes Malachy Steenson, who was elected in 2024 to Dublin City Council after appearing at anti-immigration protests, Gavin Pepper, another anti-immigration activist who also won a seat on Dublin City Council, and Tom McDonnell, elected in Kildare, another anti-immigration spokesperson (O'Keeffe, 2024; Wall, 2024). However, these small wins are notably meagre

[2] The National Party founded in 2016 by Justin Barrett, Ireland First founded by local anti-immigration figurehead Derek Blighe, the Irish Freedom Party which campaigns on 'Irexit' or the separation of Ireland from the European Union, to name a few

in comparison to the state of far-right politics across Europe and North America, and it would appear that Ireland is, at the very least, lagging behind in terms of far-right political growth compared to its European counterparts (Kavanagh, 2015; O'Malley & Fitzgibbon, 2014).

This likely has less to do with any lack of far-right sentiment in the Republic and more to do with the post-independence political system. Two centrist parties, Fianna Fáil (FF) and Fine Gael (FG), have dominated Irish politics for decades (Weeks, 2017). Both are nominally centre-right, evolving out of Ireland's fight for independence and rooted in perceptions of Irish nationalism, as it relates to independence from Britain. SF also emerged from Irish civil war politics, though they are a self-described republican socialist party who once operated as the political arm of the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA), a paramilitary organisation seeking the reunification of the 32 counties of Ireland and the end of British rule in Ireland. As a result of their role in violent conflict in Northern Ireland, SF claims ownership of the Irish nationalist rhetoric. (Arlow, 2020; Fattibene et al., 2024a; Harris, 2012).

SF remained a relatively fringe party in Irish politics for decades, but in the Republic, they have recently been considered the only alternative to a FF/FG government (Maillot, 2024). As such, SF is seen as the Irish nationalist 'protest vote' against the establishment. Political scientists thus argue that SF fulfils the demand for a nationalist, anti-establishment vote that is often exploited by far-right parties in other contexts (Reidy & Suiter, 2016). In other terms, SF occupies the rhetorical space in the political realm that nascent far-right parties tend to capitalise on (O'Malley, 2008; O'Malley & Fitzgibbon, 2014).

It should be noted that SF has adopted a relatively inclusive and pro-immigration stance, promoting anti-discrimination policy, lobbying to improve the Direct Provision system (Ireland's system for housing people seeking international protection), and advocating for stricter hate crime legislation (Fattibene et al., 2024a; Michael, 2020; O'Neil, 2022).

Further complicating the political landscape in the Republic is the idea that Loyalist groups in the North (like DUP) are historically seen as 'owning' the far-right narrative (Harris, 2012). Therefore, the relative 'absence' of far-right politics in the Republic of Ireland can be seen, in part, as a consequence of the legacy of civil war politics in which Irish nationalism is an intrinsic part of the political system, and anti-establishment, nationalistic parties occupy this rhetorical space without the accompanying xenophobic and exclusionary rhetoric that accompanies other far-right parties (Lynch et al., 2025).

However, despite this complex political picture, this is not to say far-right sentiment does not exist in Ireland or that these new fringe far-right parties are to be ignored. While this triumvirate of FF, FG, and SF were long thought to be a bulwark against the rise of the far-right in Ireland, we now see new spaces accommodating far-right narratives. This is particularly the case for online personalities or 'influencers.' In an effort to understand the emergence of this new far-right ecosystem effecting Ireland – one that sits outside the party political system – this thesis will explore the content produced by four key Irish far-right influencers to understand how they construct, adapt, and mobilise far-right discourse with an Irish focus. It will apply Social Identity Theory to understand how far-right influencers construct the concept of the 'ingroup' (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) - both in terms of the white natives of the nation *and* the enlightened minority awakened to these global conspiracies. The discursive strategies used by these four Irish far-right influencers will be analysed as a far-right 'playbook,' or the repertoire of strategies they use to create ingroup threat and issue calls to action that toe the line of extremism.

Far-right movements globally have been some of the earliest adopters of new forms of online dissemination, from dial-up boards to YouTube, Telegram, 4chan, and almost every other social media and messaging platform (Bowman-Grieve, 2009; De Koster, 2008; Rothut et al., 2023 Thorleifsson, 2022). While the online far-right community is increasingly

transnational, able to exchange information and ideology seamlessly online from context to context, it also caters to content focusing on specific regions, including Ireland (Doerr, 2017; Macklin, 2013; Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021). Even if, unlike its European neighbours, the political manifestation of the far-right is lacking, Ireland can be described as having its own growing far-right ecosystem online. ISD reported that Irish far-right messages on Telegram ballooned from 800 in 2019 to 60,377 in 2020 (Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021). Europol's 2019 T-SAT report highlighted that Ireland had an 'emergent and coherent' far-right presence that had a strong internal network as well as strong links with far-right networks throughout Europe and North America (Europol, 2019). It would appear that far-right sentiment in Ireland is neither negligible nor new, but focusing only on its political manifestation ignores the bigger picture.

While the riots in Dublin in 2023 could be seen as the 'coming of age' of the far-right in Ireland and testament to its ability to mobilise and organise without institutional representation, the Irish far-right is neither new nor isolated. In looking at the online space, it is evident that Ireland's far-right is importing tactics and ideology from other countries, including the United Kingdom and the United States (Fattibene et al., 2024a). However, the issue of scale is important here and the question becomes how, discursively, the evolution of the Irish online ecosystem is occurring and how (or if) it is situated within Ireland's unique political context. In order to understand the evolution of international connections, the relationship between far-right ideology in other jurisdictions will be explored. Specifically, the question of how influencers resolve ostensibly foreign ideas (e.g. QAnon in the United States) for Irish audiences will be considered. This thesis will discuss the findings of a content analysis that examines key themes found in the content presented by the four influencers. Further, in order to understand the process of meaning-making inherent in this content, the results of a discourse analysis will be presented to examine a.) how these far-

right influencers adapting far-right ideology to cater to an Irish audience and garner support for their movement and b.) what discursive strategies are used by far-right influencers to construct meaning online.

Ireland's far-right is very much a fractured and leaderless movement. It has evolved out of many separate Eurosceptic, pro-life, and anti-immigration factions and groups that are rife with internal spats and shifting allegiances. (O'Keeffe, 2024; O'Toole, 2023). It is not the structure of these groups but rather the discourse that enables political action. This is to say that within the online Irish far-right ecosystem, political upheaval has not materialised in terms of electoral success or even cohesive, legitimate political parties (Harrison, 2024; Gallagher, 2020). However, their discursive practices contribute to a reframing of politics and ideology that may inspire action (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Wodak, 2015). However, online, groups can exchange and disseminate content irrespective of these differing group memberships or ideological differences, which results in a playing field different to traditional political or activist environments (Ebner, 2020; Doerr, 2017). With the advent of social media algorithms, audiences may be exposed to various types of far-right content from multiple jurisdictions (O'Callaghan et al., 2015). As such, it is difficult to identify any one figure in the Irish far-right ecosystem that drives far-right discourse as it is still a fractured movement with no apparent leader. This makes the role of the far-right 'influencer' appealing – these are people who *position* themselves as opinion leaders for the far-right movement, or present themselves as a trusted source that serves to filter and translate information to their audience (Arnesson, 2022b; Fattibene et al., 2024a; Lewis, 2019; Rothut et al., 2023).

COVID-19 appears to have been a turning point for the dissemination and visibility of far-right content in Ireland (ISD, 2021; McDermott, 2021). Far-right influencers and groups were early adopters of anti-vax and anti-lockdown conspiracy theories, for which they became the go-to opinion leaders for a new expanded audience (Bieber, 2020; ISD,

2021).The confluence of far-right activists and conspiracy theories is an important specification here as it effectively brought together the far-right and conspiracy theory adherents into a new aligned community (Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021).

This paper draws on the work of Barkun (2003) and Douglas et al. (2017) to define conspiracy theory as the belief that a powerful, covert group is influencing events (typically significant economic, political, or social events) for malicious aims. While this thesis will argue that conspiracy theory belief is a regular, non-pathological occurrence in the majority of the population, the reality is that there is a visible distinction between normative conspiracy theory belief and extreme adherence that inspires political action (Imhoff, 2024; van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018).

Conspiracy theory has been a mainstay in far-right discourse long before the advent of the internet (Dafaure, 2020). In many ways, conspiracy theory narratives have always been ideologically aligned with far-right beliefs. Conspiracy theories provide a collective enemy to rally against, akin to the Manichean nature of far-right politics. They also are overwhelmingly anti-elite and anti-establishment, another feature of many far-right ideologies (Castanho-Silva et al., 2017; Sawyer, 2021). With the introduction of online far-right spaces, this process has been expedited and grown to encompass the phenomenon of 'doing your own research' and troubling algorithmic rabbit holes that expose people to more and more content related to conspiracy theories (Forberg, 2021; O'Callaghan et al., 2015). As this thesis will argue, far-right groups leverage conspiracy theories to fulfil social and psychological needs for their adherents, and use them as a tool for social cohesion and dissemination.

But what differentiates those with normative or passing conspiracy theory beliefs and those who adopt it as a lifestyle? Although many studies have shown that belief in one conspiracy theory is a predictor of belief in *other* conspiracy theories, many people believe in

at least one or two (van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018; Wood et al., 2012). The difference occurs when people's needs are met, and begin to rely, on the social and psychological functions of the conspiracy theory worldview (which will be discussed in the next chapter). Indeed, many of these online communities fulfil social needs for their adherents – making the online manifestation of the far-right that much more pervasive. When conspiracy theory and ideology become embedded in these ecosystems, it begins to serve as an identity for group members (Cookson et al., 2021; Douglas et al., 2017; Douglas et al., 2019; Jolley et al., 2020).

When this discourse factors into identity formation, it has potential consequences for society dealing with uncertainty and instability (van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013). COVID-19 was undoubtedly a unique destabiliser for the majority of the population who experienced the pandemic and resulting lockdowns. Many experienced isolation and financial and emotional strain. It was a period marked by great uncertainty, where conspiracy theories were rife and often the only explanations available for unexplainable and uncertain situations. Anti-lockdown and 'plandemic' conspiracy theories justified people's frustration with Ireland's prolonged lockdowns (some of the longest in Europe) and insistence to stay at home and stay isolated (Ackerman, 2020; Bratu, 2020; Chapelan, 2021; Wade et al., 2023). For those struggling with the state of affairs, conspiracy theories were a tempting explanation to justify their dismay and frustration.

Far-right influencers enjoyed a boost of visibility from riding the wave of insecurity and promoting a range of conspiracy theories in response to COVID-19 measures (ISD, 2021), and there was the question of how they would be able to 'pivot' their content once COVID-19 was no longer a relevant topic (and when none of the 'plandemic' allegations of eternal lockdown came to fruition). However, far-right influencers are adept at exploiting current events to fit their ideological narrative – which they continue to do. After the

pandemic, Ireland was still in a state of instability, at least in the eyes of many of its citizens. A decades-long housing crisis continued to worsen, affecting many young people unable to find housing or forced to move abroad (Social Justice Ireland, 2025). Further, after the war in Ukraine broke out, Ireland agreed to house Ukrainian asylum seekers, over 100,000 of whom have applied for asylum in Ireland (Bielenberg, 2024). Some were concerned that this would stress the housing supply further, an issue far-right activist quickly picked up and spun into their anti-immigration conspiracy narrative. These issues coupled with the local grievances and events, like that seen in the Dublin riots, supply plenty of fodder to keep the far-right content mill turning. Importantly, the influencers were capable of usurping national issues, but also very local issues, bringing their conspiracy narratives to small communities across the country (Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021; MacNamee, 2020).

Again, these are not structured groups with hierarchies under a single leader. While influencers fulfil an opinion leader role of sorts, the far-right network as it exists in Ireland is still leaderless and memetic. Scholars such as Ebner (2020) have argued that far-right networks still thrive without central leadership, instead drawing on the social and identity functions their content provide. This thesis will examine the discursive work of far-right influencers from this frame – that they perform identity work for an audience looking to bolster a sense of self-concept and belonging, and that they rebrand Irish nationalism to fit this aim (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Though these influencers may represent different ideological backgrounds (though all falling under the far-right umbrella), their content performs the same functions: to create boundaries for group membership and create a heightened sense of ingroup threat, so much so that it necessitates action. Instead, far-right influencers are thriving on a platform of ambiguity and identity work, often portraying a lifestyle or coherent worldview their viewers wish to emulate (Conway et al., 2019; Winter, 2019).

Further muddying the landscape is the question of whether this new generation of far-right activism in Ireland is the result of a grassroots movement or if it is wholly imported from abroad. While exploratory findings do suggest that Irish far-right discourse is mainly westward looking (to the United States), there is discursive work being done to tailor this content and ideology to an Irish audience (Fattibene et al., 2024a; Lynch et al., 2025; Schenk & Windle, 2025). As we have seen, far-right activists exploit local grievances and situate them within their global far-right conspiracy worldview. This is what this thesis seeks to understand – how this discursive process is occurring and what strategies are used to localise an ideology that is largely transnational.

Considering so much of the political discourse and organisation is happening online, where anyone can be an opinion leader, what is required is a shift in focus to these nodes of influence within the online far-right ecosystem. This is why this research focuses on influencers, because they position themselves as opinion leaders of this new wave of Irish far-right activism. Even when they are not representative of Irish far-right discourse as a whole (in its many iterations), they operate as the structural centre of an otherwise decentralised network (Lewis, 2019). They are the individuals often doing the discursive work of adapting ideology from one context to the next. Additionally, they are often the ones creating calls to action, however thinly veiled, that have the potential to result in activism.

Focusing on the discourse of these influencers not only elucidates how they construct this conspiratorial worldview in which the far-right operates, but also how they craft and situate these calls to action, no matter how carefully they are worded. It also exposes how these issues are made relevant within the Irish context, and how these identities are navigated in a new context.

The 2023 Dublin riots were a signal that Ireland cannot write off far-right sentiment on the island, regardless of its lack of electoral success. Far-right sentiment is growing and

mobilising, if not in the Dáil, then in pockets of the online far-right ecosystem. Rather than looking at this as a cohesive movement, this project accepts it decentralisation, instead looking at how influencers occupy the space discursively, and how they construct identities and ideology in a novel context.

The following chapters will explore how this process occurs: from the social and psychological needs this ideology fulfils, to its adaptation to Ireland, and how this is leveraged into calls to action.

In order to answer the question of *how* far-right ideology is being adapted to the Irish context, this thesis will examine the discourse of Irish far-right influencers to understand the discursive strategies they employ. It will do this by analysing the content of influencer video data to understand what topics dominate Irish far-right influencer data, and an analysis of the discourse they use to make these topics relevant to Ireland. In doing so, it endeavours to understand the far-right 'playbook' of discursive strategies used to promote this ideology in Ireland, and how this might compare to global trends in far-right discourse.

1.1 Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2 consists of a critical review of the literature on conspiracy theory belief, and how this relates to far-right ideology. It focuses on the social and psychological functions of conspiracy theories and conspiracy theory belief as a spectrum rather than a pathology. It also examines how these processes can interact with Social Identity Theory to create ingroup and outgroup boundaries.

Chapter 3 examines the Irish context. It examines the history of conspiracy theory on the island, and how it was used to intrench ingroup and outgroup boundaries. It also examines the literature on the unique history and trajectory of Irish nationalism and how this has

shaped Irish identity. This provides the national and historical context to examine how far-right influencers leverage this context.

Chapter 4 examines the literature on far-right conspiracy theories throughout time. Due to the evidence that suggest that the Irish far-right is influenced by American rhetoric, this chapter focuses on the history of far-right conspiracy theory in America, and how far-right groups have relied on conspiracy theory in the past. It gives an overview of dominant conspiracy theories, notable far-right movements in America, and factors that have contributed to the proliferation of far-right conspiracy theories throughout history.

Chapter 5 covers the role of far-right influencers in the far-right ecosystem. It draws on literature from the communications field to understand the role of influencers on social media and their role as opinion leaders. It also examines the ways in which influencers engage in political discourse, and the ramifications of this.

Chapter 6 examines literature on the far-right 'playbook' or the individual discursive strategies far-right movements have used in the past. It examines how nationalism has been constructed in other far-right movements, the role of accelerationism, and ways in which other far-right movements 'soften' or downplay the extreme tenets of their ideology.

Chapter 7 discusses the methodology and method of the project. It covers research aims and design, the data and influencers used in this project, and methods. It describes the content analysis approach as well as the critical discourse analysis approach, which incorporates political discourse analysis and discourse historical analysis.

Chapter 8 presents the results of the content analysis. It discusses influencers coverage of conspiracy theory rhetoric, anti-establishment sentiment, how they attempt to contextualise Ireland within this ideology, prejudice, how they position themselves within the far-right influencer network, and activism.

Chapter 9 presents the results of the discourse analysis, focusing on how influencers use language through a discourse historical approach such as temporalisation, spatialisation, and problematisation. Expanding on the content analysis findings, it examines the discursive strategies influencers use to adapt this ideology to the Irish context and construct calls to action.

Chapter 10 presents the results of the discourse analysis using the broader critical discourse analysis and political discourse analysis lens to examine how these discursive strategies come together to form a far-right 'playbook' or a repertoire of discursive strategies that evoke emotion and necessitate action.

Chapter 11 is the discussion of the novelty and impact of this far-right 'playbook' with regards to the existing literature. It discusses these discursive strategies as steps in the far-right playbook, and discusses the trajectory and next steps of the research.

Chapter 12 concludes the thesis. It summarises findings of this project, situating it within the evolving landscape of the far-right in Ireland (and globally). It discusses the significance of the playbook as a research tool and the impact of these discursive strategies through the lens of Social Identity Theory and calls to action.

Chapter 2: A critical review of social & psychological functions of conspiracy theories

2.1 Introduction

Though conspiracy theory is not exclusive to far-right movements, it has become a prominent aspect of far-right content and discourse. Conspiracy theories and far-right groups have a historically reciprocal relationship, mutually enforcing one another (Barkun, 2003; Uscinski & Parent, 2014). For the purpose of this thesis, conspiracy theory will be examined not just as a characteristic of far-right discourse, but as a discursive tool.

Conspiracy theories can be seen as the connective tissue of disparate far-right groups online. Conspiracy theory hinges on a sense of threat needed to promote ingroup solidarity, and online groups with shared values and identities provide the sort of 'echo chamber' that conspiracy theories need to flourish (Barkun, 2003; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). The online far-right ecosystem can be conceptualised as different levels from mainstream social media platforms (Facebook, X, YouTube) to fringe sites and forums, to individual influencer accounts (Baele et al., 2020). Over time, the far-right content online has grown to encompass several adjacent ideological and conspiracy communities and infiltrated other online niches (Marwick et al., 2022; Zannettou et al., 2017).

For instance, anti-vax parenting pages on Facebook and other mainstream forums have become a node of convergence for conspiracy rhetoric and far-right ideology (Restrepo et al., 2021). These communities were borne out of the longstanding anti-vax conspiracy theory that childhood vaccines such as for measles, mumps, etc. caused autism or developmental disorders (Jolley & Douglas, 2014). In Ireland, many of these online groups saw an uptick in membership when the pandemic happened and the COVID-19 vaccine was rolled out (ISD, 2021). These communities cultivate a scepticism of institutions, a distrust of

science and experts, and a strong emphasis on parents' rights and 'protecting children' (Bradshaw et al., 2021). Additionally, the encouragement to 'do your own research' in many of these groups promotes sharing and participatory culture across both fringe and mainstream sites (Allington et al., 2021; Staender et al., 2021). During the pandemic, far-right influencers deliberately positioned themselves in these types of parenting groups in order to recruit parents on the fence and reach those using a 'soft entry' to far-right ideology (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2022; Bracewell, 2021; Dickinson, 2020).

This goes to show that online far-right groups are abundant and diverse, often linked together more by a nebulous web of conspiracy rhetoric than any formal structure (Marwick et al., 2022; Schulze et al., 2022). The adaption of memes and visuals by many of these groups demonstrate that this ideology can cross borders even when there are language barriers, creating a truly transnational environment (Doerr, 2017). Threads of conspiracy rhetoric like the idea of covert elite control can be found in gaming forums, parenting communities, alternative health accounts, and other online communities that do not appear to be explicitly far-right on the surface (Baker, 2022; Miller-Idriss, 2020; Kaufman, 2023). In this way, they are often a powerful tool for recruitment – they provide that soft entry to those searching out specific communities, while disguising the more extreme ideology that underpins these sentiments (Marwick et al., 2022; Walther & McCoy, 2021).

While the influencers in this study may dance the line of extremism with their commentary (some of their calls to action tread the line of incitement to hatred, which would be criminal), the frameworks of radicalisation and extremism do not capture the complexity nor the nuance of their discourse. The issue of political violence is relevant and linked to the provocation of some online influencers, but this project focuses on understanding the social identity and meaning-making processes adopted by influencers which are not adequately

addressed by the extremism or political violence literature (Booth et al., 2024; Rothut et al., 2023).

Influencers, such as the ones in this project, rely on conspiracy theories as a *tool* because they not only are a recruitment strategy, but are the glue between networks (Barkun, 2003; Butter & Knight, 2020). By examining the underlying messages of these conspiracies and the way they use them to construct ingroup (national) identity gives insight into the social, meaning-making processes of far-right influencer content (Douglas et al., 2017; Jolley et al., 2018). Whether the influencers *believe* the conspiracy theories they espouse, for the purpose of this thesis, is obsolete. Instead, it examines how these influencers use them as discursive tools to legitimise grievances. The conspiracy theories and ideology underpinning this content is extremist in nature.[3] This is evident by the body of research surrounding them and historical trajectory of these narratives. Many have been referenced in terrorist manifestos, or at least cited as inspiration for contentious action (Bleakley, 2021; Gardell, 2023; Harwood, 2021). The question in this thesis is not surrounding the uptake or pathways to extremist ideology, but rather the more diffuse, non-linear process of how influencers employ these conspiracy narratives to make sense of the social world. In order to do this, this chapter will examine the social and psychological mechanisms behind conspiracy theory belief, why they are so appealing and so prevalent in the far-right space, and who they appeal to – from 'normal' conspiracy belief to its extreme manifestations.

In 2021, a QAnon-related Irish Telegram groups gained several hundred followers in a matter of hours (Fattibene et al., 2024b). At first, it was surprising that an American

[3] Specifically, conspiracy theories such as The Great Replacement and QAnon (which will be discussed in chapter 4) have exclusionary and anti-democratic tropes at the core of the narrative. The Great Replacement theory has been referenced in the manifestos of Anders Breivik and Brendon Tarrant (Gardell, 2023; Harwood, 2021), and QAnon is widely believed to be a motivator for participants in the January 6th Capitol attack and at least one shooting (Bleakley, 2021).

conspiracy theory could gain such purchase in Ireland, which operates with a very different political system. As told by an anonymous poster who goes by 'Q', some of the most salacious claims of the conspiracy canon involve ritual sacrifice of children to harvest 'adrenochrome,' a life-giving substance alleged to be used by a variety of Democratic politicians and Hollywood celebrities. At its core, QAnon builds a nonsensical world where Donald Trump is the saviour, secretly fighting to free American children from the clutches of this covert trafficking ring (Bleakley, 2021). Why members of the Irish public would subscribe to such a theory, especially one lauding a politician that does not even operate within the jurisdiction, was unknown. However, the tenets of this particular conspiracy theory are not new nor does belief in them have much to do with logic. Instead, belief in these extreme far-right conspiracies have more to do with emotion and the identity salience functions they perform (Douglas et al., 2017).

While the focus of much far-right research views conspiracy theory as a central tenet of radicalisation, this only captures a factor of the overall far-right process that is taking place in Ireland and elsewhere (Marwick et al., 2022; Schulze et al., 2022). With the rise of violent action linked to conspiracy theory narratives, especially The Great Replacement theory,[4] there has been a growing focus on the radicalisation and 'antidemocratic' potential of these conspiracies, as well as how closely conspiracy theory belief can be linked to violent action (Bischof, 2025; Emberland, 2020; Rottweiler & Gill, 2020). Marwick et al.'s (2022) review of online radicalisation of the far-right concluded that conspiracy theories alone do not act as radicalisation mobilisers, but should be seen as embedded within a broader ideological sphere.

[4] see chapter 4, a white supremacist conspiracy theory created by Renaud Camus that claims that political elites are orchestrating and benefitting from the displacement or *re*placement of white Westerners with non-white migrants (Camus, 2012)

While the framework of extremism and radicalisation is routinely applied to the case of the far-right online (Marwick et al., 2022), the reality is that belief in conspiracy theory is quite common – the majority of people will report in believing in some level of government secrecy and corruption, orchestrated attacks, and hidden agendas (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). It must be noted that throughout history, conspiracy has featured prominently at one time or another (Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Conspiracy theory belief is better seen as a spectrum than a binary, and in the context of Ireland, much of this conspiracy occurred during the fight for independence – on both sides, and belief in conspiracy theory therefore was intertwined for the overall ideological and identity stance of the construction of the ethnic nation of Ireland (Leeson, 2021). This will be discussed further in chapter 3.

However, there is a difference from a belief in government cover-ups and buying into conspiracies such as QAnon - this is an issue of both scale and commitment (Starcevic & Brakoulias, 2021). The difference is that far-right conspiracies like QAnon are inherently exclusionary in nature and promote a worldview in which ingroup identity is threatened (Belton et al., 2025). QAnon has already been tied to not only the U.S. Capitol riot on January 6th, but also at least one shooting (Bleakley, 2021). Similarly, other far-right conspiracy theories like The Great Replacement have been referenced in the manifestos of individuals who have perpetrated violent terrorist attacks (Rose, 2022).

While conspiracy theory belief should be viewed as a spectrum and of beliefs and not all are extreme, it often becomes extremist when the ingroup is constructed as under existential threat. In such instances, action is required to defend a particular group (van Prooijen, 2024). This is the space far-right influencers inhabit – the fine line between promoting the broad canon of conspiracy theory and constructing an existential threat against their adherents which only action can prevent. Research has found that political influencers on Telegram seem to be aware of the legal ramifications of promoting violence, which can be

observed in their careful wording of promoting *action*, often stopping short of explicitly advocating for violence (Belton et al., 2025; Rothut et al., 2023). As mentioned, conspiracy theory belief is a spectrum. Although there has been psychological literature that represents all belief in conspiracy theories as delusional and even pathological (Hofstadter, 1965; Teovanoic et al., 2021), belief in some form of conspiracy is actually quite common (Marques et al., 2022; van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018). Even though conspiracy theories have shown to be a detriment to society and intergroup relations, there is evidence that conspiracy theory beliefs fulfil a variety of important psychological and social needs including making sense of uncertainty, system justification, providing coalitional cues, and affirming identity (Jolley et al., 2018; Marques et al., 2022; Mus et al., 2022; van Prooijen et al., 2022).

These functions are important to consider when examining the uptake, spread, and impact of conspiracy theories. It is also important to consider this research given the increasing role of interventions based on 'debunking' conspiracy theories or inoculation theory – a term borrowed from epidemiology that refers to exposing people to a weakened counterargument to make them more resistant to greater persuasion later on (Compton, 2025; Lewandowsky & van der Linden, 2021; McGuire, 1961). These solutions focus on logic and persuasion, but ignore the reality that logic has very little to do with the process and the psychosocial needs that conspiracy theories fulfil. This chapter will examine these psychosocial needs and then consider the state of conspiracy theory research in a time of far-right globalisation to understand where Irish far-right influencers fit into this context.

2.2 The legacy of Hofstaders' (1965) 'paranoid style'

The body of literature on conspiracy theories stretches as far back as the 1960s, especially in the United States where conspiracy theories are seen as a political focal point in

different eras of history (Cohn, 1967; Melley, 2000; Uscinski & Parent, 2014). Although Europe and Ireland specifically have their own history of conspiracy theory use (which will be discussed in later chapters), much of the conspiracy theory research focuses on American political rhetoric since the formation of the state, which is still relevant in this case due to the high degree of contagion between contexts and the tendency for conspiracy theory rhetoric in Ireland to have a western gaze (Fattibene et al., 2024a). The concept of conspiracy theory *contagion* is especially relevant. Contagion refers to the process by which conspiracy theory rhetoric and its related ideology tend to spread across jurisdictions through informational cascades, group dynamics, and emotional appeal (Douglas et al., 2018; Sunstein & Vermeule, 2009). Sunstein & Vermeule (2009) argue that networked environments (like social media) aid the spread of conspiracy theory through informational and reputational cascades, in which a belief becomes more compelling the more widely it is believed within a certain group, especially if it affords the believer an opportunity to align themselves with that ingroup. Similarly, Douglas et al. (2018) point to the emotional appeal and charge of these conspiracy theories, which makes them more compelling in media algorithms that reward content with a strong emotional message (Donovan & Boyd, 2019). Though this effect has been present since before the advent of social media, the internet has streamlined this contagion process (Uscinski, 2018a). In this sense, while much of the ideology embedded in these theories advocates for strong nationalist borders, the nature of the conspiracy theories themselves is borderless and has become a pervasive fixture across social media, regardless of country (Barkun, 2003; Mudde, 2019). It is suggested that due to this contagion and the globalisation of conspiracy theories, conspiracy theory research in other jurisdictions is still equally valuable, if not in terms of the specific national context, certainly in terms of its emotional and nation-building effect (Imhoff, 2022; Mudde, 2019).

Looking to America, Dafaure (2020) lists examples as far back as the Know Nothing movement[5] to McCarthyism[6] to the more recent birtherism movement. Even in Ireland, there was broad support for McCarthyism, mobilising an anti-communist sentiment that was seen as linked to Catholicism, especially since McCarthy himself came from an Irish Catholic background (Madden, 2017). As Dafaure (2020) writes, "there...appears to be a long-lasting American tradition of othering intertwined with such paranoid mentalities" especially in the age of 'alternative facts' and social media (p. 15).

Keeping with the language of paranoid mentalities, the language of many contemporary scholarly works on conspiracy theories and the people who believe in them are influenced by Richard Hofstadter's (1965) paper: "The paranoid style in American politics." Hofstadter (1965) alleged that conspiracy theories were logically flawed and largely ideological, and people who believe in them suffer from an irrational case of paranoid extremism. Ventsel (2016) points out that several of Hofstadter's contemporaries also saw conspiracy theories as pathological and an extremist and paranoid style of logic, including Karl Popper. Ventsel (2016) also argues that these scholars treated the spectrum of conspiracy theories and their potential to create panic in a 'too homogenous manner'. This can indeed be observed in Ireland, where media coverage of far-right conspiracy shifted from treating it as a laughable fringe mentality to fearmongering over its growth within the population within a relatively short period of time (Hennessy, 2017; Gallagher, 2020). The impact of this mentality is further polarisation, heightened fear, and – within the research realm – a lack of understanding of how this phenomenon fits into the greater context of mobilisation (Ebner, 2020). Not all conspiracy belief results in social consequence, but some

[5] a nativist political party from the 1850s that held conspiracy theories against Catholic immigrants

[6] Refers to a period in the 1950s, named after Senator Joseph McCarthy who spearheaded an anti-communist campaign rife with suspicion and targeting of alleged 'communists' in public positions

will, especially when they are promoted within these highly affective, enticing far-right ecosystems that may ultimately heighten the stakes so much that they encourage action. Although this process has been at play since far before the advent of social media, the introduction of social media and its affordances for community building and information sharing has changed the method and rate of this process (Alshaabi, 2021; Cinelli et al., 2020). In other words, the use of conspiracy theories as a 'tool' to promote division and fan the flames of extremism is not new, but the channels used and the velocity of this uptake has changed.

However, when all conspiracy theories are treated the same, it is difficult to understand the processes at play. Not all conspiracy theories lead to extremism, and it is often difficult to establish which have the potential to metastasise into extreme, political supra-conspiracy (Schrader, 2024; van Prooijen, 2018). The focus instead remains on the process of conspiracy theories as discursive tools to construct identity and stoke ingroup threat.

2.3 Pathologising conspiracy theorists

Following Hofstadter's (1965) legacy, contemporary scholars in the field of conspiracy theory research are still inclined to label conspiracy theory adherents as irrational, pathological, or paranoid. Significant elements of the psychological literature on belief in conspiracy theories frame it as a flaw in critical thinking or a judgmental error (Sanchez & Dunning, 2020). Other researchers place conspiracy theory beliefs under the umbrella of 'irrational' beliefs along with things such as paranormal or pseudo-scientific beliefs (Teovanoic et al., 2021). However, framing conspiracy theory belief as purely pathological or an error in cognition ignores the importance of the meaning-making and identity-affirming functions that conspiracy theories play, even when they result in social consequence (Douglas et al., 2017; Douglas et al., 2018).

As mentioned, historical and psychological research has demonstrated that belief in conspiracy theories is actually quite common (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017). Although Hofstadter (1965) and other authors of psychological work have perpetuated the idea that belief in conspiracy theories is pathological, a large percentage of people believe in some form of conspiracy theory to some degree (van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018; Marques et al. 2022). Conspiracy theory belief is not reserved for the fringes or a percentage of the population who lack critical thinking skills – conspiracy theory belief prevails because it serves important psychological and social functions like making sense of uncertainty and bolstering self-concept by providing a cohesive identity (Marques et al., 2022).

As Kesner & Horácek (2022) emphasise, communities around the world are being faced with a variety of threats – economic, socio-political, and environmental, which has helped cultivate a climate of polarisation, radicalisation, and extremism across much of the world. Whether these perceived threats are more significant than in the past is not the issue, it is rather the *perception* of the threat that is the concern. Dominant threats, in whatever form they emerge, form the basis of much of the conspiracy theory rhetoric in current times (van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018; Zeng et al., 2024). These stressors can give rise to a host of dysfunctional behaviours, and even result in increased cognitive inflexibility, as the authors claim. This kind of inflexibility can result in the development of rigid beliefs, and although this does not necessarily immediately lead to 'deviant' behaviour or psychopathology, it has consequences, including the tendency to adhere to conspiracy beliefs and seek affinity or identification with a likeminded community. Conspiracy theories that promote strict ingroup and outgroup identity roles and feature prominently in the affective echo chambers of the far-right certainly have the ability to manipulate adherents by providing a conspiratorial worldview that legitimises grievances, which can (at least for a minority) escalate into an extremist discourse that encourages action (Miller-Idriss, 2020).

2.4 Meaning-making needs

2.4.1 Making sense of uncertainty

One of the most important functions of conspiracy theories is that they help alleviate feelings of uncertainty by ascribing order to complex events (Marques et al., 2022). Uncertainty and rapid change can be significant stressors which cause psychological distress to some individuals (Amanzio et al., 2020). During times marked by these kinds of stressors, conspiracy theories serve an important function. Instead of having to cope with the uncertainty and complexity of events, conspiracy theories serve as 'cognitive shortcuts' that reassure believers that everything is happening for a greater purpose (Singh-Grewal, 2016).

This function of conspiracy theories has been compared to the function of religious beliefs. Franks et al.'s (2013) analysis shows that conspiracy theories have a quasi-religious form and function in the sense that they use definitive explanations to make sense of worldview-threatening events, directing blame onto specific culprits, and alleviating feelings of existential anxiety. Additionally, van Prooijen & van Vugt (2018) use the framework of agency detection to understand the similarities between conspiracy theories and religious beliefs. An overactive sense of agency detection may detect connections between events when none exist, or that hidden forces are controlling these events. These beliefs help lessen anxiety around fear of the unknown (van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018). Especially when one's worldview is threatened, conspiracy theories reassure people that their sense of the world is correct (Reinhard et al., 2022).

Scholars such as O'Brien (2023) have pointed to modern far-right conspiracy theories like QAnon as its own type of moral panic. In line with Cohen's (1972) moral panic framework, the shadowy elites and enemies implicated by these conspiracy theories become the 'folk devils' posing a perceived threat that results in moral outrage. In this sense, conspiracy theories transform ambiguous anxiety into outrage towards a specific enemy or

wrong-doer. In these ways, conspiracy theories can be seen as responses to existential anxieties and threats to perceived societal values.

2.4.2 System justification and sense-making in the social world

In addition to allowing people to make sense of complex and unknowable events, conspiracy theories may also bolster trust in social systems and institutions during times of upheaval, though it seems paradoxical. Even though conspiracy theories are notorious for breeding mistrust in institutions, some research has pointed to the theory that they are actually an important form of system justification. Jolley et al. (2018) define system justification as a theory that suggests people need to feel positively about the social systems they are a part of, which "[causes] people to defend, bolster, or rationalise the status quo, even at the expense of their own interests" (p. 466). When crises occur and the validity of our systems are threatened (a poor governmental response to a national crisis, demographic change, etc.) conspiracy theories that blame corrupt and covert outside forces actually serve to prevent our societal systems from being scrutinised. Therefore, conspiracy theories perform an important function of allowing individuals to believe they live in a just world with valid systems instead of having to question the faults of the system (Jolley et al., 2018).

This has interesting implications when it comes to far-right tenets of white supremacy and ethnonationalism. While many far-right movements are populist in nature and resulting conspiracy theories revolve around being anti-elite and anti-government, a strong sense of 'nationhood' is at the centre of this ideology (Mudde, 2004). By assigning blame to the individuals at the higher echelons of government, it may actually protect the foundation of the nation and the ideology of nationalism. Instead of acknowledging fundamental problems with the nation as an entity, blame is instead deflected on elites and government officials who can be 'fixed' by replacing them (Jolley et al., 2018). This is also apparent in the more

xenophobic conspiracy narratives central to far-right movements. If the finger is constantly being pointed to non-native, non-white 'outsiders' who are responsible for importing social ills into the nation, then focus is directed outside of the social ills that already persist inside the nation, perpetuated by nationals. Using Social Identity Theory (SIT) as a theoretical lens, the following section expands on how conspiracy theories bolster ingroup and outgroup categorisation and membership (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

2.4.3 Using extremist beliefs to construct the ingroup

Several branches of sociology and psychology, primarily evolutionary psychology, have identified the potential coalitional functions of conspiracy theories, especially when it comes to constructing the ingroup and the outgroup. Perhaps the most comprehensive theory of which is Social Identity Theory (SIT) (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which details the process by which people construct ingroups and outgroups and how membership with a social group is critical to developing and maintaining one's self-concept. In terms of far-right conspiracy theories, this is particularly relevant due to their tendency to bolster existing ingroups and outgroups (white vs. Non-white, national vs. Immigrant, for example), and even results in far-right conspiracy theory echo chambers becoming their own kinds of social groups in and of themselves.

Although not all conspiracy theories can be considered *extreme* in that they are linked to exclusionary far-right ideology, certain conspiracy theories that have been used to endorse violent calls to action (like The Great Replacement or QAnon) serve as social signifier to other ingroup members. Belief in conspiracy theories is still often seen as fringe and marginalised, so voicing these beliefs can delineate between the 'outgroup', comprised of people who do not accept these beliefs and the 'ingroup' who also endorses them. Mus et al. (2022) describe how this relates to the evolutionary 'alliance detection system' in which the

best coalitional cues are ones that strongly indicate allegiance to one belief system or group and condemn another. Most conspiracy theory rhetoric echoes this kind of Manichean discourse, providing a very strong coalitional cue to other believers in conspiracy theories (van Prooijen, 2018).

Voicing conspiracy theories does not often come without significant social risk. Mus et al. (2022) explain that the best coalitional cues are ones that have 'irreversible reputational costs', which can lead an individual to be rejected by other social groups, thereby pledging ultimate loyalty to the ingroup. Using this framework, conspiracy theory belief can create strong social bonds due to perceived loyalty and perceived marginalisation.

Once these coalitional cues have been used to establish the 'ingroup' of conspiracy theory believers, these communities use affective messaging to build an echo chamber of belief. Conspiracy theory communities have been likened to 'fandoms' due to their ability to foster community engagement and affective activation (Reinhard et al., 2022). The communication styles of conspiracy theory communities, especially those on messaging platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram, Signal, etc. create a sense of insularity and safety on one hand, but also rely on toxic affective messaging and phatic language to create an echo chamber (Marwick & Lewis, 2017). Phatic language is used to describe discourse that is primarily used for social means rather than sharing new information. It promotes social cohesion by promoting group belonging and bolstering a sense of community. This combined with the nature of toxic affective messaging - a communication strategy used to invoke strong negative feelings - suggests that while these conspiracy theory communities serve a function of sharing new theories and conspiratorial content, they also serve as social cohesion by binding members together with this kind of language and messaging (Johns & Cheong, 2021 Reinhard et al. 2022).

Research has demonstrated that these conspiracy theory communities form online through this process of ingroup coalitional signalling and the affordances of social media platform dynamics (Forberg, 2021; O'Callaghan et al., 2015; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017; Uscinski, 2018b). Though far-right groups throughout history have managed to network and disseminate ideas within communities prior to the internet,[7] social media platforms have the added advantage of fast and widespread dissemination and the ability to seek out group membership that might not be readily available in one's immediate social context (Marwick et al., 2022; Youngblood, 2020). Additionally, the phenomenon of meme culture, algorithmic echo chambers, and group polarisation create stronger, more enduring social ties that cement group membership (Doerr, 2017; Forberg, 2021; Kelly, 2023; O'Callaghan et al., 2015).

Conspiracy theory communities support the normalisation of strong negative emotions and sentiments of fear, anger, and suspicion are the currency of most groups (Phillips & Milner, 2023; Uscinski, 2018a). By demonstrating such strong coalitional cues and providing a space where those with extremist beliefs are accepted into the 'ingroup' of conspiracy theorists, these groups and spaces meet the social needs of their members. Far-right conspiracy theory ecosystems benefit from this process by invoking such strong ingroup identities and coalitional cues. Additionally, these spaces prey on the language of existential threat to the ingroup as some form of apocalyptic event to trigger reactions in other members, which can justify the need to 'accelerate' the oncoming social collapse in order to achieve true ingroup domination (Amman & Meloy, 2021; Miller-Idriss, 2020).

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[7] See, for instance, Cohn's (1967) *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* for discussion of the dissemination of the pamphlet *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which was translated and disseminated internationally and Mulloy's (2014) *The World of the John Birch Society: Conspiracy, Conservatism, and the Cold War* which chronicles the formation and dissemination strategies of the socially conservative, conspiracy-driven John Birch Society in the 1950s onwards.

2.4.4 Using extremist beliefs to blame the outgroup

In addition to performing coalitional and affective functions that establish an ingroup, extreme conspiracy theories also function as a means of scapegoating. Similar to conspiracy theories as a form of system justification, using conspiracy theories to scapegoat 'outsiders' can also deflect blame from one's nation or society, preserving a sense of nationalism or belief in a just world (Jolley et al. 2018; Santing, 2022).

Similar to the idea of system justification on the national level proposed earlier in this chapter, Bertin & Delouvee (2021) use the term 'national narcissists' to describe people who defend the image or honour of their nation by blaming poor outcomes or social ills on 'malevolent outgroups'. This outcome is most likely when there is a heightened sense of threat towards the national ingroup (Bertin & Delouvee, 2021).

Importantly, some studies show that conspiracy theories that lay blame on an outgroup are more likely to be adopted by people who already possess negative beliefs about that outgroup. For example, Jardina & Traugott (2019) demonstrated that white Americans who had negative attitudes towards black Americans were more likely to believe in the 'birtherism' conspiracy that President Barack Obama was born in a foreign country and ineligible to become President. This conspiracy theory can be seen as a response as a reaction and rejection of the first black president of the United States, someone seen as belonging to an 'outgroup' by white supremacists. Those who had strong negative reactions to this clung to the contrived and false claims that there was a conspiratorial, justifiable reason why he was ineligible to be president that was tied to, but not directly a result of his race. Notably, this was one of Donald Trump's first successful bids for mainstream, right-wing political recognition – a figure that arguably understands how to exploit the far-right conspiracy process for personal gain. The authors explain the adoption of these conspiratorial beliefs as an attempt to protect group attitudes even when they are threatened (Jardina & Traugott, 2019). Relating back to SIT and van Prooijen's (2018) work, this can be seen as an example

of the reaction to the threat of ingroup dominance. When the ingroup is threatened or the outgroup attains a position of power or recognition, identity becomes particularly salient and can increase conspiracy theory belief by offering a justification for maintaining ingroup dominance (van Prooijen, 2018).

This is similar to Michael Kimmel's (2013) concept of *aggrieved entitlement*, defined in the book *Angry White Men: American Masculinity at the End of an Era* as the sense of entitlement to privilege and success as part of the national 'ingroup,' and the feelings of dispossession and grievance when this is not realised. Though Kimmel (2013) uses this concept to study white men in America, especially in the wake of Trump's presidential campaign, this frame can also be applied to this process of ingroup cohesion and outgroup marginalisation. This is an example of how far-right ethnonationalist ideology becomes linked to conspiracy theory in order to legitimise grievances. By promoting conspiracy theories like the Great Replacement theory in which white Westerners are being 'replaced,' it justifies negative reactions to immigration and changing demographics (Ekman, 2022; Obaidi et al., 2021). Threats to white dominance often result in heightened defensiveness and ingroup cohesion as well as antagonism towards the outgroup (Craig & Richeson, 2014; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this sense, conspiracy theories allow people to avoid questioning the status quo and mitigate senses of threat to the ingroup. Not only is it usually more straightforward to lay blame for social problems on a specific group of individuals than abstract forces at large, it also retains the legitimacy for the structure of society and its innate fairness instead of forcing individuals to face flaws in the system (Jolley et al., 2018).

As Jolley et al. (2018) report:

> "Conspiracy theories, to be sure, cast doubt on the motives and legitimacy of people in authority positions. They draw attention to some of the most tragic and worrisome events of modern life. However, they may often do

so in a way that appears to divert people from questioning inherent limitations of their society" (p. 475).

Although conspiracy theories breed distrust of institutions, governments, and authority figures, they often do so in a way that attributes blame to a designated band of wrongdoers, not acknowledging that more nebulous and abstract concepts play a role in societal dysfunction. Threats to the dominant ingroup will often be met with conspiracy theories and veiled explanations for social problems that blame the outgroup or a corrupt faction of elites, instead of directing some of the blame towards national systems or structures that benefit the ingroup (Bertin & Delouvee, 2021).

This feeds into a greater cycle that erodes trust in institutions as well as trust between groups. Institutions must provide individuals with a sense of safety as well as setting group norms and values (Hartz et al., 2025). When the trust and legitimacy of these institutions is compromised, these needs are not fulfilled, resulting in social dysfunction. It can result in reduced trust between strangers, increased prejudice, intergroup conflict, polarisation, and extremism (van Prooijen et al., 2022). When wielded by activists and extremists, the consequences can be exploited by heightening the existential threat against the ingroup and advocating action (Miller-Idriss, 2020).

The current state of conspiracy theory research examines the uptake of these theories, but pays less attention to how conspiracy theories are exploited and used as tools for necessitating action. Douglas et al.'s (2018) comprehensive work on conspiracy theories found that the majority of research has focused on the *causes* and factors influencing uptake than on the consequences of conspiracy theory belief as a whole. They recommend future research into how conspiracy theory interacts with ideology to influence social and political behaviour. Emergent research has demonstrated the potential for conspiracy theories to be used as mobilising tools for coalitional goals, but to date, the research looking at conspiracy

theories as a discursive tool is comparatively underdeveloped (Demata et al., 2022; Marie & Petersen, 2022; Tafi et al., 2024).

Returning to the example of the uptake of QAnon-related conspiracy theories in Ireland, it is one thing to understand the mechanics of contagion and the consequences of these beliefs, but another to understand how these theories are used discursively to achieve the goals of local far-right agitators. The next section will look broadly at the legacy of conspiracy theory research, and the blind spots with which many modern approaches examine conspiracy theory within the far-right.

2.5 Conclusion

Conspiracy theories serve a wide array of social and psychological functions from providing coalitional cues to scapegoating. There appears to be many factors that motivate belief in conspiracy theories, especially considering the majority of people believe in some form of conspiracy.

Conspiracy theory belief should be treated as a spectrum that acknowledges more normative beliefs as well as extreme forms that result in activism. Efforts to simplify the complex social forces and mechanisms underpinning adherence to conspiracy theories is counterproductive to understanding this process. Breaking away from the legacy of describing conspiracy theories in terms of paranoid psychopathology, scholars in this field have the responsibility of acknowledging the prevalence and diversity of conspiracy theory beliefs and the ways in which these beliefs are sometimes ‘normal’ and non-delusional, while also acknowledging the immense cost of conspiracy theory belief on our society is necessary.

In terms of far-right influencers, there is evidence that these conspiracy theories, like QAnon, are used to radicalise and strengthen ingroup membership, regardless of jurisdiction (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Phillips & Milner, 2023; Reinhard et al., 2022). Far-right conspiracy

theories are not contagious because they possess some indisputable logic, but because they fulfil affective and social needs in those who participate in them. Therefore, solutions aimed at enhancing critical thinking skills or debunking conspiracies before they take root only tackle a part of the problem; they do not address the psychological and social needs they fulfil that make them so difficult to disentangle from. However, if far-right conspiracy theories are approached as discursive tools for these aims, it allows a more comprehensive picture of how the far-right discursive process operates

Chapter 3: The Irish context: Irish nationalism, identity, and the history of conspiracy theories in Ireland

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter examined the continuum of conspiracy theory belief and the social and psychological needs met by such conspiracy theories, regardless of context. However, context still plays a role in the contagion and uptake of these extreme ideological and conspiracy theory beliefs – especially when it comes to the construction of nationalism in each context. To further understand how far-right ideology and conspiracy is exploited within the Irish context, it is important to consider the evolution of Irish nationalism and conspiracy theories on the island (Malešević, 2021; Mudde, 2019).

Although much of the ideology and conspiracy theory narrative among the Irish far-right today seems to be imported from America and the rest of Europe (Fattibene et al., 2024a), the reality is that some degree of far-right ideology is already mainstreamed in Irish politics (McDonnell, 2008). Ireland's revolutionary context provides a prime opportunity to adapt the rhetoric of other conspiracy theories onto the Irish context, as Ireland already has its own brand of nationalism that serves to reinforce ingroup and outgroup boundaries (Barkun, 2003; McDonnell, 2008).

Before examining the adoption and adaptation of far-right conspiracies in an Irish context, it is important to situate these conspiracy theories within the broader history of Irish nationalism, national identity, and conspiracy rhetoric. Especially due to the island of Ireland's history with colonialism and emigration, concepts of nationalism and ethno-nationalism can differ from other contexts.

This is important to consider when looking at the application of any far-right conspiracy theory, many of which contain the threads of nationalist discourse (Bergmann,

2018; Nightingale et al. 2021). Ireland's history with nationalism may impact how this aspect of far-right conspiracy theory is adapted to fit an Irish audience. Where the imagined nation forms the ingroup under threat, discursive construction of the ideology and conspiracy at hand must draw from collective and historic concept of the nation in order to make this argument resonant (Anderson, 1983; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Wodak, 2015).

The concept and construction of a national 'Irish' identity dates far before the creation of the state. In White's (2016) paper on teaching Irish identity, the author signposts events relevant to shaping the national identity of Ireland that reach as far back as the Viking raids and the introduction of Christianity. Additionally, British imperialism and its resulting plantation migration served (and continues to serve) as a uniting, collective trauma for the Irish population (Coakley, 2012; Lim, 2021). The British government's involvement and mismanagement of The Great Famine of 1845-1852, which resulted in the death of approximately one million people and the emigration of one million more permanently altered the demographic and cultural landscape (Boyle & Ó Gráda, 1986). This has been described as a 'collective trauma' in which member of the group are subject to life-altering circumstances that leaves a stain on the identity, often one that persists and manifests throughout future generations (Alexander et al., 2004). It also made ingroup and outgroup politics highly relevant, as native Irish people were oppressed and marginalised under colonial rule (Leeson, 2021; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

In particular, Catholicism became a symbolic marker for cultural identity and provided much of the structure for Irish life for subsequent generations (Coakley, 2011; Crotty, 2006). In the colonial and early post-colonial eras, Catholicism fulfilled an important organisational and self-categorisation role in that it delineated between Irish Catholic and British Protestant identities, and provided most social, healthcare, and educational services across the state (Veldeman, 2004). The Church itself was even seen as symbolic of the

resistance against British oppression (Crotty, 2006). However, as Inglis (1998) details, the Church began to lose its grasp on the 'morality' of Irish life as early as the mid-eighties with the influence of modernisation. Additionally, widespread sexual and institutional abuse scandals further attenuated the relationship between the Catholic Church and Irish identity (Coakley, 2011; Fuller, 2005; Fuller, 2012; Donnelly, 2015). The 2015 marriage referendum which legalised gay marriage and the 2018 abortion referendum which legalised abortion were seen as the nail in the coffin, so to speak, on the Catholic Church's control on Irish society (Elkink et al., 2020; Pang et al., 2022). However, the notion of 'cultural Catholicism' is still a significant feature of Irish identity and practice, ensuring that Catholicism as an identity marker still has significant purchase amongst those in search of identity markers (Coll, 2015).

Though Catholicism itself has eroded as a singular marker of Irish identity, the tradition of ingroup and outgroup politics (beyond religion) has a long history in Ireland. This, at times, has included conspiracy theory – both real and imagined. Especially during the revolutionary period, conspiracy theories of friendly fire and secret attempts to undermine the movement on both the Irish nationalist and British sides served to entrench ingroup and outgroup boundaries (Hoppen, 1989; Leeson, 2021).

These events paved the way for a shared, collective past and shared belief systems. Like all countries, the unique historical and political context of Ireland has the potential to shape far-right conspiracy rhetoric today including the construction of Irish nationalism, Ireland's relationship with the Church, and the history of conspiracy and corruption. This chapter will examine how these factors interact with Irish identity, and therefore how the collective Irish identity can be leveraged in the meaning-making process of far-right discourse.

3.2 Irish Nationalism

Irish nationalism differs from other types of nationalism and ethnonationalism evident in other countries, insomuch that it is influenced by a range of factors unique to the context. Ethnonationalism is broadly defined as the desire for the nation's territorial boundaries to coincide with a particular ethnic group or nation (Hayes & Nagle, 2016; Wimmer et al., 2009). While other types of ethnonationalist traditions are concerned with removal of foreign-born persons from the state or restriction on immigration, Irish nationalism is traditionally seen as primarily concerned with the removal of British rule in Ireland and, in some cases, uniting the island of Ireland under Irish rule (Scanlon & Kumar, 2019).

In *Imagined Communities,* Anderson (1983) argues that Irish nationalism largely grew out of a resistance to colonialism and a desire for political sovereignty and cultural nationalism. While most ethnonationalist traditions are concerned with maintaining ethnic dominance and preserving ethnic purity, Irish nationalism's primary focus was preserving Irish culture (including language) and attaining an Irish free state. In fact, some strains of Irish nationalism made attempts to appeal to Ulster Protestants, who were overwhelmingly loyal to the British government, and emphasised that Irish nationalism was more concerned with political sovereignty than sectarian division (Townshend, 2013).

Of course, this sentiment was not shared by everyone. However, historians and scholars of contemporary politics broadly agree that Irish nationalism is concerned with preserving Irish culture and Irish language over strict immigration reform and scrutiny of those residing in Ireland but perceived to be without "Irish blood," but this is not to say this sentiment does not exist on the island (Anderson, 1983; Garner, 2007; Galvin, 2006; Townshend, 2013). In fact, even the term "Ireland for the Irish" was used predominately to denote the removal of British rule on the island, not to dog whistle anger towards immigrants

and foreigners, although this term has been adopted by far-right groups in recent years (Scanlon & Kumar, 2018; The National Party, 2022).

That being said, the construction of Irish nationalism (both historically and in the present day), relies on many of the same building blocks of ethnonationalism in other contexts, especially notions of masculinity and the discussion of immigration and emigration. Redmond (2021) argues that some of the seminal written work of the Irish revolutionary period (1912 – 1923) tied the revolutionary spirit to a form of masculinity in a way that is detached from the reality of the Irish public at the time. For instance, Irish nationalist writer Pádraig Pearse described the liberation of the nation as men's work, and that the liberation of Ireland would restore the manhood and masculinity of Irish men (Redmond, 2021). The writing of the time was also concerned with crafting a brand of Irish nationalism that redeemed Irish men and masculinity, including "glorif[ying] Irish Catholic, republican manliness as brave, daring and resilient and emphasis[ing] the physical qualities necessary to fight for independence," (Redmond, 2021, p. 197). Similarly, the decision to emigrate from Ireland was described as weak and emasculating, less honorific than the decision to 'stay and fight' (Redmond, 2021). As Redmond (2021) describes, this was contradictory to the reality of the time that many families still needed at least one member of the family to migrate to support the family.

The issue of emigration and the Irish diaspora was a prominent point in Irish nationalist discourse. Although emigration was seen as a form of cowardice, as Redmond (2021) points out, the issue of how to realistically support oneself and one's family while remaining in Ireland to fight for freedom was not addressed by the writers of the time. The cowardice of emigration was seen as such a detriment to the idea of Irish nationalism that those who had emigrated were described as being not 'real' Irish, or having their Irish identity seen as tainted, or stripped of it altogether (Fischer, 2016).

The Irish diaspora, represented by the estimated 70 million people with Irish ancestry living abroad, has contributed to the construction of Irish identity through its process of fragmentation, exile, and the often-forced separation of one's sense of belonging and the native land (Department of Foreign Affairs, 2017). Waves of emigration, which began pre-independence and continue today, have been addressed by Irish nationalist discourse sometimes as a betrayal and even a British conspiracy. It was believed the rise in emigration in the revolutionary period was a conspiracy by British forces to undermine the Irish independence effort. Cathal Brugha claimed the British government was stimulating emigration from Ireland as they knew they were losing the War of Independence and was quoted as saying:

> "The young men of Ireland must stand fast. To leave their country at this supreme crisis would be nothing less than base desertion in the face of the enemy... There can be no possible excuse for desertion at the present time. The plea of want of work will not do," and claimed that, "There will be plenty of employment for everyone in Ireland in future." (Redmond, 2021, p. 202).

Emigration was looked at as a stain on Irish identity and Irish nationalism by many of Brugha's political and ideological contemporaries, regardless of the conditions that forced many Irish citizens to emigrate. According to Redmond (2021), this represents a disconnect between the political and cultural construction of Irish nationalism and the reality of Irish people at the time.

There is some evidence that the context of emigration from Ireland has impacted attitudes towards immigration to Ireland. Fanning (2013) has argued that Ireland's collective trauma of emigration has created a culture of empathy towards new arrivals in Ireland. Fitzgerald & Lambkin (2008) supports this idea, noting that the recent reversal of Ireland being a 'net sender' country to a 'net receiver' country has influenced the collective identity

of the nation and its diaspora, and has resulted in relatively open attitudes towards immigration. However, both authors acknowledge that the relationship between Ireland and immigration is a nuanced phenomenon not immune to political tensions and social challenges that come with integration. Ireland has only recently become a new destination within the EU, and is receiving immigration from a greater variety of countries than before (Fahey et al., 2019). Ireland began to experience net immigration during the Celtic Tiger period of the late 1990s and early 2000s which included returning Irish emigrants and immigrants from other countries, and with the enlargement of the EU in 2004 (Creighton, et al., 2022).

Though this new wave of immigration declined in 2008 with the onset of the financial crisis, many report that the context of emigration throughout Ireland's history primed the new trend of net immigration to be held in a positive light, especially when it was associated with positive economic conditions in Ireland. (Creighton, et al., 2022; Gusciute et al., 2022). However, the 2004 Citizenship referendum puts this 'open attitude' toward immigration into question. The referendum, which passed with nearly 80% of the popular vote, revoked *jus soli* or birthright citizenship for everyone born on Irish soil, regardless of their parents' nationality. The referendum reflected the growing anxiety about immigration, and the success of political discourses citing 'birth tourism' (Fanning, 2013). This demonstrates, if nothing else, that anxieties around immigration are not new in Ireland, and that these concerns have been successfully mobilised for political change in the past. While Ireland's reaction to immigration, especially as it relates to national identity, is nuanced in response to its history, its history likewise does not make it immune to the kind of anti-immigration tensions seen elsewhere.

Although Ireland's overall position on immigration is relatively positive, certain conditions are observed to have an impact on attitudes towards immigration. One such condition is the perception of economic threat. For instance, immigrant sentiment was more

positive during the Celtic Tiger period than during the 2008 financial crash (Creighton et al., 2022). Gusciute et al. (2022) have also found that year-to-year job losses lead to a decreased acceptance of immigrants. Overall public and political sentiment remains relatively positive towards immigration, especially in light of Ireland's history with emigration, but public opinion is still impacted by economic threat conditions, including the ongoing housing crisis (Social Justice Ireland, 2025).

Notably, Ireland has seen its own proto-fascist movements grow out of the Republican and Irish nationalist movement. Two short-lived movements particularly highlight the convergence between Irish nationalism and the fascism of the 1930s and 40s: The Blueshirts and Ailtirí na hAiséirghe. The Blueshirts lasted only three years, numbering 48,000 at their peak but the movement borrowed both symbolically and ideologically from fascist movements in mainland Europe. Perhaps most distinctly, the donning of the blue shirt and black beret as a de facto uniform which all members were encouraged to wear and gave the movement the veneer of being more organised than it actually was (Cronin, 1995). Whether the Blueshirts were a product of Ireland's turbulent post-civil war politics or a product of European fascism is a point of contention, though the answer appears to be both. While the Blusheshirts did endorse aspects of fascist ideology, they maintained a belief in democracy, and as Cronin (1995) argues, their short tenure in Irish politics and lack of political success makes it difficult to determine if the Blueshirts were indeed fascists in the narrow sense or had potential to become a fascist movement.

Similarly Ailtirí na hAiséirghe or "Architects of the Resurrection" gained prominence around the same time period, reaching its peak in 1945 when candidates from the party won nine seats in local government. Its founder, Gearóid Ó Cuinneagáin, advocated for a Gaelic corporatist state and was aligned with pro-Axis organisations. The party's fusion of totalitarian politics with Catholic moral rule made it appealing to members who wanted to

ensure not only Ireland's sovereignty, but its dominance post-World War II. However, rifts within the party – partly due to Ó Cuinneagáin's extreme views – led to its decline (Douglas, 2012)

Though arguably both movements were ultimately unsuccessful[8] , they demonstrate that Ireland was not wholly immune to fascist movements of the past - and that the current context may be no different.

Ireland's revolutionary history and its diasporic identity have contributed to a brand of nationalism that, on the surface, differs from other forms of ethnonationalism associated with far-right movements, especially regarding Ireland's overall positive stance on immigration. While some sources suggest that it has crafted a kind of collective empathy towards immigrants, it has not undone the protectionist and defensive rhetoric so often embedded in nationalism (Fanning, 2013). However, this positivity only extends so far and is impacted during times of economic hardship. McGinnity & Kingston (2017) found that attitudes became more negative as unemployment rose, but that attitudes improved in geographic areas with a higher proportion of immigrants. Though a large portion of Irish nationalist rhetoric is concerned with creating a separate national identity from Britain, it contains the sort of gendered,[9] idealistic language present in modern populist discourse (Bracewell, 2021).

These are important points to consider when examining the use of collective traumas and national identity by far-right influencers (Volkan, 2001). As Wodak (2015) demonstrates, nationalism is constructed and reproduced for populist aims by selecting collective traumas to

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[8] The Blueshirts were ultimately absorbed into FG, though the 'proto-fascist' ideology largely dissolved with the merge (Cronin, 1995).

[9] see the writings of Pearse for an example, "I hold that before we can do any work, any *men's* work, we must first realise ourselves as men. Whatever comes to Ireland she needs men. And we of this generation are not in any real sense men, for we suffer things that men do not suffer, and we seek to redress grievances by means which men do not employ. We have, for instance, allowed ourselves to be disarmed; and, now that we have the chance of re-arming, we are not seizing it." *The Coming Revolution*, p. 97

support their narrative. Instances like these, where there was a history of ingroup threat (even if it is not purely in the ethnonationalist sense), can be repurposed to drive group division in far-right discourse (Boussalis et al. 2024; De Cesari & Kaya, 2020; Wodak, 2015).

3.3 Religion & The Church in Irish Society

A key consideration in attempting to understand the evolution of Irish society in the 20th century, especially regarding Irish identity, emotionality, and the sense of belonging is the role of the Catholic Church. Since the beginning of the state, Catholicism has played a central role in Irish identity, has dominated Irish politics, the Irish education system, and Irish social norms. Although the influence of the church on ecumenical and social issues has waned since the end of the 20th century (Coakley, 2011), arguably, it continues to dominate Irish life as an identity marker. Coakley (2011) outlines three areas in which religion impacts the day-to-day construction of identity in Ireland: first, its social and organisational role for communities in the form of provision of religious services, community resources, and education, second, its ideological function in providing followers with a set of beliefs and third, its social labelling function and its ability to draw a clear line between ingroup and outgroup. In addition, a Catholic identity is relevant to the historic identities constructed as an important part of Irishness. These include chosen traumas and grievances related to the British treatment of Catholics on the island (White, 2010). Considering the discussion of SIT in the previous chapter, religion functioned to perform many of the social categorisation and self-concept roles that we see in conspiracy theory belief today. In addition to providing social structure to Irish life, it provided clear delineation between the Catholic, nationalism ingroup and the Protestant, oppressive ‘other’. Besides operating as a unifying structure, religious belief provided a narrative to make sense of a complicated and often unjust reality, as well as lent the ingroup an air of moral legitimacy in that their search and adherence to the

truth would be rewarded – notably similar to how conspiracy theory belief functions today (Robertson et al., 2018; Wood & Douglas, 2018).

Historically, Catholicism and Irish nationalism have been closely linked. In the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, religion remains an important marker between communities and contributes to the conceptualisation of a national identity (Burgess, 2018). This especially became the case in the 19th century, when religion became more of a salient marker of Irish ancestry than language, as the use of Irish language decreased due to famine deaths and emigration (Coakley, 2011).

In order to construct a national identity as a post-colonial nation, Irish nationalism borrowed from Catholic doctrine. The construction of an Irish national identity became more pressing after independence as Ireland emerged as a young nation separate to Britain and British identity. This new identity must solidify Ireland's political legitimacy and promote domestic unity within the new nation (O'Mahony & Delanty, 1998). According to Fischer (2016), much of the construction of the Irish nationalist identity borrowed from Catholic teaching and values including purity, chastity, and virtue. Similar to the gendered discourse of masculinity and nationalism during the revolution, Irish women's 'purity' was described as determining the future of the country (Fischer, 2016). This is an allegory still seen within modern far-right rhetoric. Especially with the fearmongering and conspiracy theories surrounding influxes of 'undocumented male migrants' and the threat they pose to native Irish women, the 'purity' of the nation's women is still symbolic for the honour of the nation – but rarely used as a rhetorical trope when it does not affirm far-right ideology (Miller-Idriss, 2020). This has especially been the case when it comes to the symbolism of the pure Irish mother. Ward (1983) documents how Cumann na mBan, the Irish republican women's paramilitary organisation, used the imagery of the Irish mother tending the hearth and the Virgin Mary to emphasise Irish women's purity and role in preservation of culture. This

image appeared again around the 2018 abortion referendum – the pure Irish mother to symbolise the importance of reproduction to Irish nationhood and the importance for Irish women to conform to the role of motherhood (Smyth, 2017).

Though fewer Irish citizens self-report as Catholics, the centrality of Catholicism in Irish culture still has an impact on modern attitudes. While the percentage of the population who reported themselves as Catholic has dropped from a high of 94.9% in 1961 to 77% in 2022, the lowest recorded, it is still one of the most Catholic nations in Western Europe (Central Statistics Office, 2022; Pew Research Center, 2018). As of 2025, 88.3% of primary schools in Ireland are still under Catholic patronage (Oireachtas, 2025).

In some instances, religion can be a more divisive factor than race and ethnicity, with Creighton et al. (2022) indicating Muslim immigrants to Ireland faced more antipathy than Polish and Black immigrants. However, the issue of race and religion is complicated in Ireland, with more recent sub-Saharan African Muslims reporting more discrimination than longstanding Middle Eastern Muslim immigrants (Lynch & Veale, 2015). Furthermore, the issue of class interacts with these factors; survey data demonstrated that attitudes towards immigration are more negative in economically disadvantaged communities and individuals facing financial difficulty were more likely to hold negative views towards migrants (Laurence et al., 2024; McGinnity et al., 2018).

Even though Catholicism and the Church had a strong influence in Irish identity, the number of citizens who identify as Catholic continues to decline. Since the 1970s, constitutional changes such as the right to sale of contraceptives, legality of same-sex marriage, and the removal of the ban on divorce have contributed to a liberalisation of Irish structure and weakening the Church's position in Irish society (Coakley, 2011). The Vatican and Irish Catholic leaders formally opposed both the 2015 same-sex marriage referendum and

the 2018 abortion referendum, yet both passed with the popular vote (Kirchgaessener, 2015; MacDonald, 2018).

A further blow to the centrality of Catholicism and the Church in Irish society is the corruption and controversy that came to light in the early 2000s. The Ryan Report (2009), the Ferns Report (2005), and the Murphy Report (2009) revealed the extent of the Church's corruption to the Irish public, detailing the realities of Magdalene laundries and allegations of physical and sexual abuse of children in the Church's care, as well as attempts to cover up the abuse (Pang et al. 2022).

The political departure from Catholic ideals and the revelation of the Church's crimes and corruption was no doubt damaging to the Church's social and ideological centrality in Irish society, but also attenuated the relationship between the Catholic Church and Irish nationalism. In the early days of the state, Catholicism and Irish nationalism were mutually reinforcing. However, as the relationship between being "Irish" and belonging or relying on the structure of the Church is weakened, the tenets of Irish nationalism must change. As Coakley (2011) asks:

> "If being 'Irish' cannot depend on being a speaker of the ancestral language, and neither implies nor is implied by being a Catholic, on what cultural basis does Irish nationalism rest?" (p. 110).

This is a question that is difficult to answer, yet central to the issue of Irish far-right conspiracy and modern Irish ethnonationalism. Through the lens of SIT, the weakening of this concept may leave some more susceptible to the rhetoric of those who propose a coherent definition of what it means to be an Irish national (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This has the potential to be exploited by Irish far-right influencers, who use this as an opportunity to infiltrate this weak spot with their own definitions of nationalism that veer into the extreme. Anderson (1983) argues that when the idea of national identity is fluid, as it is in times of

crisis, it is more vulnerable to being manipulated to meet political goals. This has been seen in other European countries such as Italy, France, and Spain where destabilising forces such as economic crises, increased immigration, and regional independence movements have contributed to a national identity in a state of flux, which allowed rhetorical space for populist parties to introduce their version of nationalism (Rueda, 2025).

Where the Catholic Church provided a structure and identity to Ireland as a young country, its hold on national identity has weakened as Ireland has become increasingly modern and progressive. Without this signifier of true 'Irishness,' and the widespread loss of the Irish language, Irish identity may be similarly in flux, and has the potential to be manipulated in times of crisis (Coakley, 2011).

3.4 Conspiracy and corruption throughout Irish history

As mentioned, all societies encounter conspiracy beliefs both real and imagined, and Ireland is no exception. In fact, many of its early conspiracy theories served the same functions as those we see today: they delineated between ingroup and outgroup and supported political ideology (Leeson, 2021; van Prooijen, 2018). The time of the Irish revolution, the early twentieth century, was a period rife with conspiracy theories - especially originating from Britain. British conspiracy rhetoric at that time consisted of fear of spies, communism, antisemitism, and even some of the earliest alleged UFO sightings (Leeson, 2021). Furthermore, activities related to the Irish rebellion were portrayed as a part of a broader conspiracy against Britain. For instance, in 1920 the Duke of Northumberland addressed the government insisting that the Irish revolution was part of an international Bolshevist conspiracy to undermine the British Empire (Leeson, 2021).

Leeson (2021) also discusses that in the context of the Irish revolution, there were allegations of conspiracy from both sides (some warranted, others not). One such example is

the assassination of Tomás MacCurtain, the Lord Mayor of Cork in 1920. At the time (and today), the killing is widely believed to have been orchestrated by the Royal Irish Constabulary, however the British press alleged that MacCurtain's death was actually a false flag operation by the Irish Republican Brotherhood. In this sense, the Irish revolution developed in a context in which conspiracy theories were alleged from both sides, and some were inarguably true – but it also did so in a way that bolstered the social divide between ingroup and outgroup and national identity (Leeson, 2021). According to SIT, conspiracy theories such as this provided a self-categorisation function for its adherents – it separated the pure, righteous nationalism from the corrupt, scheming enemy (Tajfel & Turner, 1979)

Although the recipient of conspiracy theory allegations, Irish nationalists were not immune from the broader, global conspiracy theory rhetoric of the time. Antisemitic conspiracy still held weight in Irish politics of the early twentieth century. Notably in 1921, George Noble Plunkett (who was Minister for Foreign Affairs at the time) wrote Éamon de Valera warning against a close relationship with 'the Jews,' citing a number of the popular antisemitic conspiracy theories throughout Europe at the time. This comes not long after the 1904 Limerick anti-Jewish pogrom. Although Irish public opinion was divided on antisemitic conspiracy and anti-Jewish activity, this is evidence that the antisemitic sentiment of the era did reach Irish soil (Hanely, 2020).

3.5 Conclusion

All of these factors continue to influence the appeal of far-right conspiracies in Ireland today. The intertextuality of the historic construction of nationalism provides a discursive blueprint for far-right figureheads to manipulate today, drawing on collective traumas still pertinent to the Irish psyche (Anderson, 1983; Wodak, 2015).

With a shifting definition of Irish nationalism and a unique relationship to emigration, certain far-right conspiracy theories must be adapted to an Irish context. It was believed that Ireland's unique brand of nationalism might serve as a protective measure against the proliferation of far-right ideology in Ireland, yet this ideology has appeared in Ireland (Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021; Hennessy, 2017; O'Malley, 2008). This history provides the context in which to examine the uptake of far-right conspiracy theories in Ireland, especially those originating in other contexts such as QAnon, the Great Replacement, the Great Reset, and Agenda 21.[10] These will be explored in the next chapter. The unique political and historical context of Ireland influences how the Irish far-right emerges considering the transnational far-right network and highlights the work that needs to be done to adapt conspiracy theories to meet the needs of Irish people.

[10] see following chapter for definitions

Chapter 4: Conspiracy theory in context: the evolution of far-right conspiracy throughout time and the rise of conspiracy narratives

4.1 Introduction

Though all societies have experienced conspiracy theories at one time or another, this chapter focuses specifically on the conspiracy theories associated with far-right movements and those espousing a far-right ideology. Far-right movements and ideology did not originate in the United States (Saull, 2025). However, preliminary evidence suggests that Irish far-right conspiracy theory borrows primarily from American rhetoric (Fattibene et al., 2024a). Location based keywords reveal that online Irish far-right spaces discuss the United States more often than any other country, including the UK (Fattibene et al., 2024a). This is reflected in the kind of themes dominant in these spaces: American conspiracy theories such as QAnon and American far-right ideology such as Trumpism (Fattibene, 2024b). This raises the question of if – and to what degree – Irish far-right actors are influenced by the American context, a context in which the far-right strategy has arguably been successful and resulted in a rise to power. for the purposes of this paper, the exploration of historical far-right conspiracies in the American context will be explored in this chapter. America has long been characterised by its 'paranoid' or conspiratorial style of politics (Barkun, 2003; Hofstadter, 1965). Most recently, the 2016 and 2024 elections of Donald Trump to presidential office has shown America's centrality in the blueprint of uniting disparate far-right discourses into one narrative (Neiwert, 2017). Of course, the present day context is relevant here – at the time of writing, Donald Trump has nearly completed his first one hundred days in office of his second term. What we are seeing in America is the culmination of a far-right mainstreaming process whose seeds were sown far before Trump ever took political office. Trumpism has become a reference point for

modern far-right movements worldwide, and some fear that other countries will be swept up in a similar trend (Gilbert, 2025).

This legacy of conspiracy did not begin on American soil. In fact, the tenets of American conspiracy seem to borrow from European discourses, dating at least back to the Middle Ages. Anti-Catholic conspiracy theory became a defining theme, including the Popish Plot, an English conspiracy theory from the late 17th century that alleged that there was a massive Catholic plot to assassinate King Charles II and install a puppet government under the Pope (Collins, 2023). Both the French Revolution and the American Revolution drew on similar rhetoric to mobilise public outrage, using media available to them at the time including pamphleteering (Campbell et al., 2024; Chisick, 1993).

Similarly, the concept of 'the figural Jew' as a narrative device that encapsulated the idea of a shadowy, scheming 'other' became a ubiquitous symbol in early modern Europe. While the concept of the figural Jew was often separate from actual Jewish communities, it represented the threat of the enemy within and often did justify violence against Jewish people. It represents a sort of conspiratorial logic, still present today, that seeks to represent the threat of a small, covert group that is secretly manipulating events for their own benefit (Hammerschlag, 2010; Nirenberg, 2013).

The European tradition of conspiracy symbology was adapted and reshaped in the American context throughout time. Just as the European conspiracy tradition migrated to the colonies then, the same tropes and strategies have now travelled back across the Atlantic Ocean (Fattibene et al., 2024a; Walter & Drochon, 2020). To understand how much current Irish far-right discourse borrows from the American context, we must take a deep look into the evolution of far-right conspiracy in America, and popular conspiracy narratives worldwide.

The first part of this chapter will address far-right conspiracy theory in The United States: what conspiracy theories have become popularised throughout history, their role, what factors give rise to them, and their spread. Understanding the tenets of American far-right conspiracy theories, and the conditions that led to their popularity, is important in understanding how these theories spread transnationally, even in countries like The Republic of Ireland which has a very different historical and political environment.

The United States of America has a long history of far-right mobilisation, closely linked with the country's history (Lundskow, 2022). America's history of white supremacy predates the country itself. As Lundskow (2022) and Burtin (2021) argue, the history of America is closely intertwined with cultural beliefs such as Manifest Destiny (the belief that American settlers were destined by God to settle the American West, displacing a large percentage of the Native American population), and 'bootstrapping' or the belief in the 'American Dream,' which upholds the Protestant ideal that a hard work ethic guarantees success in the United States, and failure to achieve this success is associated with personal failure rather than structural or environmental factors (Soto-Vásquez & Sánchez-Santos, 2022). While the idea of 'pulling oneself up by one's bootstraps' has remained a popular belief in American culture, it is not a reality for most of the population (Nelson, 2019). Historically, Nelson (2019) explains, many of the earliest 'success' narratives of socioeconomic rise in American history relied on concepts such as Manifest Destiny and the displacement of the Native American population and the slave economy of the Old South. The legacy of exploitation of indigenous people and people of colour to fulfil the 'American Dream' continues to fuel white supremacist ideology in America – the tenets of Manifest Destiny support the pervasive ideology that white people 'earned' their place in the New World, while this success was directly built of the exploitation of others. Racist ideologies of

white superiority were necessary to uphold these systems which contributed to the economic success of the new country (Burtin, 2021; Lundskow, 2022; Nelson, 2019).

According to Lundskow (2022), any perceived threat to white dominance creates tension among white supremacists. This often results in an uptick of fearmongering, apocalyptic rhetoric, and conspiracy theories (Obaidi et al., 2021). There are several instances of this phenomenon throughout American history such as pushback during the Reconstruction era in the South and resistance to the 1960s Civil Rights movement, however many have documented a recent turning point after the election of President Barack Obama in 2008. This is an example of far-right, racist conspiracy theories moved into the mainstream in modern American politics, including the widespread 'birtherism' conspiracy theory promoted by Donald Trump, which insisted that Obama was not born in the United States and therefore ineligible to be president (Butter & Knight, 2020; Paul, 2021). For many far-right activists, the election of a black president, the failure to achieve socioeconomic mobility, and increasing diversity and multiculturalism were perceived as a threat and drove far-right groups to disseminate conspiracy theories that caution against progressive values and glorify the past when America was 'great' (Paul, 2021). This has had the ability to 'unite the right,' or bring together once disparate groups separated by slim differences in ideology, now united by conspiracy narrative. Though these disparate groups all have different ideologies, Trump was credited with appealing to conspiratorial and exclusionary tenets of them, allowing them to operate as a collective for political mobilisation (Lundksow, 2022; Sawyer, 2021; Bleakley, 2021).

4.2 Prominent Groups & Movements throughout History

To understand the evolution of far-right movements in the United States that culminated in the situation we see today, this section will detail some of the major far-right

groups in recent history. Tropes and ideology tend to be recycled and reapplied in a new context; this is relevant when it comes to the emergence of similar conspiracy theory narratives in Ireland.

There have been several prominent far-right groups active in the United States throughout history – most with their own conspiratorial ideology, but have been united throughout time through the politics of shared grievances and threats (Barkun, 2003; Berlet & Lyons, 2016; Mudde, 2019):

4.2.1 White Supremacist and Anti-Semitic Movements

Due to the legacy of racial inequality in America, many racist and anti-Semitic groups operate across the country such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), The Order, and the Aryan Nation, and various neo-Nazi groups. Popular conspiracy theories among these groups are belief in the Zionist Occupied Government and The Great Replacement theory. The Zionist Occupied Government (ZOG) theory is an anti-Semitic theory that proports that the United States is run by a secret group of Zionist elites (Allington et al., 2020; Burtin, 2021). The Great Replacement theory suggests a similar covert group is aiming to replace white Americans and Europeans with non-European immigrants (see below) (Gentry, 2022). These theories are used to heighten racial and ethnic tension (Obaidi et al., 2021).

There is a long history of white supremacist and anti-Semitic sentiment in America. The KKK was founded in the 1860s, as a result of the American Civil War and the coming end to slavery in America, and the beginning of the Reconstructionist period in the South. It regained prominence in the 1920s with the film *The Birth of a Nation* that spread the message across the country that only the knights would save the honour of the country from depravity committed by freed slaves and the recent influx of Jewish and Catholic immigrants, utilising popular tropes and symbols present in early European conspiracy plots (Nirenberg, 2013).

Although it did not originate with this film, the concept of the honour of the nation needing to be defended in this symbolic way has become a mainstay in far-right discourse (Kaplan, 2018).

Although the United States fought with the allied powers during World War II, anti-Semitic sentiment was rife during this time. Even American mogul Henry Ford promoted the anti-Semitic doctrine *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* a pamphlet that constructed Jews as a secret threat, and disseminated its teachings so widely that he received praise from Adolf Hitler. By 1945, almost three-fifths of all Americans agreed that 'Jews had too much power in their country' (Burtin, 2021).

Groups like the Christian Identity Movement arose out of this, using interpretations of religious scripture to justify racist, anti-Semitic, and misogynistic beliefs. The Christian Identity Movement relies on a re-telling of the story of Eve in Gensis and claims that white people are the righteous descendants of Adam while the Jewish and non-white populations are descended from Cain. Many white-supremacist movements adopt this theology and believe there is a battle being fought between 'good' (the Aryan people) and 'evil' (Jewish people and non-whites) and similarly believe that they will be rewarded in Heaven, where Jewish people and non-whites are enslaved or exterminated. This justifies a Manichean view of society and the importance of ingroup and outgroup boundaries (Gentry, 2022).

Gentry (2022) writes that white supremacist and anti-Semitic groups justify their hatred of Jewish and non-white people by stoking fear that the government is secretly controlled by Zionists. This is part of constructing the threat of domination of the 'pure' white race by the 'impure' others.

4.2.2 Militia & Patriot Movements

The Patriot Movement is a broad ideological umbrella within the United States that gained prominences in the 1990s for their anti-government ethos, drawing on a desire to defend the U.S. Constitution. This took the form of armed militia movements, both localised and decentralised. Several militia movements garnered momentum in the 1990s, and again in 2008 (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019). These movements first came to the forefront after the Ruby Ridge and Waco sieges in the 1990s, which heightened tensions and concerns around the U.S. government's use of force against civilians, and gave rise to local armed militias across the country. In Kathleen Belew's (2018) book *Bring the War Home*, they detail how these groups gained legitimacy and membership after the Vietnam War. The ethos of militarisation and the image of the heroic warrior became symbolic post-war (Belew, 2018; Fitzgerald, 2022). On an institutional and governmental level, this served to retain its identity as a military stronghold rather than acknowledge what was a 'messy' defeat and strategic failure (Fitzgerald 2013; Fitzgerald, 2022). On an individual level, for those returning from war and those disillusioned by the defeat, it was a reaction to a sense of betrayal and abandonment by the government and a desire to defend the same values at home. This galvanised support for local right-wing militias – the desire to fight against a government that had turned its back on them (Belew, 2018). And, in its most extreme manifestations (such as the Christian Identity movement), precipitate collapse to achieve white domination through doomsday prophecies (Aarons, 2023; Belew, 2018).

The purpose of these militias is supposedly to defend civilians from the government (a right believed to be protected by the second amendment of the U.S. Constitution), and in response to the Brady Bill which tightened firearm legislation across the country. Several of these militias were formed by the overlap of white supremacists, doomsday preppers, and other right-wing groups. Many militias believe they must defend themselves from the New World Order, a conspiracy in which the federal government is planning to trap citizens in a

totalitarian regime, or other conspiracies involving the federal government overextending its power. This was part of the inspiration for Timothy McVeigh's infamous attack on the Alfred P. Murrah federal building in Oklahoma City (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019). The Patriot movement rose to prominence again in 2008 with the rise of the Tea Party, which Berlet & Sunshine (2019) attribute to a resurgence of conservative, populist ideals after the economic collapse and the desire to combat the left's alleged 'socialism'. The Tea Party became a mainstream influence on the Republican Party. Within two years, the Tea Party had chapters in all fifty states, and 45 Tea Party candidates were elected to federal government in 2010 (Haltinner, 2016). Tea Party membership is strongly associated with the 'birtherism' conspiracy theory that alleged that Barack Obama was not eligible to be President of the United States due to the belief that he was 'foreign.' Tea Party candidates like Sarah Palin openly referenced this conspiracy theory on the campaign trail, leading to a gradual mainstreaming of these conspiracy beliefs associated with the Tea Party and Patriot movements (Sawyer, 2021).

4.3 Modern Far-Right Conspiracy Theories

While these historical conspiracy narratives are still circulating and waxing and waning in influence (Winter, 2018), these tropes have also been adopted into a new generation of conspiracy theories. Moving from the explicitly American context to the global conspiracy narratives that abound in far-right spaces today, it is evident that some of these conspiracy theory tropes have been recycled (Uscinski, 2018). Scholars such as Perlstein (2008, 2014) highlight that conspiracy think is a durable and useful strategy in American conservative politics, and now embedded in the fabric of American politics in reaction to delegitimisation to aspects of American democracy – especially after events such as Watergate and the end of the Vietnam War in the 1970s and the tumult of the 1990s (Ganz,

2025). Although these conspiracy theories are often convoluted and fantastical, they regurgitate tropes that are not new in conspiracy theory rhetoric, and can be seen in the earliest of American far-right ideology and far-right ideology the world over. It will be important to understand these patterns and narratives when looking at the content of Irish far-right influencers.

4.3.1 The COVID-19 'Plandemic'

The concept of the 'figural Jew' and the 'secret cabal' have influenced how the COVID-19 pandemic was framed among the far-right in America. A surge in anti-vaccine rhetoric was observed on white supremacist website Stormfront, sharing the debunked claim that vaccines cause autism and the belief that they infringed on personal freedoms (Walter et al., 2022). There was the widespread belief that vaccines were being pushed by elites with nefarious intentions, which Stormfront users framed in terms of Jewishness and race (Walter et al., 2022).

In addition to budding conspiracy rhetoric about COVID-19, the onset of the pandemic in America was closely linked to anti-Asian and anti-China sentiment. China was quickly blamed for the virus, with a handful of American politicians blaming the 'weird' Chinese diet of 'bats, dogs, snakes, and anteaters' as the reason why the virus developed. Some of the same politicians also suggested that COVID-19 may have been developed in a Chinese laboratory as a biological weapon (Sautman, 2021).

As lockdowns were extended across the country, they were met with rising tension and the growing belief that the pandemic was a hoax meant to dampen individual liberty. As Jarvis & Eddington (2021) document, the hashtag #OpenAmericaNow began to trend on social media. The posts under this hashtag represent a mix of ideologies that all manifested in the same sentiment. Jarvis & Eddington (2021) argue that this confluence of ideologies

represents the joining of several fringe groups under one movement, including QAnon, the Christian Identity movement, and Patriot movements.

4.3.2 QAnon

The QAnon conspiracy theory originated in 2017 on online message boards. An anonymous poster claiming to be a high-ranking American intelligence officer, dubbed 'Q', began posting cryptic clues warning of a coming 'storm'. Q encourages the audience to 'do their own research' and work together to decode the clues, contributing to a greater participatory culture that has helped QAnon spread so widely across the internet in a relatively short period of time (Bleakley, 2021; Lundskow, 2022).

The theory itself centres around the belief that American elites – including Democratic politicians, Hollywood actors, and globalists, are trafficking children in an elaborate Satanic rite that involves harvesting their blood. The theory proports that President Donald Trump is waging a secret war against this paedophilic cabal. This belief was part of the justification behind the 'stop the steal' movement, or the conviction that Trump won the 2020 election in a landslide and President Joe Biden and the Democratic Party had unfairly 'stolen' the election to regain power. Ultimately, widespread belief in the QAnon conspiracy theory contributed to the storming of the United States Capitol building on January 6, 2021 (Bleakley, 2021). This theory contains the archetype of the 'figural Jew,' long associated with shadowy figures who sacrifice children and are motivated by their greed for world domination (Bleakley, 2021; Ekman, 2022). It also justified the support for Donald Trump, suggesting that his downfall would lead to an apocalyptic event, and ultimately serving as a justification to challenge the American democratic system (Jarvis & Eddington, 2021).

4.3.3 The Great Replacement

The Great Replacement is a white supremacist conspiracy theory derived from the work of French extremist Renaud Camus (2011). It suggests that there is a plan in place by the 'global elite' to replace white Europeans in Western countries with non-Europeans, similar to extant white supremacist and Aryan Nation fears of 'white genocide' and 'race wars.' This theory has bled into far-right rhetoric in Europe and America (Gentry, 2022).

The threat to white dominance in America has always provoked fear and resistance from white supremacists. For instance, research has shown that the anticipated narrowing gaps between racial majorities and minorities in the United States can stoke negative racial attitudes in white Americans. Therefore, conspiracies such as the Great Replacement are effective in heightening racial tension (Obaidi et al., 2021).

4.4 Dissemination, Contagion, & Activism

When looking at the history of far-right groups and related conspiracy theories, it is difficult to determine which came first. While conspiracy theories have influenced and mobilised many ideological groups - not only far-right – conspiracy theories and far-right groups have a historically reciprocal relationship (Barkun, 2003; Uscinski & Parent, 2014). While there is evidence that America imported the precedents of conspiracy theory ideology from Europe, this does not necessarily prove that conspiracy thinking predates what would today be termed as far-right groups. While conspiracy thinking has been documented back to the Middle Ages, the reality is that far-right groups and conspiracy theory have likely always been reciprocal (Nirenberg, 2013). Conspiracy theory creates the sense of threat needed to promote ingroup solidarity, and groups with shared values and identities provide the sort of 'echo chamber' that conspiracy theories need to flourish (Barkun, 2013; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2020).

The spread of far-right conspiracy theories in the United States has resulted in violent activism, both in the forms of lone-actor terrorism and mass demonstrations. Perhaps the most powerful example of this is the storming of the U.S. Capitol building by a crowd of several thousand people on January 6, 2021. The motivation behind storming the Capitol was the belief that the 2020 Presidential election had been unfairly stolen from candidate Donald Trump. According to some, the mob intended to hang Vice President Mike Pence and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (Lundskow, 2022). Most media blamed this mass delusion event on the widespread dissemination of the QAnon conspiracy theory, but further examination of those involved in the attack shows that it was a confluence of QAnon conspiracy theorists, 'Patriots', Proud Boys, anti-Antifa activists, and other far-right groups (Lundskow, 2022; Soto-Vásquez & Sánchez-Santos, 2022).

Though these disparate groups all have different ideologies, Trump was credited with appealing to conspiratorial, racist, misogynist, and white supremacist underpinnings in all of them, so much so that the end of his presidency was perceived as a common threat across far-right spaces (Bleakley, 2021; Lundksow, 2022; Sawyer, 2021). Far-right activists were able to cooperate and organize the Capitol siege by rallying a wide array of activists and utilising privacy-first messaging apps to plan the attack (Soto-Vásquez & Sánchez-Santos, 2022). This has implications for the future of far-right mobilisation, in America and elsewhere. The threat of disparate far-right groups should not be dismissed due to their differences in ideology, and instead evaluated by what common ideology has the potential to unite these groups. The consolidation of these far-right groups is arguably to a level that is unprecedented in recent history (Mondon & Vaughan, 2021). This was achieved through a process of mainstreaming extremist rhetoric, weaponising common grievances among groups, and appealing to the militaristic origins of several of these groups (De Genova, 2020; Jones, 2018; Mondon & Vaughan, 2021). By mainstreaming once fringe ideas, extreme far-right groups gained a

foothold within the Republican party where their ideology was not only tolerated, but represented (Mondon & Vaughan, 2021). Within the rhetoric of Trumpism, their common grievances (racism, xenophobia, white supremacy) were constructed as real existential threats to Americans, encouraging solidarity across groups to fight the 'true enemies' (Mudde, 2019; Norris & Ingleheart, 2019). Similarly, the mainstreaming of Trumpism and far-right rhetoric from official political channels endorsed the paramilitaristic style and structure of these groups such as the Proud Boys. Where they had once been firmly anti-government, now they were being legitimised through government channels (Pirro, 2024).

Conspiracy theory rhetoric has also inspired a variety of lone actors. The QAnon conspiracy theory is linked to domestic terrorism, including a shooting at Comet Ping Pong pizzeria in Washington D.C., which was alleged to be part of the 'Pizzagate' conspiracy and the establishment where children were being held and abused (Bleakley, 2021). A man also shot a member of an organised crime family outside his home in Staten Island, believing that he was a key player in the conspiracy (Lundskow, 2022).

Conspiracy theories have been able to spread to such vitriolic levels in part because of the participatory culture and 'red-pilling' that helps disseminate them. 'Red-pilling' is a term adopted by the far-right from the movie The Matrix, in which a character can choose to take a red pill to uncover how the world really works or take a blue pill to remain ignorant. In the conspiratorial sense, 'red-pilling' refers to being exposed to conspiracy theories that alter the way in which one views the world, and reveals a truth about society that becomes impossible to ignore (Rea, 2021). Historically, conspiracy theory dissemination relied on traditional forms of media, but with the rise of social media, there has been a greater emphasis on participatory meaning-making when it comes to far-right conspiracy theories – this will be discussed in chapter 5. From message boards to influencers to the encouragement of 'doing

your own research', the interactive component prompts widespread sharing in far-right spaces and more mainstream spaces alike (Allington et al. 2021; Staender et al., 2021).

4.5 Factors that give rise to far-right conspiracy theories

4.5.1 Threats to white dominance

In the American context and throughout Europe, conspiracy rhetoric is often born, in part, due to threats to white dominance (Snagovsky, 2024). Situations that challenge white power and privilege (in the political or socioeconomic sense, or simply due to shifting demographics) are met with an attempt to increase social control over marginalised groups (Bleakley, 2021). In Europe, the 2015 migrant crisis is attributed to giving rise to a new generation of far-right political parties (Dennison & Geddes, 2019). This is due, in large part, to the creation of an *existential* identity crisis that was underpinned by an increase of migrants to Europe (Kaufmann, 2018; Postelnicescu, 2016). Populist parties such as France's Front National and Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) capitalised on leveraging this kind of discourse (Hansen & Olsen, 2022; Stockemer, 2017). This is often achieved through structural or overt racism, but can also be achieved through the subtext of conspiracy theories (Gentry, 2022; Obaidi et al., 2021).

Far-right adherents believe white identity is under attack and is accompanied by the sentiment (popularised by the Proud Boys) that white Westerners, and particularly white men, 'should not have to apologize for creating the modern world' referring to the widespread legacy of Western imperialism and colonialism (Bleakley, 2021; Paul, 2021). This is interesting to consider when it comes to the case of Ireland, where Irish identity and early conspiracy theory rhetoric were staunchly anti-colonial, and often a result of British colonisation of the island (Coakley, 2011).

From the nascent research into the Irish far-right, it would appear that Irish far-right groups take a 'mix and match' approach to integrating this broader far-right repertoire of contention into their own narrative (Tilly, 2008). While Irish far-right content mirrors the white dominance rhetoric of other far-right movements, as well as arguments against immigration, it is less clear how it incorporates this pro-colonialism messaging considering Irish nationalism is historically anti-colonial by definition (Fattibene et al., 2024a; Lynch, 2007). Regardless, far-right rhetoric does not shy away from internal inconsistency and hypocrisy, and is prone to promoting and condemning the same strains of ideology within a single sentence (Bull & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2014; Wodak, 2020). This is because it is not the internal logic of their argument that makes it compelling, but the emotional response they inspire (Boler & Davis, 2018; Colgrove et al., 2021; Weismueller et al., 2022).

It is easy to see how conspiracy theories such as The Great Replacement, which warns of an impending genocide of the white race, has roots in racist ideology (Obaidi et al., 2021). Theories like this can be seen through the lens of coping with shifting demographics and success or social mobility of racial minorities, both seen as a threat to white dominance, as well as justifying racist views. For instance, a common concern among believers of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory is the idea of 'differential fertility' which purports that the 'higher birth rate' among lower class and racial minority groups in America and Europe will eclipse the birthrate of the white, ruling class and cause them to lose political and economic support (Graff & Korolczuk, 2021). This is not a new trope in far-right conspiracy rhetoric; the 'higher birth rate' argument has been cited as a condemnation against black Americans since the early 20th century (Prather et al., 2018), and also was used against Catholics in Northern Ireland, hence Terence O'Neill's quote that "the basic fear of Protestants in Northern Ireland is that the will be outbred by the Roman Catholics," (McBride, 2023, p. 628). Clearly a racist belief, it is framed as a valid concern under the guise of conspiracy

theory rhetoric. The intent of this 'high birth rate' argument is to stoke existential fear around demographic change, being outnumbered by members of the marginalised outgroup, ultimately leading to loss of ingroup dominance (Stefaniak & Wohl, 2021).

Paul's (2021) explanation of metapolitical whiteness is a useful lens through which to understand this phenomenon. Metapolitical whiteness is an approach taken by far-right groups to reframe norms and values to privilege whiteness by default. The goal is to reframe this discourse as non-extremist and separate from white supremacy, but instead as 'the natural order of things' in order to appeal to a wider audience. It also uses victimhood narratives and perceived grievances against white people to legitimise its claims and justify reinstating white power. Metapolitical whiteness uses a symbolic form of white pride and nationalism that is heavily linked with masculinity, heterosexist gender politics, and misogyny (Paul, 2021).

Metapolitical whiteness, and its accompanying conspiracy theories, allow white people to express their anxiety over threats to white dominance while not openly aligning themselves with white supremacy, although this is certainly the underlying sentiment. Metapolitical whiteness has been utilised by far-right political movement Nouvelle Drotie (New Right) in France, Renaud Camus, founder of the Great Replacement conspiracy theory and several far-right groups online across 4chan, 8chan, and Gab (Paul, 2021).

4.5.2 Distrust of government and elite

Far-right and populist sentiment arises when trust in government dips (Bertuzzi, 2021). According to McNall (2018), the percentage of Americans who believed they could trust the government to do the right thing was only 19% in 2015, compared to a high of 73% in 1958. Lack of trust in governing bodies and tension associated with the growing divide between the 1% and the rest of the population provide an environment rife for populism and subsequent conspiracy theories (Bertuzzi, 2021).

Distrust of government and elites are prominent themes in conspiracy theories such as The Great Replacement and QAnon. In addition to naming government officials and elites as conspirators, far-right conspiracy theories often apply a Manichean or racialised lens. For example, one study of Stormfront users found that when discussing conspiracy theories about political forces and elites, the narratives were connected to race and, in particular, blaming Jewish people (Walter et al., 2022)

Similarly, distrust and disappointment in government can evoke fear that the political system is secretly being 'controlled'. Some scholars attribute conspiracy theories like QAnon, Satanic Panic, and McCarthyism to the tendency to interpret things through a Manichean lens of good forces versus evil forces (Thielmann & Hilbig, 2023). Soto-Vásquez & Sánchez-Santos (2022) describes this as a memetic frame, drawing a parallel between evangelical Christian theology and right-wing disinformation. When the government is constructed as an untrustworthy or 'evil' force, conspiracy theories play a role by giving people agency in which to conquer evil and restore 'good' to the world (Lundskow, 2022). Through the lens of SIT, this entrenches ingroup and outgroup dynamics by constructing the government as another kind of 'outgroup' oppressing the ingroup, and providing a framework in which the ingroup can restore their position (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

At the core of the struggle between the righteous people and the tyrannical government and elites is the reality that many Americans do not feel represented by their government, similar to McNally's (2015) analysis of Gramsci, in which the cultural hegemony created by elites results in the alienation of the people from the elite, leading to the tendency to demonise them. Lundskow (2022) says that paranoid conspiracy beliefs demonize elites, allowing common Americans to be constructed as the 'real' patriots and harbingers of privileged knowledge, helping combat feelings of existential anxiety and threat to cultural values. As it applies to Europe and more specifically Ireland, there is evidence that

far-right activists and fringe politicians have similarly referred to themselves as the true patriots and upholders of freedom (Nightingale, 2021; Sheridan, 2024).

Many researchers attribute Donald Trump's rise to power to his exploitation of this frame, constructing himself as a populist leader who serves as an embodiment of the people and can forge ahead in a shared direction ("Make American Great Again") (Keenan & de Zavala, 2021). This trope of harkening back to a better time is not new, and not necessarily unique to the far-right, but it does provide an incentive to return to a past glory, typically a time where the ingroup maintained a type of dominance that is portrayed as lost to them (Norris & Ingleheart, 2019; Stefaniak & Wohl, 2021).

Lack of trust in government is a prominent issue across the United States (and some would argue more globally) with approval ratings indicating a widespread period of dissatisfaction with government and representation, in addition to a pervasive feeling of suspicion when it comes to wealthy elites (McNall, 2018; Lundskow, 2022). Historically, these conditions have given rise to populism, and have also given rise to far-right conspiracy theories (Bertuzzi, 2021). These conspiracy theories apply a far-right lens to feelings of threat and distrust of government, often linking in narratives around race, gender politics, and portraying issues as a simplistic, good versus evil battle of forces (Soto-Vásquez & Sánchez-Santos, 2022; Walter et al., 2022).

4.5.3 'Doing your own research' and participatory culture

Further entrenching modern far-right conspiracy theories into the mainstream is the phenomenon of participatory culture and 'doing your own research' (Brown et al., 2023; Mudde, 2019). With the growing distrust of elites and government, there has been a movement to construct the idea that the possession of knowledge is 'elitist', and scientists,

scholars, and researchers should not be trusted as they are all lumped into the corrupt, conspiratorial ‘elite’ (Bleakley, 2021).

In addition to distrust of scientific evidence, many mainstream media sources have also been deemed ‘fake news’ and corrupt, assumed to be playing into the liberal agenda. Using this framing, far-right populists and conspiracy theorists have touted the importance of ‘doing your own research’ - a process separate from relying on factual information or scientific thought and instead is often a piecemealing of different conspiracy theories to inform one’s worldview (Bleakley, 2021).

Bleakley (2021) reports that QAnon followers have regularly stated ‘we’re the news now,’ a dangerous sentiment that demonstrates the echo chamber effect of this conspiracy theory. Conspiracy theories like QAnon are unique due to their emphasis on participatory culture. Not only do they provide a sense of community to believers, they also encourage believers to construct their own meaning from ‘Q-drops' or clues left by the cryptic poster and movement’s namesake, Q (Bleakley, 2021). The participatory culture of this conspiracy theory allows people to feel like active participants in the struggle of good versus evil, and elevates them from a reality in which they feel debased to serving a higher purpose and being privy to ‘secret knowledge.’ Looking at this phenomenon through the lens of SIT, this could be another way to foster ingroup cohesion and serve as a coalitional cue – it creates an environment where members create an echo chamber dedicated to sharing ‘facts’ and information that foster their own beliefs, and dissemination pieces of secret knowledge that are ‘hidden’ from the outgroup. The far-right ecosystem supports this structure, as some research shows that common citizens are now important disseminators of far-right content, instead of only politicians and public figures leading the movement (Datts, 2020). In this sense, the participatory culture of modern conspiracy theories (in which it is up to ‘average’ people to construct meaning from them) is another factor that makes conspiracy theories so

enticing to people feeling threatened or uncertain, as well as serving as a tool for dissemination that can launch conspiracy theories into the mainstream (Bleakley, 2021).

4.6 Social & psychological functions of conspiracy belief

Linking this back to the social and psychological functions of conspiracy, these common factors suggest that conspiracy belief serves as a coping mechanism for those facing existential or social dominance threats, or struggling with social uncertainty (Douglas et al., 2019).

Conspiracy theories serve an important purpose when existential needs or positions are threatened. As Douglas et al. (2019) explains, not only are conspiracy beliefs associated with feelings of powerlessness, they afford a sense of control by believing that, through this grand narrative, believers will be rewarded or entitled to some kind of power, and they can reject official narratives in favour of more favourable outcomes. Unsurprisingly, this means that conspiracy theory belief is also associated with personal unrest, lack of understanding of the social world, and belief that the economy is getting worse. Belief in conspiracy theories can provide a buffer from feelings associated with these threats, and restore some sense of agency or hope that what they have lost or could lose can be regained. In the case of The Great Replacement Theory, QAnon, or the 'Plandemic,' each of these serve as an explanation for uncontrollable events, and allow those who distrust government or have entrenched white supremacist or nativist stances to maintain their beliefs even in the face of change (Douglas et al., 2019). Following this explanation, it is apparent why these conspiracies have spread so widely, even to countries with different political systems and cultural contexts that would be thought to prevent such logic.

The good versus evil dichotomy of conspiracy theories and their internally consistent explanations for the social world help people establish a sense of certainty when no such certainty is readily available. There is a desire to believe that the social world is understandable and predictable, and when these beliefs are threatened, it can cause distress (Douglas et al. 2019).

Douglas et al. (2019) also reports that conspiracy theories help maintain a positive image of the self and the social groups we belong to. Especially when one feels a lack of representation in government, or the political party one belongs to is not in power, conspiracy theories become more enticing because they provide an explanation that is more desirable than the reality – the election was stolen, the opposing party is corrupt, etc. Although verging on delusional, these conspiratorial mindsets protect the self from feelings of loss in a 'winner' and 'loser' dichotomy. Again, it has less to do with the internal logic or consistency of these theories, and more with the social functions and identity functions they provide to their believers. Far-right influencers understand how to exploit this to support their platform (Arnesson, 2022a).

4.7 Conclusion

The beginning of this chapter examined America's history of far-right conspiracy from the dawn of the state to Trump's presidency and its current impact on global far-right conspiracy. While America may be driving some of the modern far-right conspiracy discourse trends, these themes and ideas are neither new nor uniquely American. As such, it should not be surprising to see them adopted by European contingents.

Due to America's history of white supremacism, threats to white dominance has been responded to with a surge of far-right rhetoric and conspiracy theories (Snagovsky, 2024). Conspiracy theories can be understood as a response to an existential threat or threat to one's

standing in one's social environment, in order to uphold positive ingroup image or deal with uncertainty (Douglas et al., 2019).

Several common factors often precipitate conspiracy theories – namely distrust in government, threat to dominance, the devaluation of scientific knowledge. The same conspiracy theory tropes have been recycled throughout time and space, at least as far back as the Middle Ages (and likely before) (Collins, 2023). The wave of conspiracies we are witnessing now are, in many ways, not new. Sometimes it is less the content or credibility of a particular conspiracy theory and more its ability to justify one's beliefs and restore feelings of certainty and predictability that makes it enticing (Douglas et al., 2019; Jolley et al., 2020).

Keeping this in consideration, it is important to examine Ireland through the lens of historic cycles of distrust in government and elite and threats to social dominance. These are the factors that cause groups feeling 'threatened' to adopt conspiracy mindsets. While the Irish context differs from American and other European contexts, this does not make Ireland immune to conspiracy theory contagion. In fact, we have already documented it in action (Fattibene et al., 2024a). The question is how this far-right conspiracy theory rhetoric is adapted and exploited by far-right influencers to garner traction for their movement.

Chapter 5: The role of far-right influencers

5.1 Introduction

So far, this thesis has examined far-right conspiracy and movements – historical and current – but not the individuals who champion them. The successful far-right movements throughout time are often attributed to their charismatic leaders who held popular appeal and were able to tap into mainstream anxieties and represent the ideal native, ready to defend the nation. Social media has diversified this role (Ebner, 2020). The role of those at the helm of far-right movements has drifted away from those occupying the political space to those holding the social media space, who are able to directly communicate to everyday citizens and shape opinions of the political and social realm. Globally, we are far removed from the 'generation zero' or original cohort of far-right social media influencers – the far-right has been using social media to their advantage since the dawn of Web 1.0 in the early 1990s (Bowman-Grieve, 2009; De Koster & Houtman, 2008). However, far-right influencers continue to evolve and adapt with the changing online ecosystem. Because so much of the far-right political discourse happens online, by examining the discourse of far-right influencers in Ireland, it provides direct insight into the modern opinion leaders of the movement and an exploration of how discourse is performed and manipulated to support their movement.

Far-right influencers occupy an important space in the online far-right ecosystem. Globally, far-right movements have always been quick to adapt to new forms of digital media from dial up bulletins and early internet forums to the more modern style of vlogging, livestreaming, trolling, and meme culture (Baele et al. 2020; Lewis, 2019). In line with this pattern, the far-right is adapting to 'influencer culture' and using their digital literacy and

algorithmic knowledge to create personal brands that blend lifestyle content and perceived authenticity with far-right ideology and conspiracy theory rhetoric (Arnesson, 2022a; Maly, 2020; Maly, 2021). Far-right influencers provide a critical lens into the far-right movement not only due to their position as prolific far-right content creators and disseminators, but also as agents of political discourse who attempt to construct far-right ideology and conspiracy theory in their own local contexts and lived experiences (Rothut et al., 2023; Shmalenko et al., 2021).

5.2 The rise of influencer culture

The growth of social media over the last two decades has contributed to the phenomenon of 'influencer culture' or what Marwick (2015) refers to as microcelebrity. Microcelebrity can be defined as:

> "a self-presentation technique in which people view themselves as a public persona to be consumed by others, use strategic intimacy to appeal to followers, and regard their audience as fans," (Marwick, 2015, p. 1).

Influencers are highly visible people across social media platforms, who accrue large follower counts due to the branding of their persona. In recent years, due to advertising and the creation of sponsored content, being an influencer has become a tenable career for many, even a coveted one (Gómez, 2019). Whereas the tenets of influencer culture have been adapted from traditional celebrity culture, influencer culture differs in its perceived authenticity, with influencers often offering followers seemingly candid insight into their lives and lifestyle which gives the illusion that followers have an 'unrestricted' or more intimate access into the lives of these influencers (Abidin, 2015; Arnesson, 2022b; Lewis, 2019).

It is this perceived authenticity presented by influencers that makes their content valuable to followers. This is especially the case when it comes to the case of brand deals, sponsorships, and commercial endorsements, a process that now goes hand-in-hand with the commercialisation of influencer culture. A 2021 study found that consumers were more willing to pay for an influencer-endorsed product than a product endorsed by a more traditional celebrity because they saw influencer content as more 'believable and authentic,' and therefore the product endorsement more meaningful (Kapitan et al., 2021). Some far-right influencers have even been able to secure brand deals and sponsorships, highlighting their perceived authenticity and how they have adapted to the relatively new terrain of influencer culture (Rothut et al., 2023).

This authenticity is something that followers expect, and often demand, from influencers – not just as it relates to paid and sponsored content but also as it relates to ideology, values, and politics. Arnesson (2022a, 2022b) examines follower reactions to perceived authenticity of Swedish influencer accounts. Using a critical discourse lens, followers construct (and deconstruct) authenticity of influencer content – which Arnesson argues is in a state of flux, to be discursively constructed by influencers and followers. Arnesson (2022b) examined collaborations between two brands and four Swedish influencers through the lens of the discourse influencers employ to achieve not only the commercial but also the ideological goals of the collaboration. Comments left under these posts revealed that followers were also important in the process of constructing authenticity, as they often questioned and challenged the position of the influencer and their authenticity (Arnesson, 2022b). When it comes to far-right influencers, this authenticity is something that must constantly be constructed and defended; it plays directly into the narrative of 'this is what the news won't tell you' and 'being the new mainstream media' - the idea that they are the sources you can really trust (Lewis, 2019). This is similar to the concept in cultic studies that

the leader instils the idea that they have some secret and privileged knowledge, prompting followers to become dependent on them for information and interpretation of events (Singer & Lalich, 1995).

Another study examined the comments under sponsored #VisitDubai posts from two influencers accounts, who were sponsored by the governmental tourism agency of the United Arab Emirates. Arnesson (2022a) examines how followers construct the influencers' perceived authenticity (or lack thereof) by either disparaging influencers for not acting in line with their perceived values by visiting a country that they deem oppressive or arguing that this action does not impact their perceived authenticity, despite what other commenters might claim.

In this sense, Arnesson (2022a) demonstrates that perceived authenticity is in a constant state of construction/deconstruction by influencers and followers, and that this authenticity is tied to transparency of influencers' politics and ideology. Arnesson (2022b) states that influencers function as "ideological intermediaries that legitimate neoliberal policies by personifying and promoting a lifestyle that is inspirational, aspirational, and deeply ideological" (p. 540), or at least, this is what is expected of influencers by their followers. Therefore, there is an expectation that influencer content can, on some level, be seen as ideological by the people that consume it, and that influencer content functions as something that constructs ideology – something followers can weigh their own ideology against.

Successful influencers construct this sense of authenticity and accountability with their audiences (Lewis, 2019). This is where influencer culture *presents* itself as different from traditional media and celebrity culture. Maintaining this sense of authenticity enhances credibility with the audience, and therefore can make their follower-base more susceptible to the messages promoted by influencers (Kapitan et al., 2021; Lewis, 2019).

5.3 Influencers as opinion leaders

Influencers can be considered among the 'ideological ambassadors' or 'opinion leaders' of the 21st century (Rothut et al., 2023; Suuronen et al., 2021). The idea of opinion leaders was popularised by Katz & Lazarsfeld (1955) theory of two-step flow of communication. They recognised that individuals can have a larger impact on beliefs than others when they position themselves as opinion leaders by acting as intermediaries who filter and interpret information between mass media to a wider audience. In terms of SIT, opinion leaders tend to emerge in specific groups and reinforce ingroup ties and identity (Tajfel & Tuner, 1979).

At the time, this usually took place through the process of traditional media, which Katz & Lazarfeld (1955) argues was not directly impactful in and of itself, but instead impacted the public through its interpretation through these figures deemed 'opinion leaders' who interpreted and contextualised the perceived importance of traditional media content that the public uses to form the basis of their opinions. McCombs & Shaw (1972) expand this theory by viewing mass media as another 'agenda-setting' entity in its own right, arguing that in the process of deciding what news stories are displayed or what political issues are discussed with importance, mass media plays a role in setting the agenda of campaigns and other political or ideological processes. This demonstrates that the impact of news, media, and politics on the public has never been a direct process, but is instead a product of how it is presented and then constructed and filtered down through the perceptions of opinion leaders.

Suuronen et al. (2022) apply this framework to modern influencers. In examining how a sample of Finnish influencers engage in political discussions, the authors found that influencer accounts can be their own kind of third space, or a separate place where people go for connection, where political ideology is performed, as the majority of these influencers

reported engaging in political discussions on their platform, especially those with higher follower count.

Influencers that successfully perform authenticity, and engage in its construction with their followers, become opinion leaders through which ideology and political discourse is filtered through to their audience. Therefore, influencers have become a critical part of the formation of ideology and political views in the modern world due to the position they occupy, not just as opinion leaders, but as opinion leaders with an enhanced sense of credibility, authenticity, and intimacy they build with their followers, which may cause their followers to be more susceptible and loyal to their messaging that they would be to other, more traditional types of media personas or celebrities (Arnesson, 2022a; Marshall, 2020; Suuronen et al., 2021).

5.4 When influencers turn political

This process becomes more complicated the more political discourse and commercial discourse become intertwined. As De Gregorio & Goanta (2022) point out, the line between commercial and political has become blurred, which causes complications as political speech enjoys a high amount of protection in most contexts, whereas commercial speech is more regulated.

Furthermore, there is growing interest in the impact of social media on politics. Not only are most politicians expected to have a social media presence, social media can be utilised to promote opinion leaders into the political realm, and social media campaigns and opinion leader endorsement can make successful PR campaigns for hopeful politicians (Shmalenko et al., 2021). With the growth of social media and the reconfiguration of opinion leaders as social media influencers, politics and social media is now firmly intertwined to the point that influencers have been paid by politicians to make memes and sponsored content

endorsing their campaigns (De Gregorio & Goanta, 2022). One of the consequences of the entanglement between influencers and political content is that it reinforces the idea of 'doing your own research.' As mistrust in institutions and mainstream media heightens, online influencer content becomes a compelling alternative (Chinn & Hasell, 2023; Hassell & Chinn, 2025; Riedl et al., 2023). This has been found to result in an oversimplification of political topics, since the barriers for engagement are lowered, and there is increased polarisation, enforcing an echo chamber effect (Reidl et al., 2023).

Furthermore, digital literacy and successful social media utilisation is something that is now demanded of political leaders – even more, successful influencers and opinion leaders can utilise their following to enter the political realm (Marshall, 2020; Shmalenko et al., 2021).

While some of the literature in the field of the blurring of commercial and political discourse focuses on the issues that ensue when politicians become influencers or start endorsing commercial products on their political platforms, an interesting process is also occurring when influencers turn political. As Suuronen et al. (2021) and Uca (2021) demonstrate, there is a certain pressure for influencers to engage in political discourse to maintain that sense of authenticity with their audience. For some, recent events such as COVID-19 and the Black Lives Matter protests were motivating factors to turn their content political (Goodwin et al., 2023). The field would benefit from additional research on what motivates influencers to shift their content from a specific niche to be more politically oriented, as has been observed with some far-right influencers.

5.5 From Stormfront to /pol/: the growth of far-right social media

The concept of far-right opinion leaders, or even far-right influencers, is not novel. Since the birth of the Internet, far-right groups have proven adaptive and innovative when it comes to utilising digital spaces to advance their agenda.

Conway et al. (2019) illustrate that far-right digital spaces have been around since at least the 1980s, when an American white supremacist established bulletin board system 'Aryan Nation Liberty Net' in which anyone with dial-up could access a variety of white supremacist content and information on local Aryan Nation meetings as well as a list of 'enemies' in what the authors describe as perhaps one of the earliest forms of far-right doxxing.

With the advent of Web 1.0, characterised by static and read-only websites, and the birth of internet forums in the 1990s came Stormfront, one of the most prolific far-right forum sites that still exists today. The earliest version of Stormfront contained quotes of week and a library of white nationalist documents as well as hyperlinks to an assortment of other far-right sites. Stormfront quickly became a kind of third space for those ostracised from family and communities for their far-right, neo-Nazi ideology, a kind of coalitional cue itself – to link back to SIT. In De Koster & Houtman's (2008) study of Stormfront users, participants expressed their appreciation for the site, describing it as a second home, providing a space where they could express themselves in line with their ideology and engage with likeminded individuals. Virtual communities like Stormfront also fulfilled a social need for members – it provides a space to construct meaningful discourse and negotiate group identity (Bowman-Grieve, 2009). Bowman-Grieve (2009) details how members on Stormfront share their experiences of personal 'awakenings' to the movement and their perceived grievances.

Other far-right online spaces emerged during this time, although with varying degrees of interaction and engagement. Atton (2006) studied the discourse of the British National

Party's website in the early 2000s, another early kind of far-right third space. Although the website had fewer opportunities for users to leave messages and comments and engage with the content overall, the website contained many of the discursive properties still present in far-right rhetoric today, such as constructing and re-constructing the 'other' or outgroup in relation to the ingroup and their pure, national identity.

Web 2.0, the phase of the internet in which more user-generated content was employed, allowed for a new wave of far-right digital content. The increase in user-generated content and social media platforms changed the methods and tactics of the far-right, especially due to the ability for far-right individuals to form connections. Baele et al. (2020) argue that this strengthened international links between right-wing extremists, and changed how far-right recruits were interacted with and ultimately how far-right content is disseminated.

In 2011, 4chan's /pol/ or "politically incorrect" forum was created, a space based around trolling, shitposting, and posting of extremist content as a 'joke', or for the sake of being 'edgy' and angering others. The structure of 4chan's rating system typically rewards posts that are most transgressive and controversial, heightening the visibility of posts with the most shock-factor. Thorleifsson (2020) argues that this has caused /pol/ to become a haven for transnational white supremacists where fascist fantasies of the 'ultra nation' and the violent practices to attain and defend it are acted out through extreme language, othering, and conspiracy rhetoric. In these scenarios, the space is less defined by the specific nation one claims to defend, and more the extremist ideology of nativism. This provides an online space where far-right ideologies and conspiracies have the potential to bleed over to new contexts.

Whereas far-right online spaces are often thought of in terms of anonymous forums like Stormfront and 4chan's /pol/, Lewis (2019) argues that far-right social media has progressed through the power of celebrity, especially in the wake of Trump's 2016 election.

A variety of far-right or alt-right figureheads emerged as right-wing opinion leaders including alt-right neo-Nazi Richard Spencer and Breitbart News editor Milo Yiannopoulos. In a way, far-right movements have relied on the power of microcelebrity and opinion leaders even before the nascence of influencer culture, and far-right influencers are now the newest iteration of far-right adaptation to the modern digital space.

Instead of far-right 'celebrities' like Richard Spencer and Milo Yiannopoulos, far-right influencers have used algorithmic knowledge and digital literacy to work up through the ranks of social media and gain an audience, often producing audio-visual content in keeping with the latest iterations of Web 2.0 and the popularity of image-sharing and video-hosting sites like Instagram and YouTube (Baele et al., 2020; Conway et al. 2019; Lewis, 2019). Often, these influencers have no pre-existing allegiances with far-right groups in real life and have not occupied a public position. Instead, they organically rise up the ranks of social media through the dissemination of far-right content. Some media would write far-right influencers off as poorly educated, dogmatic, incel-types, but this is not always the case – some of these influencers are highly educated and maintain relatively normal, functional positions in society (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Davey & Ebner, 2017). Although far-right influencers capitalise on the new affordances of influencer culture, this type of far-right 'influencing' and content is not new.

Baele et al. (2020) highlight the importance of far-right blogs during the transitional Web '1.5' content where the internet was moving away from static sites and towards user-generated content. Far-right blogs consisted of static blog posts, but often had a comment section where discussion could be held. Baele et al. (2020) point to the importance of blogs like Robert B. Spencer's "Jihad Watch" and Pamela Geller's "Atlas Shrugs" played in the counter-jihad movement in Europe, whereas sections of Anders Breivik's manifesto were copied from similar Islamophobic blogs. In both these instances, the work of singular far-

right bloggers was highly influential – especially when it came to aspects of far-right ideology that were gaining mainstream traction, namely anti-Islam and counter-jihad sentiment. To put it plainly, far-right activists have evolved with the web, from the static forums of Stormfront, to the Web. 1.5 anti-Islam blogs, to now the Web 2.0 user-generated content. In this way, the concept of the far-right influencer is not new, only something that has moved to the forefront with the burgeoning growth of influencer culture, and 'influencer' status as a way to exploit the current online landscape.

5.6 The online far-right ecosystem

Baele et al. (2020) conceptualise the modern far-right online network as a four-levelled ecosystem, which can be explained in ecological terms. They describe the levels as entities, communities, biotopes, and whole network – no level could exist without the other, and each level works together in a kind of symbiotic relationship. Entities consist of individual domains such as websites or social media platforms such as a Facebook group pages. They are the individual nodes of the network that are linked together to form communities, often literally in the form of sharing hyperlinks to similar far-right entities in the community, creating a dynamic connection. Biotopes are the niches, or sometimes ideology, that communities inhabit – for instance, the 'manosphere' and white supremacists would be examples of far-right biotopes. These are communities that link together sometimes due to shared ideology or a shared cause. Finally, the whole network is just that, the macro-level of analysis that takes into view the link between all entities, communities, and biotopes in the far-right network.

In thinking of the far-right network as an ecosystem, especially against the backdrop of the user-generated content of Web 2.0, the role of the far-right influencer becomes

integral. While far-right influencers can be seen as their own entities, they are also responsible for forging communities through linking with other influencers, something influencer culture encourages. They perform the ideology that unites biotopes under the same ideology umbrella, and therefore become and binding part of the whole network.

While far-right social media 'influencing' is not new in essence, the wedding of far-right ideology and the strategic use of influencer culture has helped far-right movements adapt to the new landscape of Web 2.0 (Baele et al., 2020; Maly, 2020).

Far-right activists become successful influencers by combining far-right ideology with lifestyle content. Far-right issues are approached from multiple different angles. For instance, scholarly attention has been paid to influencers who blend traditional gender roles with far-right ideology to create a lifestyle brand that becomes part of the overall far-right movement – such as the emergence of 'pastel QAnon,' trad wives, and shield maidens to name a few, who create spaces for far-right women to perform their ideology (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2022; Love, 2020; Stern, 2022). Trad wives have become particularly pertinent in recent years, combining homesteading and homemaking lifestyle with the more dogmatic ideology that women should be subservient and endeavour to serve their husbands and families above all else, often as a response to modern feminism (Stotzer & Nelson, 2025). In many instances, this is part of a pipeline to other far-right (and pro-Trump) ideologies. Additionally, many 'trad wives' have broken through to mainstream, users such as Ballerina Farm and Nara Smith on TikTok, eliciting both supportive and concerned responses from the public (Agnew, 2024). In many instances, identities like these are linked to far-right conspiracy theory rhetoric. In the case of trad wives, the discourse of 'birthing as many white babies as possible' is linked to narratives like the Great Replacement, and neo-Nazi ideology

the Fourteen Words[11]which promote fear that the white race will be outnumbered, which positions this identity as a form of practical resistance (Kisyova, Veilleux-Lepage & Newby, 2022; Sykes & Hopner, 2024).

Maly (2020) uses the case of far-right influencer Brittany Pettibone to explore how these influencers use authenticity in their content to attain their far-right, 'metapolitical' goals. Using the example of Pettibone's wedding to Martin Sellner, a fellow far-right activist and leader of the nationalist Austrian Identity movement, Maly (2020) examines how lifestyle content is used to advance metapolitical goals. In a YouTube video about their wedding on Pettibone's channel (the video has since been removed, presumably by Pettibone), Pettibone and Sellner share idyllic and intimate wedding photos with their audience and discuss their reasons for getting married. Part of this conversation takes the general 'lifestyle' content slant, discussing potential problems in marriage, before taking a more explicit far-right lens, discussing the perceived ethics and implications of two far-right activists being married, how they intend to uphold traditional gender roles in their marriage, and constructing a framework in which 'the left' is out to get them (Maly, 2020). As Maly (2020) points out, not only is Pettibone engaging in this construction of authenticity with her audience by sharing seemingly intimate details of her life and lifestyle, but this video, which is simply titled "3 Reasons Why Marriage Is A Risk (And Why We Still Took It) [sic]," has the potential to be displayed by search engines to an audience that is looking for content on marriage and lifestyle, and may not be aware that this particular result contains far-right rhetoric. This is the kind of algorithmic visibility opitmisation and search engine optimisation that influencers leverage - it not only increases the chances of the content being shown more

[11] "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children," a phrase that originated with neo-Nazi David Lane's 88 Precepts (derived from a longer quote in *Mein Kampf)* and has since become a slogan for white nationalists (Michael, 2009).

in the algorithm, but also increases the chances that organic traffic looking for content on popular keywords will be driven to their content (Magalhães & Yu, 2017).

Utilisation of this kind of SEO technique is an example of how far-right influencers highjack topics and use algorithmic knowledge to advance their dissemination goals. Darius & Stephany (2020) demonstrate how the far-right uses the concept of "hashjacking" to dominate online spaces dedicated to other issues. On Twitter, far-right groups were observed using COVID-19 related hashtags such as #FlattentheCurve to spread far-right disinformation and rhetoric.

The success of far-right movements relies on how efficiently they embed themselves within the digital mainstream. Influencers like Pettibone are able to exist on mainstream platforms for a sustained period of time due to their adherence to the community guidelines, while influencers that are deplatformed remain in the greater network due to the dynamic creation and limitation of far-right spaces and platforms across the internet (Maly, 2021). This is the case for several of the influencers in this project – though they have been deplatformed from major social media sites (though some managed to maintain their accounts on these sites for years), they have still managed to retain their position in the far-right network.

Though far-right movements have utilised the internet since its creation, we see a distinct shift in how their dissemination goals are realised today, and one of the ways in which these goals are achieved is through the process of the far-right influencer (Maly, 2021). Each influencer represents, at least marginally, a different function or angle into far-right ideology. This becomes a powerful dissemination tactic that allows the far-right movement to reach many different audiences and niche communities, providing entry into the far-right community from multiple points (Maly, 2021; Rothut et al., 2023).

Far-right influencers make an array of content for multiple different communities, but what are the discursive strategies that underpin their content and how are they attempting to garner momentum for their movement? Research since the earliest iterations of online far-right spaces find that the discourse is framed by power, sometimes even borrowing the discursive strategies of the 'leftist' institutions they claim to oppose to highlight the ways they perceive they are being oppressed and discriminated against (Atton, 2006; Fong et al., 2021).

While far-right rhetoric is consistently characterised by hate speech and othering of minorities, women, immigrants, etc. they have also been observed to construct themselves as 'the other' and victims in a world ruled by 'the left.' (Atton, 2006; Lewis, 2020; Maly, 2020).

Similarly, much of the conspiracy theory rhetoric they employ is focused on power differentials. Fong et al. (2021) found that language categories such as power, religion, and death were higher for conspiracy influencers than science advocates. Most, if not all, conspiracy theories are power-related, with many of the popular conspiracy theories with the far-right claiming traditional ways of life are under attack from powerful, usually leftist or elitist forces. In this framework, far-right influencers and conspiracy theorists construct themselves as the victims where behaviours like racism, prejudice, and hate speech are constructed as common-sense reactions to the attack against the idealised far-right world (Atton, 2006; Maly, 2020).

In this framework, far-right influencers present themselves as authentic actors who want to pull back the curtain, or radicalise, their audience. Going back to this notion of perceived authenticity – influencers are exploiting their direct connection with their audience to position themselves as more believable and credible than mainstream news sources. Due to the distrust of mainstream media and the belief that it is intrinsically leftist, these influencers

present themselves as the only alternative media source in which one can learn the 'true facts' or conspiratorial content (Lewis, 2019).

However, most of these conspiracy theories take place in the global context and the secret elites are often named as 'globalists.' Conspiracy theories popular with the far-right often take place in a vague, global context - useful because they never have to answer to specifics about the alleged conspiracies, and they skirt around naming individuals or invoking extremist beliefs outright to abide by community regulations online (Basham, 2003). One of the questions that must be asked is how far-right influencers make sense of these conspiracy theories in their local contexts.

Rothut et al. (2023) identified four major communities among 243 German far-right influencers on Telegram, including one composed of regionally engaged online activists. According to Rothut et al. (2023), these influencers attempted to reach a broad audience with content about recent trends and linked with regional activists and politicians. This community is characterised by a regional focus, 'patriotic' interests, and using current events such as the COVID-19 pandemic as a mobilisation framework - the same could be said about what has been observed to date from the Irish far-right movement (Fattibene et al., 2024a).

Anecdotally, a similar pattern has been seen in Ireland. The COVID-19 pandemic presented an opportunity for far-right groups, including far-right influencers, to mobilise and reach a more mainstream audience. This community also consists of other regional far-right influencers and aspiring politicians, occupying that rhetorical space in the far-right ecosystem (Curran, 2020). The question that remains is how Irish far-right influencers construct global far-right ideology and conspiracy theories in their own local contexts.

5.7 Conclusion

Far-right influencers are a critical level of analysis not only due to the role they play in the far-right ecosystem overall, but also in the role they play as ideological intermediaries to their audience (Baele et al., 2020; Rothut et al., 2023). Followers look towards influencers to provide the functions of opinion leadership and provide a sense of authenticity that traditional media cannot provide, especially in far-right spaces (Arnesson, 2022a). Influencer culture is integral to the modern landscape of internet culture, and far-right movements can gain traction through the prominence of far-right influencers who use the tenets of influencer culture to build an audience, going so far as to create 'lifestyle' content, which may reach an audience that otherwise would not be exposed to far-right content (Maly, 2020).

Due to the importance of influencers in the far-right movement, it is integral for research to focus on how these far-right influencers engage in political discourse and even more importantly, how they construct far-right ideology as it relates to their local contexts. Influencers are operating on the individual level of the far-right ecosystem, but they influence communities at large as well as the whole network, and in some cases, the mainstream (Baele et al., 2020). Influencers are representative of the discursive construction and contagion of ideology and conspiracy theory into Ireland, and they are the ones shaping calls to action for their Irish audience. Therefore, examining far-right discourse at the level of the far-right influencers not only gives insight into how they are adapting transnational content to Ireland, but also what action they are calling for to defend the Irish state.

Chapter 6: The Far-right Playbook

6.1 Introduction

This thesis has thus far discussed how far-right ideology and conspiracy has operated over time – both in Ireland and beyond, as well as how far-right influencers fit into the far-right ecosystem and process of contagion. What is less understood is the process or 'playbook' of how these far-right influencers operate.

While research has identified individual discursive tactics used by certain far-right political parties, influencers, or online groups, there is less focus on how these strategies operate together as a coherent discursive repertoire (Darius & Stephany, 2020; Maly, 2020; Rothut et al., 2023; Wodak, 2015). Especially in nationalist movements, it is important to determine to what extent these strategies are transnational, and what they incorporate from their own nationalist histories (Macklin, 2013; Nightingale, 2021; Wodak, 2009).

Ireland is a prime case study for this – it has its own nuanced nationalist history, yet has not seen far-right political success, though this paper has demonstrated that far-right sentiment has long been present on the island (Coakley, 2011; O'Malley & Fitzgibbon, 2014; Redmond, 2021). As the far-right movement gains visibility post-COVID, and as Irish far-right influencers attempt to maintain their online presence, it is critical to know where they are sourcing their rhetorical strategies and how they are reinterpreting Irish nationalism to achieve their aims (Fattibene et al., 2024a). This chapter will examine the literature on individual discursive strategies used by far-right movements, in preparation to analyse how these strategies operate together as a far-right 'playbook' for the Irish influencers in this study.

The idea of a far-right 'playbook' - a repertoire of rhetorical tools far-right influencers deploy – pulls from literature on mainstreaming, interpretive repertoires, populist narratives, conspiracy theory, and influencer culture (Anderson, 1983; Miller-Idriss, 2020; Mondon &

Winter, 2020). Wodak's (2015) examination of far-right discourse establishes that many far-right parties throughout history draw on the same linguistic strategies to promote nationalistic, xenophobic, and racist rhetoric. This repertoire can be fluid between jurisdictions – though many nations draw on the same strategies, the particulars of use depends on the sociohistorical context of the nation and current events in the political zeitgeist (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Mondon & Winter, 2020). These strategies are constantly being constructed and reconstructed throughout political discourse, made more accessible by the democratisation of political speech afforded by the internet and the rise of 'political' influencers and online spaces where political discourse is enacted (Lewis, 2019; Rothut et al., 2023).

Far-right conspiracy theory rhetoric is both an amalgamation of these discursive strategies and another tool in the repertoire – it solidifies populist binaries of corrupt elite vs. the people, the threat of ingroup in decline, and the encouragement of turning away from mainstream institutions in order to 'do your own research' (Douglas et al., 2017; Harambam, 2020; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). At the same time, it also serves as a mobiliser for audiences. It provides cognitive closure to an audience experiencing social uncertainty, it promotes ingroup cohesion, and provides a framework for viewing the social world where everything can be construed as evidence of a nefarious plan (Douglas et al., 2019; van Prooijen & van Vugt, 2018). Equally as important, it flies under the radar in online spaces that ban racist, xenophobic, or extremist rhetoric – conspiracy theory manages to convey the same extremist message in a 'softened' package (Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Miller-Idriss, 2020; Mudde, 2019). The context of the online ecosystem should not be ignored here; far-right influencers also exploit perceived authenticity, emotive messaging, and their interconnected network to amplify their reach on social media (Baele et al., 2020; Boler & Davis, 2018; Forberg, 2021; Lewis, 2019).

It is known that far-right influencers, and far-right movements as a whole, tend to borrow the language and tropes from other successful far-right movements, irrespective of context (Barkun, 2013; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Wodak, 2015). A prime example of this is the Great Replacement Theory, which draws on conspiracy tropes present for centuries and was popularised by Renaud Camus to represent the situation in France, then quickly picked up by other European far-right parties and migrated from the fringe to the mainstream in the United States (Ekman, 2022; Miller-Idriss, 2020). The many iterations of the Great Replacement Theory rely on nationalist context, this brand of nationalism essentially consists of the same regurgitated tropes: white entitlement to the nation, and fear of losing power (Gardell, 2024).

While creating a shared native and national identity is paramount to the success of far-right rhetoric, this identity seems to largely rely on shared construction of the 'ultra nation' rather than any individual aspects of the respective nation (Barkun, 2023; Griffin, 2018; Thorleifsson, 2022). It must be considered if the same is occurring in Ireland, whose political and historical context as a post-colonial nation was thought to in some ways prevent an influx of far-right ideology, however it is seen that is not the case (O'Malley, 2008; O'Malley & Fitzgibbon, 2014).

In order to do this, the processes of far-right influencers and activists in other contexts must be examined, to see if their discourse is representative of a pattern that can also be applied to Ireland. How is this ideology made relevant – and threatening - to Ireland? What discursive practices are utilised to obtain this? How are conspiracy theories used? And most importantly – how can these strategies be represented? This thesis has already discussed the bleed-over to extremism with far-right conspiracy rhetoric and that far-right influencers ultimately espouse calls to action that can be compelling to their audiences. Given that the far-right movement in Ireland can be described as being in the early stages relative to other

far-right movements across Europe (Harrison, 2024; Karlsson & Ördén, 2025), understanding how their discursive playbook compares to other movements not only gives us insight into the aims of these far-right influencers, but also a potential to understand what we may see in the future.

Although far-right content around the world is often ultra-nationalistic, far-right actors have shown they are not opposed to networking across borders and replicating discursive strategies that have been successful in other countries (Barkun, 2013; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Wodak, 2015). Though it is known, content-wise, what topics are covered in this type of rhetoric – migration, conspiracy theory, anti-elitism, to name a few – it is harder to name the process and effect that this rhetoric has (Wodak, 2015).

The reality is that far-right actors, including online figureheads, enact a similar repertoire of discursive strategies across contexts, be it Ireland or Spain or Sweden, that results in a process, or 'playbook,' of identity, emotionality, and incitement that results in the trend of right-wing extremism playing out in the political field today (Barkun, 2013; Ekman, 2014; Gemignani & Jiménez Carrasco, 2023; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Wodak, 2015) .

Many of these strategies have been well documented by discursive scholars across fields and various jurisdictions, but little work examines the process, and impact, of these strategies all together (Douglas e. al., 2017; Harambam, 2020; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). Here, theoretical underpinnings and discursive strategies are examined to understand how far-right influencers are able to construct and exploit boundaries and the concept of identity, and also the impact this has on developing existential and cultural threat, and possibly inciting or accelerating violence (Jolley et al., 2018; Wodak, 2015).

6.2 Us vs. Them: Social categorisation theory, identity, and boundaries

Social Identity Theory gives insight into the social processes far-right influencers are enacting in their discourse. SIT explains how self-concept is bolstered by group membership, and the mechanics of delineating the ingroup versus the outgroup. A component of SIT, social categorisation theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is useful for understanding how far-right influencers utilise frames related to ingroup and outgroup to construct identity. Similarly, SIT is a useful lens to pull from when examining the discourse of far-right influencers, especially the dichotomy of 'us' vs. 'them,' which can be used to construct ethnonational belonging (Drury & Reicher, 2000; Reicher, 2004).

Social categorisation theory is a social psychology theory that explains the tendency for people to categorise themselves and others according to discernible social features such as race, sex, and age. This contributes to the larger theoretical background of bias and stereotype formation, and the creation of ingroup and outgroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Likewise, SIT emphasises the importance we place on belonging to a social group, and its role in the formation of our own identity and self-concept. In tandem, these theories add to the understanding of individual and group identity processes, as well as the basis for how and why construction of the ingroup and outgroup occurs.

According to Hogg (2014), uncertainty and instability around identity can be linked to seeking out group membership in social groups with hard 'ingroup' and 'outgroup' boundaries. Uncertainty about the social world and one's role in it can motivate individuals to gravitate towards groups where these phenomena are strictly defined and explained for them. Social media facilitates this process, as it offers an endless variety of niche social groups to those lacking group membership or social connection in other ways. Through interacting and aligning themselves with these communities, users become part of the ingroup. Conspiracy theory circles, religious extremism, and even white nationalism can be alluring options for those looking for an explanation of the world around them, and fixed boundaries around

ingroups and outgroups, where belonging to the ingroup bolsters their own self-identity, and helps placate that sense of uncertainty (Douglas et al., 2017; van Prooijen, 2013).

Discursively, it is paramount for far-right influencers to a.) provide compelling explanations and reframe the social world in a predictable, controlled way to allay uncertainty for their audience and b.) create clear delineations between ingroup and outgroup that bolsters their audience's sense of belonging and identity within the ingroup (Douglas et al., 2017, Tajfel & Turner, 1979; van Prooijen, 2013; Wodak, 2015). Two particular cases showcase how far-right influencers and opinion leaders attempt to sell group membership as an anecdote to uncertainty and how they construct the outgroup as something to rebel against. The first discourse of far-right Spanish party Vox, and the second is the rising 'trad wife' subculture.

Gemignani & Jiménez Carrasco (2023) examine the discourse of far-right Spanish party Vox in terms of constructing the ingroup (native Spaniards) and the outgroup – Muslim immigrants. According to the authors, party spokespersons create distance between the imperilled native Spaniards and the other, Muslim community in Spain by using oppositional logic to tie Muslim immigrants to crime, extremism, and inevitable threat to Spanish culture. This separates the ingroup/outgroup into axes of known/unknown (in terms of culture, values and ideology), and safety/danger.

This process of distancing and oppositional logic is observable in the discourse of many far-right parties globally, who align groups of immigrants with crime and social ills and leftist movements with the loss of 'traditional' culture (Wodak, 2015). This is followed by the promise that aligning yourself more closely with 'traditional' far-right values will provide a stable, salient identity.

An example of this is the rise in prominence of online 'trad wives' (see chapter 5) as resurgence of support and visibility for women who endorse traditional gender roles and

submission in marriage (Proctor, 2023). This lifestyle is often presented as a more fulfilling, natural order solution to the 'woes' of modern feminism. This movement is often wedded with alt-right and far-right ideology, and contrary to the prevailing sentiment that women in alt-right spheres play more passive and supportive roles, several 'trad wife' influencers have risen to prominence, demonstrating their importance to the movement's discourse (Kisyova et al., 2022). By promoting aspirational lifestyle content like this, what influencers are doing is essentially cosplaying a salient, cohesive identity to their followers, with the implicit promise that if these followers adhere to the same lifestyle and ideology, they might improve their self-concept. This process works through the premise of self-categorisation: it encourages followers to align themselves with a certain identity by performing the shared values, norms, and practices associated with that ingroup (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner & Reynolds, 2012).

Kisyova et al.'s (2022) research on trad wives reveals that, in their discourse, they provide a solution to identity incongruence by constructing the alt-right, 'trad wife' lifestyle as an identity aligned with greater fulfilment, belonging, and harmony. Furthermore, they problematise modern society, and portray 'whiteness' as something under threat, and only to be solved through trad wife ideals of 'birthing as many white babies' as possible.

Beginning to look at this process discursively, problematising aspects of modern society and linking solutions to inherently far-right narratives is prominent in far-right discourse. Bacchi's (1999) work on problematisation in policy focuses on how this framing process occurs. Political discourse does not serve to address social problems as much as it does to construct them. Bacchi's framework analyses this by examining how the problem is represented and how it links to the sociopolitical and historical context that produced it and how, historically and culturally, certain phenomena are constructed as issues to be debated, solved, or controlled. Important as well is what is absent from this discourse of problematisation (Bacchi, 2012; Bacchi 2016). In the case of trad wives, this might take the

form of domestic violence, economic strain or financial abuse, or expectations of labour – all not commonly addressed as problems in the trad wife cannon (Deem, 2023; Sykes & Hopner, 2024).

This is seen over and over in far-right discourse in which certain events, trends, or phenomena are constructed as problems to be solved – i.e. immigration, declining white birth rate (Gemignani & Jiménez Carrasco, 2023; Kisyova et al., 2022). By identifying these areas as a problem, far-right influencers and opinion leaders can then engage in framing processes to link these societal 'problems' to far-right 'solutions.'

Benford and Snow's (2000) framing processes, drawing on social movement theory, attempt to describe how, after problematising certain phenomena, speakers attempt to frame their messages to achieve their aims, and create resonance with their audience.

The diagnostic frame relates to Bacchi's process of problematisation, in which the problem is constructed and defined. Prognostic frames propose solutions, (i.e. in the case of the trad wives, living a more 'traditional' lifestyle and having white babies), and motivational frames encourage audiences to action, usually by using some sense of urgency or impending threat or emotionality. Additionally, tactics like frame bridging are utilised to widen the net to encapsulate unrelated but ideologically congruent issues into the problem – this is often seen in conspiracy rhetoric, which serves as a catchall to critique a multitude of unrelated progressive policies, such as climate change, feminism, LGBTQIA+ rights, which are all portrayed as linked under the far-right conspiratorial umbrella.

6.3 Discursive strategies: downplaying, softening, and victimhood

Though much of the construction of problematisation and diagnostic and prognostic frames of far-right discourse focus on immigration and race as the 'problem' affecting today's society, far-right influencers take measures as to not appear racists themselves and

reject the labels of racist, xenophobic, etc. Some of these strategies include downplaying and softening the racist undertones of their arguments – and also, more structurally, reversing the argument on its head to construct *themselves*, as white westerners and far-right ideologues, as the true victims within the power structures – ironically borrowing language of the left to do so (Allchorn, 2020; Brown et al., 2023; Paul, 2021).

Explicit prejudice is less acceptable in the mainstream of today's society, at least in the Western world, though this can be a fluid and nuanced phenomenon (Álvarez-Benjumea, 2025). This can lead far-right influencers to obscure these ideals behind of veneer of discursive techniques that downplay their severity. Much of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's (2003) work on 'colourblind racism' examines how American discourse post Jim Crow and civil rights era has shifted to more indirect, 'softened' statements, that still at their core espouse the same racist ideology. The goal has changed to perform a kind of discourse that will not allow one to be labelled a racist (a socially unacceptable stance, at least in the mainstream) but still conveys the kind of racist othering that reinforces ingroup and outgroup identities. Using this softened discourse instead of extreme rhetoric has select benefits for influencers. Though it cannot be determined whether they individually care about being labelled explicitly racist or not, deflecting this label allows them to reach a more mainstream audience. It can be seen as the same strategy as metapolitical whiteness in that it broadens the appeal by making these concepts something that appeal culturally (Paul, 2021). It also has the added practical benefit of skirting community guidelines on social media sites (Rothut et al., 2023). Far-right influencers employ these kind of strategies across the board to access the same mainstream affordances their success depends on (Brown et al., 2023).

The phenomenon of 'collective victimhood' also comes from SIT, in which groups may attach the effects of being harmed or oppressed by another group to their identity, in which it becomes a salient piece of the collective identity (Noor et al., 2012).

Furthermore, *vicarious* victimhood occurs when this collective victimhood identity transcends not just the people who directly experienced the traumatic event, but everyone who aligns with that identity, often for generations into the future (Noor et al., 2012; Lynch & Joyce, 2018). This is particularly relevant in the case of Ireland, where even early nationalistic rhetoric was motivated to oppose a British identity and resist British oppression on the island, and still remains an important part of Irish identity today. This is utilised by far-right influencers in order to construct the framework, typically a conspiratorial one, in which traditionally privileged social groups (i.e. white, Western men) are the victims of other oppressors (elites, government, or progressive movements) (Boussalis et al., 2024).

Allchorn (2020) demonstrates this by looking at the discursive strategies of high-ranking far-right influencers like British activists Tommy Robinson and Milo Yiannopoulos, and Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who all employ this technique. Far-right influencers like these use this strategy as a rallying cry for their audience to view themselves as true victims in which the power structure is reversed, and they are absolved from racism and discrimination and instead see themselves as the victims of these processes.

This narrative is captured in Allchorn's (2020) analysis of Milo Yiannopoulos' speech at a 'free speech' rally at U.C. Berkeley, in which he stated:

> "When it comes to oppressed minorities and marginalised groups, there's no tribe in America at greater risk – the physical and existential risk – than the campus conservative," (p. 7).

By reversing the power structures often present in more liberal discursive stances, far-right actors such as Yiannopoulos are able to construct themselves, and their 'ingroup' as the threatened minority – using common narratives of discrimination for their own benefit.

These are strategies that far-right influencers employ that are documented across multiple jurisdictions. While each of these strategies has been examined as individual phenomenon, they also reinforce each other, creating a distinctive repertoire.

6.4 Constructing the nation: nationalism in discourse

To return to Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and examine the nation as an ingroup, in which national identity that is constantly being reconstructed in discourse. In far-right discourse, the nation becomes not only a salient identity, but also a tangible entity with real and imagined borders, and something that requires the constant need to defend and honour it by invoking national martyrs, identifying threats, and calling for action (Wodak, 2015).

Discursive work goes into this construction of nation – it relies on collective memory and shared history, and successful constructions of it draw on feelings and shared experiences that can delineate between those who are rightful members of the nation and those who are not (Anderson, 1983). It also relies on a selective memory of the past – what is remembered and what is allowed to be forgotten, especially regarding existential threats and security, shapes the identity of the contemporary nation, and how it approaches securitisation (Fitzgerald, 2013).

In *The Discursive Construction of National Identity,* examining the nationalistic discourse of nativist party Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (FPÖ) in Wodak's (2009) native Austria, they write:

> "The construction of a common political past revolves around founding myths and myths of origin, mythical figures, political successes, times of prosperity and stability, defeats and crises," (p. 31).

The examples of this are widespread from Trump's "Make America Great Again" discourse to the invocation of revolutionary martyrs in today's far-right discourse – this is a tendency that's been seen since the Militia and Patriot movements and their invocation of revolutionary martyrs such as the founding fathers, usually to staunchly defend the second amendment and create juxtapositions between the America of today and the America envisioned by 'our forefathers' (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Mulloy, 2004). In Ireland, another post-colonial, post-revolutionary context, the same can be observed – revolutionary heroes like Michael Collins are lauded as symbolic of the nation, a symbol against British oppression (Redmond, 2021).

Similarly, the concept of *victimhood nationalism* is relevant to the Irish context. Victimhood nationalism refers to the nation's history of past suffering insofar as it shapes a collective identity. Historian Jie-Hyun Lim (2021) uses this term to describe how these historical memories result in legitimacy for modern political movements and national identities. Lim (2021) examines how this manifests in their native Korea, and the legacy of colonisation in creating Japanese 'perpetrators' and Korean 'victims,' but also examines the concept in contexts such as Israel, Poland, and Germany. This framework can be applied to Ireland as well in the sense that Ireland's history of colonisation and oppression is constructed as a collective memory where the Irish people were 'victims.' This concept not only influenced modern Irish politics, but the concept of nationalism in Ireland (Baumann, 2013).

6.5 Emotionality, fear, and accelerationism

Part of this construction of nation revolves around the idea that the nation must be defended or its culture, ways of life, and existence will be threatened. Constructing this

imposing threat relies on creating fear and drawing on emotionally charged arguments (Buzan et al., 1998).

According to securitisation theory, when actors create a dynamic where the threat is so heightened that all action is a matter of survival, then it becomes possible to justify extreme measures, to protect the integrity of the nation (Buzan et al., 1998). This is not a process that is unique to the far-right, but it is evident in far-right discourse (Marcks & Pawelz, 2020). The mortality salience model suggests that this kind of existential threat can intensify ingroup cohesion, making exclusionary and extreme rhetoric more enticing when the threat is evoked (Frischlich et al., 2015; Greenberg et al., 1986).

Marcks & Pawelz (2020) call this creation of this threatening framework 'narratives of imperilment.' This kind of narrative ranges from conveying a threat to traditional ways of life to complete extinction. This is often seen in the discourse surrounding certain conspiracies, from Cultural Marxism (a threat to 'traditional' conservative customs to destabilise society) to the Great Replacement (the belief that white westerners will be systematically replaced and eradicated). By constructing a world in which the audience's very existence is under threat, far-right actors can then justify extreme actions as a means for survival. This would not be possible without constructing and re-constructing the ingroup and outgroup through far-right discourse. Perceived threat can also heighten ingroup cohesion, strengthening ingroup bonds and outgroup distrust (Castano et al., 2002; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

This is similar to the process of accelerationism in radicalisation literature. While applied to all sides of the political spectrum, accelerationism is a mainstay in far-right discourse, including manifestos of far-right terrorists such as Brenton Tarrant, which framed his mass killing as an act of sociopolitical destabilisation, ushering in a kind of social transformation, and urged others to do the same (Harwood, 2021). Within the far-right

sphere, accelerationism refers to the process by which, faced by the looming threat of societal and cultural collapse, the drive for far-right actors to increase disorder and violence, or accelerate the flames of inevitable collapse so that the process occurs faster (Walther & McCoy, 2021). By highlighting this perceived ingroup threat (i.e. the Great Replacement or demographic shift), it ultimately legitimises the call for violence to facilitate the collapse and transformation of society back to 'order' in which the ingroup regain dominance (Hardy & Henschke, 2024; Kriner et al., 2022).

Sometimes this occurs in the culmination of an attack, as with Tarrant's attack on the Christchurch mosque, and sometimes it is perpetuated in far-right political discourse, or in reaction to a trigger event. Regardless, the aim is to create fear around a looming existential threat, which justifies immediate action. In doing so, they transform it into a security issue, which necessitates action (Buzan et al., 1998).

There are several examples of this globally, where far-right actors construct a looming threat to instil fear and encourage rapid action. For instance, in Germany, the murder of a teenage girl in Berlin in 2018 prompted a slew of anti-migrant discourse, although the perpetrator's ethnic background was not initially shared. Proponents of this line of attack included members of AfD, Germany's nativist political party, and a prominent member of Pegida, a far-right and anti-Islam organisation. Darmstadt et al. (2019) report that far-right actors perpetuated this narrative saw the country "en route to civil war because of perceived 'mass immigration' and 'Islamisation'"(p. 155).

Similar events have been observed in Ireland – accusations about the murderer of Ashling Murphy - a young Irish woman who was killed while out running in a seemingly random attack – circulated in far-right spaces, with the same insistence that the perpetrator was not a migrant and not Irish, before a suspect had even been apprehended (Brennan & McDonnell, 2022). Likewise, the attack on three children outside a Dublin primary school in

November 2023 received the same treatment – far-right actors alleged that the perpetrator was not Irish, and that this was a social consequence as a result of 'mass immigration' (Carroll, 2023; Maguire, 2023). This led to the Dublin riots that resulted in looting, arson, and violence. This mirrors a well-documented far-right strategy called the Kondopoga Technology, after the 2006 Kondopoga riots in Russia, in which far-right actors seized on instances of violence committed by migrants to frame immigration as a problem and exploit ethnic tensions in order to accelerate social unrest (Arnold & Markowitz, 2018).

This process can be seen as the type of fear-baiting and accelerationism referred to in the literature – trigger events, or even common social ills, are constructed as direct consequences of migration, loss of culture, values, and national identity. This, in turn, justifies accelerationist action borne out of the fear of a changing national, social, and cultural landscape. Linking the idea of accelerationism back to SIT, this language of emotionality and fear does, almost paradoxically, reinforce the identity of the nation – by constructing the idea of who belongs 'outside,' it reinforces the idea of the 'inside'. In looking at Vox's immigration discourse in Spain, Gemignani & Jiménez Carrasco (2023) make the point that constructing the 'outgroup' in this way is key to the construction of the nation as 'home' or the salient, solidified national identity, that must be protected at all costs.

Ekman (2022) examines this specifically through the lens of conspiracy theory rhetoric among the far-right, especially the Great Replacement. Ekman (2022) identifies two inherent *topoi*, or foundational themes, within the argument of the Great Replacement: the topos of existential threat and the topos of cultural threat. Although these two arguments routinely work together, they are worth separating to examine each's discursive implications. Note that while Ekman and other scholars examine these discursive techniques typically within their own jurisdictions (in the case of Ekman, Sweden), and while these arguments inherently revolve around the defence of one's own respective nation, one's own respective

culture – the strategies remain much the same regardless of country or nation, no matter how individualised and valuable each nation is presented.

The topos of existential threat, Ekman (2022) argues, is constructed around the threat that migrants pose to natives of the nation. The topos of *cultural* threat revolves around the claims made by Renaud Camus, pioneer of Great Replacement theory, relies on the threat of demographic shift. Of course, the very 'threat' of this claim relies on underlying racism and xenophobia, but is often expressed in as 'legitimate' concerns about 'cultural compatibility' (another softening technique that negates the label of xenophobia). For instance, political parties such as Vox and AfD make claims that those migrating from Muslim countries will have values that inherently clash with Western values, undermine LGBTQIA+ and women's rights, that immigration will put undue stress on the housing and labour market, that their 'high birth rates' will shift demographics (Allchorn, 2020; Darmstadt et al., 2019; Ekman, 2022; Gemignani & Jiménez Carrasco, 2023; Marcks & Pawelz, 2020).

As Ekman (2022) concludes, the cultural threat becomes the existential threat through discursive techniques, especially by constructing the outgroup as not only culturally incompatible, but also as having inherent characteristics that threaten the existence of the nation. As one quote from a Swedish far-right column states:

> "Sweden should be the land of the Swedes. Sweden should be a country where we Swedes feel at home. It is unproblematic and obvious. It is one of our most basic human rights to wish to remain ourselves in our own national and cultural identity" (cited in Ekman, 2022, p. 1138).

The same quote could appear in any other far-right sphere from any other country – it downplays the contentiousness of this claim by insisting that the right to a delineated national and cultural identity is a human right, and then drawing a hard boundary between the

construction of ‘us’ and ‘them.’ The premise that this is under threat and that they, as native citizens, are the victims, justifies action to reinforce these boundaries.

6.6 Conclusion

Far-right actors, regardless of place, nation, or local history, appear to be using these same discursive strategies that aim to cut to the core of a threatened national identity. By using SIT as a lens, it is easy to understand why these arguments are so appealing – they promise a more harmonious social world and a more stable identity by ascribing to their movement. Tapping into the accelerationist discourse heightens the necessity for immediate action, which has already proved to have devastating social consequences. While the literature remains disparate and segmented by individual countries and parties, it becomes clear when looking at it holistically that many far-right movements follow this framework, and utilise the same processes to incite action. If the same far-right playbook is in its nascence in Ireland, we can expect to see the same process of construction of the nation, identity work, and accelerationism. The following chapters of this thesis will explore the notion of this far-right ‘playbook’ in the case of four Irish far-right influencers. It will examine how the strategies of this playbook operate together in an attempt to mobilise their audience.

Chapter 7: Methodology

7.1 Aims and objectives

The influx of visibility in online far-right sentiment in Ireland since the COVID-19 pandemic has generated questions about the nature of the movement and its proponents (Cannon et al., 2022; Gallagher, 2020). One of the most pervasive unanswered questions surrounding this phenomenon is how the Irish far-right influencers are using the existing ideology and conspiracy theory rhetoric from other contexts to garner momentum for their own movement.

The literature review provided an overview of far-right and conspiracy tenets both globally and how it pertains to Ireland's history, and why far-right influencers are an appropriate level of analysis to examine these questions. The aim of this project is to understand the far-right influencer 'playbook' in Ireland, or their repertoire of rhetorical and discursive strategies to promote far-right ideology, and how it relates to other contexts. In addition, an exploration of the *localisation* of global far-right narratives by these influencers will highlight how far-right conspiracies are adapted for an Irish audience.

In an attempt to understand this, the following research questions are addressed by this study:

- How are far-right influencers adapting far-right ideology to cater to an Irish audience and garner support for their movement?
    - How are conspiracy theories used as tools in this discourse?
    - How do they import conspiracy theories and ideology from other contexts and adapt them to Ireland?

- How do influencers import conspiracy theories and ideology from other jurisdictions and adapt them for an Irish audience?
- What are the key themes of relevance in far-right influencer content?
- What discursive strategies are used by far-right influencers to construct meaning in online spaces?

7.2 Research design

In order to answer these research questions, a two-phase approach was adopted, utilising a mixed-method approach consisting of both content analysis and discourse analysis. These methods were chosen because, while there is some research that addresses the key foci of the Irish far-right, there is very limited literature on the purpose and mechanisms of Irish far-right influencer content (Fattibene et al., 2024a; Gallagher & O'Connor, 2021; Lynch et al., 2025). This method was chosen as an iterative approach: a content analysis was conducted, and the emergent topics were used to select segments for discourse analysis in order to investigate the discursive strategies used by influencers. In order to determine what global conspiracy theories are prevalent in the content generated by these far-right influencers, a content analysis is necessary. The purpose of a content analysis is to describe the characteristics of the content including areas of focus, concepts, or thematic coverage (Benoit, 2010; Berelson, 1952; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Krippendorff, 1980; Wesley, 2014).

Content analysis is used for its systematic approach to evaluating communication (Berelson, 1952; Krippendorff, 1980). Content was quantitatively analysed to determine frequency of topics and qualitatively analysed, using a directed approach drawing on extant literature (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), namely Mudde's (2002) taxonomy of far-right ideology and exploratory research on topics prevalent in online Irish far-right spaces (Fattibene et al., 2024a). Because the ideology of the far-right is inherently 'messy' in that it tends to contain

internal overlap and inconsistencies (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Mudde, 2007), these sources were used to implement a structure or hierarchy for the content codes that mirrors the existing literature (see below). The content analysis provided insight into what conspiracy rhetoric, far-right ideology, and Irish context is present in the data including the overall coverage of certain conspiracy theories. The level of analysis was topics as denoted in the coding structure. Frequency of topics was also analysed. Topics rather than individual words or phrases were chosen due to the tendency for certain conspiracy theories and far-right ideology to be referred to by varying, largely interchangeable monikers ("The Great Reset" vs "Agenda 21", "globalists" vs. "elitists" or "New World Order"). Additionally, 'dog-whistling' or using coded language that, on the surface, has no extreme meaning but an audience may understand as denoting an extremist ideology, is common in this type of far-right content (López, 2014; Wodak, 2015). Therefore, different coded phrases or words may superficially denote one issue, while the intention is to convey a more extreme strain of far-right ideology. Therefore, it is highly important that analysis draws on the body of literature on far-right dog whistles and terminology. The more common of these dog-whistle terms are noted in the codebook (see Appendix A).

The content analysis is conceptual in nature rather than relational (Krippendorff, 2004; Neuendorf, 2017). Due to the aim of this content analysis being merely to represent the content present in the data as well as its frequency and overall coverage, the relationship between themes does not need to be explored at this point in the analysis. Discourse analysis provided the basis for the remaining analysis. Discourse analysis is a method used to understand the use of language to construct the social world (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The discourse analysis will address connections between these themes, and more importantly, how meaning-making is constructed and how far-right ideology and conspiracy theory is promoted by far-right influencers, as well as how these are constructed as Irish issues and

used to meet the needs of the Irish far-right. Content analysis and discourse analysis have been combined in a mixed-method approach to examine far-right rhetoric by Wodak (2015) and Wodak & Reisigl (2015). Additionally, authors such as Krzyżanowski (2020), van Dijk (1983), Klein & Muis (2019) and Collins (2023) demonstrate how using a two-stage methodology combining content or thematic analysis and discourse analysis with political media allows for greater depth of findings. The benefit of this methodology is that it anchors the depth of discursive strategies within the broader scope that a content analysis offers, allowing for both an overview of the corpus of content and a rigorous investigation on the salience of the discursive strategies within the data (Krippendorff, 1980; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

The content analysis answers the *what* of the research aim – what ideology and conspiracy theory do far-right influencer cover, what is used to convey Irish identity and nationalism, what tenets of ideology are most prominent. A content analysis also has the benefit of portraying frequency of these themes. The frequency and coverage of specific issues over others can be telling in terms of what is salient to the Irish far-right and what these influencers believe will garner the most interest or traction for their content.

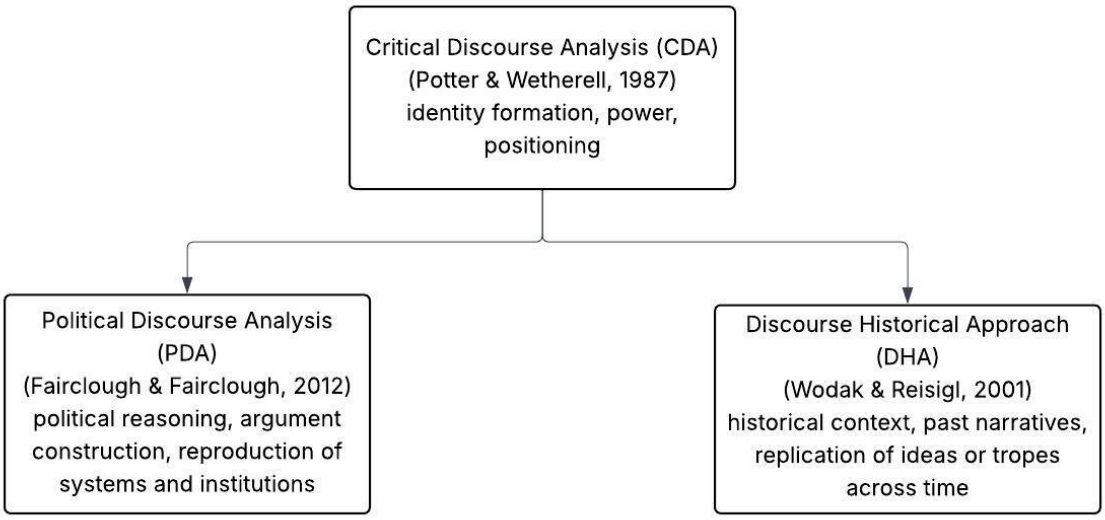


Figure 1: CDA Methodology

If content analysis answers the what, then discourse analysis answers the *how*. This thesis utilises Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), drawing from the work of Potter & Wetherell (1987) to examine how identity is constructed and reproduced in the data as well as how influencers position themselves and assign power within the social world they are (re)constructing. To further the analysis, elements of Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and the Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) were incorporated. PDA (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013) views forms of political communication (in this instance, political influencer content) as a form of practical reasoning in that it involves the construction of an argument that problematises certain social circumstances and proposes solutions. It examines how speakers enact values and construct social circumstances to enact political goals (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013). Additionally, DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001) takes into consideration historical, sociopolitical, and intertextual context when examining discourse. This is particularly useful in understanding how far-right language recycles tropes throughout time and how the sociopolitical and historical context of Ireland interacts with this iteration of far-right discourse (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2015). PDA and DHA ultimately fall

under the umbrella of CDA and its ability to dissect the reciprocal nature of discourse and society, although they offer a more tailored focus when examining political content.

CDA pays particular attention to the allocation of power in discourse, especially in the context of social institutions and established structures. Given the common anti-establishment stance among far-right groups, it is important to approach the data from this lens in order to examine a.) the power allocated to establishment institutions (government, media, corporations, etc.) and how that power is constructed and b.) how far-right influencers position themselves in relation to these institutions, and the power they allocate themselves (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; van Dijk, 2008; Wodak, 2015).

Some literature points to far-right actors' tendency to borrow argument structure of the far-left (Mudde, 2007) or portray themselves as victims or an oppressed and marginalised group in the mainstream, even though their rhetoric often involves the oppression of marginalised groups, see chapter 6 (Ganesh, 2020). Due to this, analysis should take into consideration what kind of power far-right influencers ascribe to themselves, and whether they also construct themselves as victims or marginalised. CDA is particularly useful in examine the purposefully vague and ambiguous rhetoric of far-right influencers, as well as examining the subtext and framing in these statements. Far-right influencers are often careful to disguise extremist beliefs under dog-whistle language to avoid violating social media community guidelines. CDA is also a valuable lens due to its focus on social constructions of power such as racism, misogyny, xenophobia, homophobia, and other socially established prejudices. This is useful due to the nature of far-right influencer content and its ideological roots in prejudice. Using a critical discourse lens examines how marginalised groups are constructed as less-than relative to dominant groups, and how far-right influencers construct

these groups and conspiracy theories to justify their stance (Mudde, 2007; van Dijk, 1983; van Dijk, 2008).

PDA is closely aligned with CDA, though the goals of employing this analysis differed. PDA was used to understand how far-right influencers position themselves and their ideology in the political system as well as to examine how Irish (and global) politics are constructed discursively in this content. Though not all of the influencers in this sample are politicians, they all can be considered political actors. Through their discussion and construction of the state of Irish government and politics more broadly, they are exerting a discursive force on the political realm. Political discourse extends beyond formal settings and speeches delivered by politicians, especially now that so much of the discursive work of politics occurs online and can be engaged with by anyone with a social media account. This is one of the benefits of employing a political discourse lens to online content (Abdulmajeed & El-Ibiary, 2020; Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013; Shmalenko et al., 2021).

> Social media, has, in some ways 'democratised' political discourse – while political discourse used to take the form of official outlets and speeches, now everyday citizens shape the impact of political discourse and act as opinion leaders (Arnesson, 2022a; Nguyu, 2025). These influencers highlight this phenomenon, as they have explicitly curated their platform to be the kind of populist, grassroots political opinion leaders involved in shaping political discourse. Therefore, it is important to examine the research questions through the lens of political discourse analysis, as this content has consequences on the construction of politics. The discourse analysis portion of this analysis will help construct the far-right 'playbook' in this context – the discursive strategies these influencers enact. Through looking at the construction of the social world, specifically in Ireland, it reveals how they represent ingroups and outgroups, the construction of the

nation and its natives, and how they construct these issues to be so pertinent and threatening that they necessitate action.

7.2.1 *Creation of the codebook*

As part of the content analysis, a codebook was developed as an additional output to represent the thematic structure of this far-right influencer content. As previously mentioned, far-right content (and ideology, more broadly) can be difficult to analyse and structure due to its 'messiness' and coded language (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Mudde, 2007). The aim for the codebook is to provide a coding structure that can potentially be used by other researchers in order to structure analysis and 'decode' common far-right terminology. Though this codebook is based in the Irish context, it has the potential to be adapted to other contexts.

The codebook was developed both deductively from previous research and inductively from the data. Mudde's (2002) taxonomy was used to group the content into codes that mapped onto the tenets of nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and belief in the strong state. Fattibene (2024a) et al.[12] on dominant themes in the online Irish far-right ecosystem were similarly used to create 'parent codes' to structure the content analysis (Guest et al., 2012). Thus, the parent codes became 1.) conspiracy theory rhetoric 2.) prejudice 3.) anti-establishment sentiment 4.) activism and 5.) contextualising Ireland (see Appendix A). Codes within these parent codes represent themes presented in the content, including themes that were dog-whistled to. For instance, conspiracy theory rhetoric contains many dog-whistles: references to *replacing* the native population often pertain to the xenophobic conspiracy theory The Great Replacement, which influencers rarely name outright but often allude to through the strategic use of replacement.

[12] The top five most mentioned themes were The Great Reset, Anti-Left sentiment, Alt-Right sentiment, Anti-Black sentiment, and Anti-Government sentiment. See codebook for examples of parent codes.

1. **Conspiracy rhetoric**
1.1. The Great Awakening & QAnon
1.2 The Great Replacement
1.3. Agenda 21/The Great Reset
1.4. Transhumanism
1.5. War in Ukraine
1.6. Climate Change
1.7. COVID
1.7.1. Anti-vax
2. **Prejudice**
2.1. Anti-Islam
2.2. Anti-LGBTQ+
2.2.1. Anti-drag
2.2.2. Transphobia
2.3. Xenophobia
2.3.1. Anti-immigration
2.3.1.1. Fear of male migrants
3. **Anti-establishment**
3.1. Anti-government
3.2. Anti-MSM
3.2.1. Criticism of how the public process information
3.3. Anti-education system
3.4. Anti-globalism
3.4.1. Criticism of American influence in Ireland
3.5. Anti-elitism
3.5.1. Anti-corporatism
3.5.2. Anti-expert and scientists
3.5.3. Money as motivator for 'elite'
4. **Activism**
4.1. Calls to action
5. **Contextualising Ireland**
5.1. Religious factors
5.2. Irish spirituality
5.3. Housing crisis
5.4. Internalised inferiority
5.5. Irish Nationalism
5.5.1. Anti-British
5.5.2. Irish Ethnonationalism
5.5.3. Irish Masculinity
5.5.4. Irish Republican Movement

Table 1.1: Codebook

7.3 Theoretical framework

So far, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) has been used as a lens to understand how far-right ideologies and conspiracies fulfil social and psychological needs, and how far-right influencer culture may exploit this. SIT complements the discursive analyses used in this project by providing a framework for understanding ingroup and outgroup boundaries, and how language can shape this. CDA and PDA approach data from a social constructionist perspective (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2013; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), which can be used in tandem with SIT. SIT tells us how identities are promoted and defended to bolster self-concept, and social constructionism shows us how these identities are constructed through language (Benwell & Stokoe, 2006; van De Mieroop, 2015; Zotzmann & O'Regan, 2016).

Social constructionism examines how social institutions, power, and identities are constructed and deconstructed through language. It argues that these entities are constantly in a cycle of being reproduced through language. In many ways, this discourse also performs the ingroup cohesion relevant to SIT by negotiating ingroup boundaries, reproducing shared values in everyday speech, and reinforces the social order (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Zotzmann & O'Regan, 2016).

Due to CDA's analysis of power, positioning, and construction of social identities, it is a useful methodology for examining far-right influencer discourse. Simply the fact that influencer content is created to be consumed and influential for a certain audience already speaks to the position these influencers place themselves in and the power they assign themselves as opinion leaders of the far-right (van Dijk, 1993; Wodak, 2015).

Much of the theoretical underpinnings of the confluence of discourse and power come from the work of Foucault (1980) and the technologies of power – which views

discourse as a form of social action within social structures that can either reinforce the power structures at play or challenge them. Similarly, Weber (2019) defines power as "the chance that an individual in a social relationship can achieve his or her own will even against the resistance of others," (p. 28). In this sense, every utterance is an opportunity to reinforce or challenge established systems of power. Expressions of power therefore highlight the disparities is social structures, and language is the common currency of power in the sense that, as Wodak and Meyer (2019), using DHA, state:

> "language indexes and expresses power; language is involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power; power does not necessarily derive from language, but language can be used to challenge power, to subvert it, to alter distributions of power in the short and the long term; and language provides a finely articulated vehicle for differences in power in hierarchical structures," (p. 12).

Power can also be conveyed through the use and disclosure of specialised knowledge, status, fame, and other symbolic power resources. In terms of far-right discourse, power is central in the sense that discourse can challenge extant power structures (anti-establishment discourse criticising government, scientists, the education system, etc.) or reinforce the power of dominant social groups while marginalising others. Far-right influencers active on social media sites, especially 'alternative' social media sites like Odysee have a potentially novel relation to power in discourse. As Jancsary, et al. (2017) explain, social media and audio-visual content are often less strictly controlled than traditional media or forms of discourse such as political speeches, which may make them a more accessible choice for anti-establishment or resistance actors.

Similar to the concept of power, CDA is also concerned with the positioning of actors within discourse. In far-right discourse, this can manifest as the widely recognised "us" vs.

"them" dynamic, similar to the SIT construction of ingroup and outgroup. As Wodak (2019) details, positioning is key in populist discourse in the way that the needs of the people have to be positioned centrally opposed to the corrupt elite. Positioning is often expressed using the following discursive tools: polarisation, pronouns (us, them, ours, etc.), identification, especially when it comes to an actor positioning themselves to speak for a specific group i.e., "as a nationalist..." or "as an Irish person...", emphasis on positive self-descriptions and negative other-descriptions, activities, specifically referring to actions that must be carried out by a specific group, norms and values, and interests (van Dijk, 2019).

Positioning is an important concept in online influencer discourse. It can take the form of legitimising and defending their stance as opinion leaders, and practicing authenticity in an attempt to build trust with their audience. The concept of 'opinion leaders,' initially termed by Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) was first applied to public communications research, mainly in the realm of traditional mass media but since has been used to describe more non-traditional forms of media, including influencers (Casaló et al., 2020; van Leeuwen, 2008). Self-presentation is often one of the first discursive tools utilised in any speech or text, serving to legitimate the content of their discourse and establish credibility. This can take the form of aligning oneself with a social group or utilising specialist knowledge (van Dijk, 2008).

Analytically, Wodak's (2015) DHA informs much of the theoretical and procedural backing to this analysis. Building off of CDA and PDA, Wodak's (2015) method takes the lens of CDA but applies historical, political, and social context to the data. This is particularly important when considering how ideology and identity is adapted from context to context – considering the tenets of Irish identity discussed in the previous chapters, it is important to consider how these are constructed and invoked in the data. This methodology also acknowledges the intertextuality of the data – not just how it relates to formative literary movements or documents, but how it channels national heroes, past slogans, and other

national symbols. In the Irish case, this is particularly relevant due to the state's own revolutionary history and construction of a uniquely Irish identity.

Reisigl & Wodak's (2001) taxonomy from *Discourse and Discrimination* is used to understand linguistic patterns in the discourse. Some of the pertinent categories include collectivisation (the use of 'we,' 'us,' 'them,' etc. to represent collectives), spatialisation vs. de-spatialisation ('insider' vs. 'outsider' and other terms that denote spatial boundaries or the crossing or respecting of these spatial boundaries), ethnonyms (i.e. Irish), nationyms (nationals vs. non-nationals), politicisation (party alignment terms like 'leftists,' Sinn Féin or 'shinners'), and criminalisation (i.e. 'illegals'). While descriptive in nature, these taxonomies provide insight into how far-right influencers view boundaries and dichotomies and how they construct the social world through their discourse. Furthermore, it shows us how they problematise issues like immigration and other 'social ills,' and how they ultimately construct these things as such a problem that it necessitates action (Bacchi, 2009; Foucault, 1980).

Both content analysis and discourse analysis are necessary to answer the research questions. The content analysis provided answers to *what* the far-right influencer content landscape looks like, which ideologies are expressed, which conspiracy theories are covered, which social issues seen as most pressing. It also provided a measure of frequency for these themes – how often they talk about these issues, what conspiracies are brought up most, what national symbols are invoked most often. This provides the foundation of knowledge for *how* they adapt this to the Irish context and what discursive strategies they employ to meet their aims of radicalisation and mobilisation (Feltham-King & Macleod, 2016; Garcia-Jaramillo et al. 2023; Morgan et al., 2024; Wodak, 2015).

This is where the discourse analysis digs deeper into the data. Using a CDA (including DHA and PDA) approach, the analysis allows us to understand how far-right influencers position themselves within the social world, how they perform the ingroup and

outgroup functions that are so crucial to SIT and their movement, and how they make these issues relevant to an Irish populace.

7.4 Method

The method for this project involved the following steps: identification of prominent Irish far-right influencers, identification of suitable social media platform to extract data, data collection, video transcription, content analysis using descriptive coding and process coding, and discourse analysis of relevant passages. Each step is expanded on below.

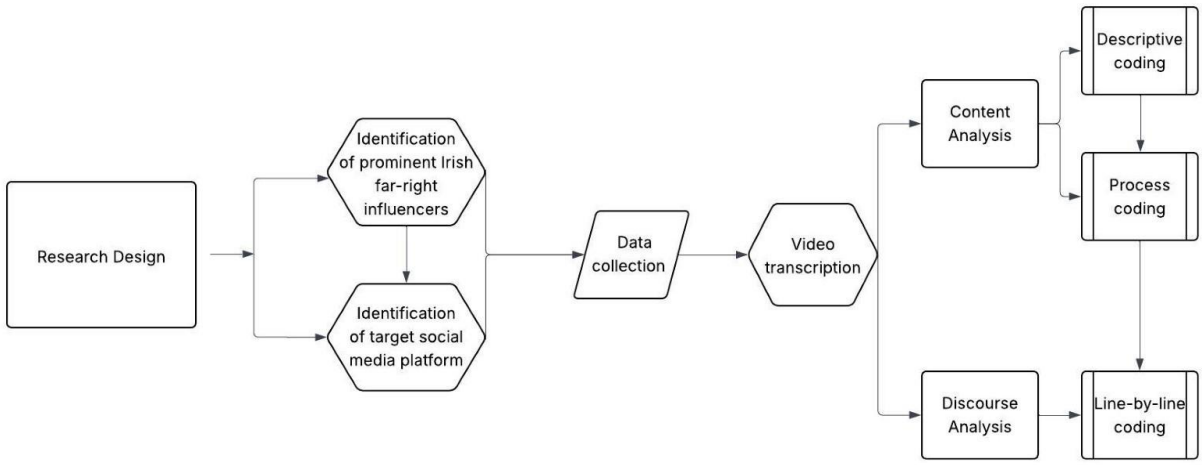


Figure 2: Research Design

7.5 Participant (influencer) selection and platform selection

In order to answer these research questions, the actual online content of the influencers was examined. Firstly, far-right actors are traditionally hard to access from a researcher or institutional standpoint, as many see academia as inherently leftist, liberal, or mainstream, and view academic research as disingenuous and antagonistic to their message (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Wodak, 2015). Secondly, in order to answer *how* far-right influencers engage in this discursive and meaning-making processes for their audiences, we must access

the same content at the level of the audience, in order to observe it naturally, and not through the researcher-participant lens that alters the power structures, and therefore the discourse (Ganesh & Froio, 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2020).

Four influencer accounts on the platform Odysee were chosen for analysis. These four influencers were selected in accordance with the following criteria:

a. Identified as prominent and influential personas in the Irish far-right space[13] (Fattibene et al., 2024a).

b. Known to be Irish and/or based in Ireland at the time of data collection.

c. Had 1,000 or more followers across platforms at the time of data collection.

d. Had a public and active Odysee channel at the time of data collection.

Beginning with known far-right influencers in the Irish space, four accounts met this criteria and were selected for analysis.

The platform Odysee was chosen due to its popularity with far-right influencers. Odysee is a video-hosting platform alternative to YouTube. Since YouTube, BitChute, and other video-hosting platforms have implemented community guidelines meant to deter this type of content, Odysee currently hosts far-right influencers who have migrated from other platforms. The influencers with the biggest followings in this dataset have already been deplatformed from other social media sites such as YouTube, Twitter (now X), Instagram, and Meta (Facebook). It is important to note that deplatforming has become a moderation strategy when it comes to far-right influencers on mainstream social media (Lewis, 2021; Rogers, 2020). While deplatforming can sometimes reduce visibility, it also prompts

[13] As part of this analysis which examined 422,156 social media posts across Twitter, Telegram, Youtube, and 4chan (from 1 October 2020 to 30 June 2021), a list was generated of the top ten most mentioned influencers across these online Irish far-right spaces. Though they were not named in the publications, these influencers were sourced from that metric.

influencers and their followers to migrate to more fringe platforms where moderation is weaker (Renton, 2021; Theocharis et al., 2021). Although Odysee is considered one of these 'fringe' sites, many influencers still engage in coded language and dog-whistles to disguise the extremist nature of their rhetoric (Schulze et al., 2022).

Utilising Odysee content has the benefit of accessing content which is largely unmoderated, allowing access to the discursive construction of the far-right world without limits. Odysee is built using block-chain technology which facilitates a more lenient approach to content on the site, since ownership is decentralised, however Odysee does engage in some content moderation but presents themselves as a more lenient alternative to extremists looking for a platform (Tuck et al., 2023). Odysee also allows for the direct download of .mp4 video files.

All of the four influencers had previously used more 'mainstream' platforms or their content (YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, etc.), however, all have been deplatformed. This led to the migration to more fringe sites, primarily BitChute, which some influencers still post their content on, but has become a less popular option after the site updated its community policies in 2021 to add an "incitement to hatred" prohibition (Pew Research Centre, 2022). There are limitations to only using video content from Odysee, namely that Odysee represents the last platform in a trickle-down effect; whereas some of these influencers amassed large followings (some 100,000+) on their more mainstream platforms, with each jump to a new platform, the follower count typically decreases. As a result, viewership on Odysee is lower than on more mainstream platforms yet Odysee also represents (presently) the platform where more extreme content is permitted, therefore potentially hosting content that is more extreme and less coded than other platforms.

While collecting other data in addition to video data from video-hosting platforms was considered at the outset of the project, querying other social media platforms (like X or

Telegram) for textual data is a more involved process requiring permission from social media platforms and tailored data extraction tools, and given that some of these influencers post multiple times a day and often re-post content from other influencers or news sources, the quantity of data would not lend itself to a thorough discourse analysis. Additionally, in keeping with the framing of influencer culture (see chapter 5), video content plays a pivotal role in creating the culture of perceived authenticity. By creating video content in which the audience can observe the influencer, their mannerisms, accent, and expressions, it creates a semblance of authenticity and intimacy with the audience that cannot be replicated by text alone (Ganesh, 2020; Miller-Idriss, 2020). Therefore, video content was selected for its salience to influencer culture and the group cohesion process that occurs through video content, as well as its limited barriers to data collection. Video content, especially among far-right influencers, can add an extra level of analysis by its incorporation of visual tactics including memes, visual propaganda, and other images (Doerr, 2017; Hohner et al., 2024). However, the format of the videos from these influencers often took the form of interviews, livestreams, and 'talking head' style videos where few visual elements were added.[14] Some of the videos are designed to be 'podcast style' content, i.e. intended to be listened to by viewers without having to be watched. For the purpose of this analysis, which focuses primarily on discursive strategies, only audio/speech was analysed instead of incorporating analysis of visual elements.

Several of the videos collected from these four influencers involve them interviewing each other or other far-right influencers in their network. Rather than compromising the integrity or 'muddying' the data, this is treated as an opportunity to examine the nature of far-

[14] with the exception of Influencer A and Influencer B who use B-roll of nature scenes around Ireland in the background of some of their videos. Influencer A also occasionally uses cartoon images of themselves with different expressions in lieu of appearing on camera, and sometimes adds images of news articles or news clips they are discussing.

right content and how the far-right influencer network operates. In keeping with Baele et al.'s (2020) conception of the far-right as ecosystem, the interconnectedness of these influencers is central to the construction of their arguments. Authors such as Bennet & Segerberg (2012) and Nahon & Hemsley (2013) showcase how these networked communications serve to amplify each other and build influence through shared messaging rather than in isolation. Furthermore, Fielitz & Thurston (2018) and Maly (2018) argue that far-right content is best studied as a network to understand dissemination tactics and participatory construction of similar narratives.

7.6 Data collection

In this project, data consisted of .mp4 files of videos posted to the four influencer accounts between December 1, 2022 and February 28, 2023. This time period was selected due to the nature of far-right rhetoric during this time – far-right influencers gained more mainstream visibility in Ireland throughout 2020-2021 due to their coverage of COVID-19 related conspiracy theories and events. By selecting the time period situated at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic (the WHO declared that COVID-19 was no longer a global emergency on 5 May, 2023), the hope was that this sample of far-right influencer videos would demonstrate how far-right narratives were adapting in Ireland now that the COVID-19 pandemic was ending and none of the COVID-19 conspiracy theories had come to fruition.

Throughout the December 1, 2022-February 28, 2023 time period, all videos posted to the four selected influencer accounts were downloaded each week as .mp4 video files. The videos were stored in OneDrive only accessible to researcher and supervisor. This resulted in a sample of 61 videos across the four influencer accounts, ranging from five minutes to two and a half hours, or a total of 31 hours of video content.

The breakdown of influencer contents is as follows:

Influencer A: 47 videos, 14 hours, 35 minutes, 1 second

Influencer B: 9 videos, 10 hours, 16 minutes, 59 seconds

Influencer C: 4 videos, 5 hours, 50 minutes, 30 seconds

Influencer D: 1 video, 2 hours, 7 minutes, and 21 seconds

University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh

CORA
Cork Open Research Archive
Cartlann Taighde Oscailte Chorcaí

Fattibene, G. 2025. “The Ireland Last approach”: the ‘playbook’ and discursive strategies of Irish far-right influencers. PhD Thesis, University College Cork.

Please note that Section 7.6.1 is unavailable due to a request by the author.

CORA Cork Open Research Archive http://cora.ucc.ie

7.7 Data storage and management

Data in this project consisted of 61 .mp4 files gathered weekly from Odysee accounts, as well as one .xlsx, one .docx, and one .nvp file generated during analysis. The video files were downloaded directly from Odysee and stored securely on OneDrive only accessible by researcher and supervisor, using UCC credentials, as per UCC data management recommendations. No video files were stored locally.

Content analysis generated an .xlsx file that was stored on OneDrive to the same specifications as above. Video transcription was performed by the researcher using Word

Online, the resulting .docx file was also stored on OneDrive. This document was also stored in NVivo 12 for the discourse analysis portion of analysis. NVivo 12 was provided through the university and operated on a password-protected laptop and .nvp files were backed up to OneDrive.

Influencers were referred to as their screen names for the content analysis .xlsx file and the transcription .docx file, only accessible to researcher and supervisor. These names were redacted in the final results for the sake of anonymity and researcher safety, although they have made their names publicly available.

As per UCC Data Policy, all data (.mp4, .xslx, .docx, .nvp files) will be retained and stored on OneDrive for a period of ten years, after which responsibility for deletion lies with the researcher.

7.8 Ethical Considerations

This project used secondary data. It involved only observational research and data collection; no direct interventions or interviews were carried out with the target audience. These are manifestly public data points and so do not violate platform terms and conditions (Odysee, 2025). Data included that from sources which have forgone the reasonable expectations of privacy due to their active promotion of their content and "influencer status," this refers to significantly large groups (1,000 members across platforms) with no barrier to entry (British Psychological Society, 2021; Fattibene et al., 2024a; Markham & Buchanan, 2012; Townsend & Wallace, 2016)

Data was gathered in line with UCC's Policy for Conducting Internet Research. All data was gathered from platforms/online communities with no barriers to entry and low perceived privacy due to their "influencer" status or high group membership (1,000+ users across platforms). Anonymity of all influencers was preserved, and direct quotes were

reworded where necessary so that they cannot be traced back to the original content. No usernames or other identifying information will be published. Only researcher and supervisor had access to the data, which is encrypted and stored on OneDrive.

Ethical permission was granted by University College Cork's Social Research Ethics Committee in July 2022. Institutional ethical approval was sought to ensure that the project adhered to institutional codes of online data collection and to maintain transparency and rigor in the research process (Townsend & Wallace, 2016; Zimmer, 2010).

While many other pieces of research openly name influencers, and at times this is considered ethically permissible, this thesis does not. Scholars such as Marwick & Boyd (2011) and Townsend & Wallace (2016) acknowledge that influencers who position themselves as public personas may be expected to be named where analysis requires the context of their background and celebrity, but still the decision must be weighed by researchers with consideration to potential harm. Certainly, in other contexts, far-right influencers have achieved a kind of celebrity and notoriety that pieces of research such as this would not cause additional reputational damage or potential harm, but Ireland operates within a different context (AoIR, 2012; Towsend & Wallace, 2016). Due to Ireland's small population and hyper-local political focus, it is not unreasonable to assume that naming influencers could cause additional harm or inadvertent doxxing, as well as allow them additional visibility (Sprejer et al., 2021; Townsend & Wallace, 2016; Whelan, 1993). While these influencers may have accounts large enough to warrant the expectation of some level of recognition and scrutiny, they are still individuals embedded in the local and regional context of Ireland, and do not occupy the same kind of celebrity as far-right influencers such as Alex Jones, Tommy Robinson, Milo Yiannopoulos and other far-right influencers who occupy the global stage. Even far-right influencers who currently create this content may change their ideology and political alignment over time, and many still occupy 'normal' everyday

positions in their community, so making their identities known could cause enduring reputational damage and also cause potential harm to their followers, though no comments or usernames from followers were collected as part of this project (Townsend & Wallace, 2016; Zimmer, 2010).

Additionally, any far-right research must consider the issue of researcher safety. Historically, research into far-right groups have resulted in harassment, doxxing, and terroristic threats directed towards researchers. The notorious 2014-2015 "#Gamergate" event demonstrated how alt-right and far-right groups react to those they see as oppositional to their ideals. In a response to the perceived 'political correctness' and advancing feminism in gaming subcultures, a harassment campaign was launched against female video game developers that resulted in doxxing and death and rape threats (Kelley & Weaver, 2020). Academics are not immune to this kind of backlash. It is widely reported that far-right influencers see academia as part of the establishment, and academics and researchers as part of a leftist regime implicated in nefarious conspiracies to silence and discredit them (Miller-Idriss, 2020; Wodak, 2015). This leaves researchers vulnerable to potential backlash. Current best practice in the field recommends researchers engage in safeguarding measures, including maintaining their own digital privacy and removing any identifiable information (office locations, video recordings of conferences, phone numbers) from publicly available domains, which was done before publication of this research (Electronic Frontier Foundation, 2025; Marwick et al., 2016). Additionally, resources such as Crash Override and PEN America's Online Harassment Field Manual provide practical information on what steps to take in the event of online harassment. These resources will be engaged with in the event of an online harassment campaign, but to date there has been no targeted backlash.

7.9 Analysis

After data collection, the two-phase analysis process commenced with the following steps: content analysis of all video data, transcription of identified sections, descriptive coding for discourse analysis (focusing on linguistic characteristics, which will be discussed below), process coding for discourse analysis, and line-by-line coding for discourse analysis until data saturation was reached. Data saturation is treated here in line with O'Reilly & Parker (2013) in which additional data failed to contribute new and meaningful insight that had not been previously captured. Each step is detailed below.

7.9.1 Content Analysis

A content analysis was conducted of the 61 .mp4 video files. The structure and terminology of content codes was established by previous research on known topics within the Irish far-right ecosystem (Fattibene et al., 2024a) as well as other existing research on far-right content and Cas Mudde's taxonomy of core far-right elements (Mudde, 2002). Specifically, Mudde's (2002) work on the five core features of far-right ideology: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and the belief in the strong state were used to structure parent codes, as well as the findings that the most popular overarching themes in Irish far-right online spaces were The Great Reset, anti-left sentiment, alt-right sentiment, anti-black sentiment, and anti-government sentiment (Fattibene et al., 2024a). Taken together, this provided the parent codes for the codebook,

For validity and also as an additional research output, a codebook was produced to demonstrate a.) the structure and hierarchy of far-right topics within this data and b.) the operational definitions of far-right topics used to code this data. Because far-right content is situated within the far-right ecosystem which often uses its own insider language, terms, and references to disguise the true nature of the discourse, it is important to define these terms for understanding. By producing a codebook that captures the structure and meaning of these

terms in far-right influencer content, it contributes to the field by essentially providing a structure usable to other researchers to map far-right content onto, and to understand some of the more 'niche' conspiracies and terminology.

In line with existing research, data was coded into overarching 'parent codes' (Guest et al., 2012): conspiracy theory rhetoric, anti-establishment sentiment, and prejudice. A 'contextualising Ireland' code was also created to capture instances where influencers explicitly tied this ideology or rhetoric to Ireland, to aid in performing the discourse analysis and answering the research question *how* are far-right influencers adapting ideology and conspiracy theory rhetoric to an Irish context?

Codes were generated manually by playing each video (at this point stored securely in OneDrive) and noting time codes that represented the beginning and end of each topic. These time codes were recorded in an .xslx spreadsheet. Quotes referenced in the analysis contain the time stamp, video number, and influencer from which they were sourced. Of course, the nature of far-right influencer video content and far-right ideology as a whole is 'messy' and tends to overlap, either changing track mid-sentence or combining multiple tenets of ideology or conspiracy theory in a single utterance. In these instances, data was coded under all applicable codes and parent codes, to capture the correct frequency of these topics in the data.

All 61 videos were coded using the process above, resulting in a spreadsheet of codes and the below codebook. Using this data, the frequency of topics was established, including most referenced conspiracy theories, most frequent types of prejudice, and types of anti-establishment rhetoric. These findings answered the preliminary research questions *what* is the dominant topics and ideology in far-right influencer content, which laid the foundation for the question of *how* this rhetoric is used and adapted in an Irish context.

7.9.2 Discourse Analysis

In order to answer the research question of *how* far-right ideology and rhetoric is adapted to the Irish context, data coded under 'contextualising Ireland' from the content analysis was examined. This data was transcribed by the researcher in a Word .docx file for discourse analysis.

During the content analysis, sub-codes were generated under the 'parent code' of contextualising Ireland, including religious factors, Irish spirituality, housing crisis, internalised inferiority, and Irish nationalism. Data coded under anti-immigration was also included in the transcribed data, where it pertained to immigration into Ireland. However, the majority of the content coded under 'contextualising Ireland' pertained to either the housing crisis or anti-immigration, and data saturation was reached on these two topics. To capture the other complexities of the contextualising Ireland rhetoric and to complete analysis in a timely manner, data was coded down to exclude these two codes once data saturation was reached, or when no new concepts were emerging in these categories (O'Reilly & Parker, 2013; Saunders et al., 2018). This resulted in a transcription document that represented the 'contextualising Ireland' code in the data.

At this point, the transcription document was used in NVivo 12 to create a .npv file in order to perform the discourse analysis. As part of the discourse analysis, data was subjected to descriptive, process, and line-by-line coding. Each phase of coding is detailed below.

7.9.2.1 Descriptive Coding.

All text from the transcription file was coded using the nodes function of NVivo according to descriptive linguistic characteristics. These codes followed Reisigl & Wodak's (2001) DHA methodology and utilised codes pertaining to collectivisation, spatialisation, ethnonyms, nationyms etc. This examined data on a smaller unit to identify discursive strategies such as constructing the concept of the nation, creating ingroups and outgroups, and enforcing other kinds of social boundaries through language, in line with CDA.

7.9.2.2 Process Coding.

Once all data from the transcription file had been descriptively coded, it was then process coded at a higher level. Process coding took the approach of broader CDA and PDA methodologies, examining the positioning, power, and identity construction in the discourse to examine not only *how* influencers construct these dynamics, but what the goal of these utterances are. Process codes, rather than describing the discourse, focused on the *impact* of the discourse and the aims and strategies behind these discursive techniques. The process codes ultimately contributed to the far-right 'playbook' or the repertoire of discursive strategies far-right influencers used to pitch their ideology in an Irish context.

7.9.2.3 Line by line coding

Line-by-line coding was performed using the annotation function of NVivo. Line-by-line coding was used to capture additional nuance in the text that could not be captured at the descriptive or process coding level.

7.10 Outputs

In addition to the analysis presented in this thesis, the project also generated practical outputs that may be used by future researchers. These outputs include a.) the codebook (see Appendix A) which demonstrates a hierarchy of themes and terminology that can be used to code other types of far-right content, and b.) the far-right playbook, which can be used as a theoretical tool to understand the discursive strategies used by far-right influencer which may be examined or compared to other contexts.

7.11 Conclusion

In summary, this research took a two-pronged approach: first, a content analysis to examine *what* topics dominate Irish far-right influencer discourse, and the specifics of their coverage. Secondly, a discourse analysis was used to answer the research question: how are they making this specifically Irish, and what discursive strategies do they use to do so? The discourse analysis approach draws on the longstanding literature of CDA and nationalism, as well as implementing aspects of PDA in viewing influencer content as a form of political speech and DHA to examine how, in the case of Ireland, these strategies pull from existing tropes, intertextuality, and national myths. The findings from this analysis will be explored in the following chapters.

Chapter 8: Content Analysis

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the content analysis of the data. The goal of this content analysis was to answer the *what* questions of the data: what are the key themes of relevance in far-right influencer content? What conspiracy theories and tenets of far-right ideology are represented in this data? In order to examine how this ideology and rhetoric is *adapted* to the Irish context, it must be established what is being discussed and the frequency with which it is mentioned.

This chapter will outline key themes in the content, in line with the literature on far-right ideology and conspiracy theories that has been discussed above. Drawing on the 61 videos from four influencer accounts gathered between December 1, 2022 and February 28, 2023, this analysis explores six overarching themes in the content:

1.) conspiracy theory rhetoric (individual conspiracy theories of importance discussed in findings)

2.) anti-establishment sentiment

3.) contextualising Ireland

4.) prejudice

5.) the far-right influencer network

6.) activism.

Sub-themes and frequencies of each are discussed below.

Of course, these 61 videos cannot be seen as indicative of the content of all Irish far-right influencers. Especially now, the content has evolved to encompass more timely issues in the news cycle, and new influencers have emerged. However, it gives insight into the

dominant themes at a formative time for the far-right online ecosystem, central to this was the Dublin riots. These influencers were among the most discussed in online far-right spaces according to Fattibene et al. (2024a), so it is reasonable to expect they hold some influence over the Irish online far-right space. Additionally, far-right conspiracy theory tropes tend to be reinvented throughout time to encompass a myriad of events (see chapter 3), so it is also reasonable to expect that even if these conspiracy theories are being applied to outdated events or issues, the foundational tenets of these conspiracies will appear again in far-right discourse.

Although there is minimal far-right political presence in Irish government (O'Keeffe, 2024; Wall, 2024), the far-right in Ireland operate as an online network (Fattibene et al., 2024a). This network includes online figureheads or 'influencers' who create content about far-right ideology as it relates to Ireland. Far-right influencer content enjoyed a boost of visibility during the COVID-19 pandemic due to coverage of popular anti-lockdown and anti-vax conspiracy theories (ISD, 2021), but it is still unclear how other aspects of far-right ideology and conspiracy theory are discussed in an Irish context.

The data for this study consists of 61 .mp4 files of videos posted to the four influencer accounts between December 1, 2022 and February 28, 2023. During the data collection time period (December 1, 2022-February 28, 2023), videos posted to the four selected influencer accounts were downloaded as .mp4 video files. The videos were stored in OneDrive only accessible to researcher and supervisor. This resulted in a sample of 61 videos from all four influencer accounts, ranging from five minutes to two and a half hours and representing a total of 31 hours of footage.

Videos were coded using the following thematic framework which was developed from video content and literature on far-right ideology. Coding far-right content thematically poses a theoretical challenge as very few scholars agree on what the central tenet of far-right

ideology is. The most comprehensive definition comes from political scientist Cas Mudde (2002), who argues that far-right is essentially an umbrella term, but most definitions include the same five core features: nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and the belief in the strong state (Mudde, 2002). Several of these features are present in popular conspiracy theories among the far-right, and also map onto findings pertaining to the dominant themes in Irish far-right spaces (Fattibene et al., 2024a). Therefore, this justified the overarching 'parent codes' that content was expected to fall into: conspiracy theory rhetoric, anti-establishment sentiment, and prejudice.

8.2 Results & Discussion

Results of the content analysis are presented below by parent code. Each table displays the codes under each parent code and the number of times they were coded throughout the 61 videos. Each count represents a single mention in the videos. In instances where influencers discussed issues pertaining to more than one code, the section was coded as all applicable topics.

8.2.1 Conspiracy theory rhetoric

Parent Code	Code	Count
Conspiracy theory rhetoric	COVID	126
	Anti-vax	43
	Agenda 21/The Great Reset	55
	Ukraine War	30
	Climate change	30
	The Great Replacement	19
	Transhumanism	12
	Cultural Marxism	3
	The Great Awakening	2
	September 11th	2
	Pearl Harbor	2
	Chemtrails	1
	Centralised Currency	1

	Debt-based Economy	1
	5G	1
	Lizard people	1

Table 1.2 Conspiracy theory rhetoric

The dominant category that emerged from the sample of far-right influencer content in this study was *conspiracy theory rhetoric*. In total, conspiracy theory rhetoric was mentioned 320 times throughout the data set. Video content was both based around specific conspiracy theories but also incorporated conspiracy theory content as part of their coverage of other events or issues. The most prominent conspiracy theory addressed were those related to COVID-19 (mentioned 126 times) and this included the broader anti-vax conspiracy theories (mentioned 43 times). Although the majority of these videos were created after the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and some after the pandemic was no longer determined to be a global emergency, COVID-19 was still a major topic in the far-right influencer content.

COVID-19 conspiracy theories centred around the idea that either the coronavirus never existed and was a hoax deployed by elites, or that the severity of the virus was blown out of proportion and not as deadly as it had been reported. Others believed that the COVID-19 lockdowns were enacted by the establishment to restructure society and disrupt the economy. This discourse is often tied to other conspiracy theories such as Agenda 21, with some influencers discussing their belief that the COVID-19 lockdowns were 'practice runs' for eventual climate lockdowns or the emergence of smart cities.

> Influencer A, video #13, 10:44-12:33: *"The agenda of globalists is a population that is dependent on the state for all of their basic needs. People who live in cities cannot produce their own food; they cannot sustain themselves; they cannot be independent – they need the system. The smart city concept is ideal for communists. Because the state can fully control the means of production for everything that people need including their food. Once our populations are stuffed into these massive, heavily surveilled, smart cities,*

they are at the mercy of the control grid for everything they need. Their freedoms and rights can be greatly infringed upon and privacy is practically gone."

Although COVID-19 was no longer considered a global emergency, and had very much faded from media coverage, it still dominated far-right influencer content in this sample, albeit with a different framework. Much of the conspiracy rhetoric around the pandemic and lockdowns alleged that the lockdowns would never end, and they would pave the way for a massive scale back of personal freedoms (Tafi et al., 2023). The data shows that influencers adapted this claim when the lockdowns ended. The COVID-19 lockdowns were being referred to as a 'test-run' for the enactment of other conspiracy theories. For instance, this influencer continues to incorporate the themes of loss of personal freedoms and overreliance on the government, but using a new concept: smart cities. 'Smart cities' simply refer to an urban infrastructure concept in which sensors and smart technology are utilised to manage city infrastructure. Influencers adapted this into an Agenda 21 conspiracy trope that they are designed for the government surveillance of citizens (van Twist, 2023).

The same tactic appeared in reference to climate change conspiracy:

Influencer A, video #13, 0:00-4:28

"So, you may have noticed ridiculous hysteria in the media right now about how cold it is and how treacherous the roads are like standard winter weather we get every single year is now presented to us as a bloody crisis. It won't be long before a gorgeous hot, sunny day in summer will be justification for a climate lockdown in order to lower our CO2 emissions. You can see where all of this kind of thing is headed."

The language of 'lockdowns' was now being adapted into other forms of conspiracy theory rhetoric. This poses the question: why are far-right influencers still discussing COVID

and lockdowns with such frequency when, for the most part, it was no longer a relevant social issue? There may be several possible answers. The first is that far-right influencers enjoyed a boost of visibility during the pandemic due to their coverage of the COVID-19 'hoax.' To them, it was a tool used to steer audiences towards their content and leverage algorithms to their favour (Bohan, 2020). Therefore, continuing to use it as a reference point and the 'foundation' for other conspiracy theories engages the audience they gained due to that coverage and replicates what was a successful social media strategy. By continuing to make COVID-19 relevant, it serves to maintain their hold on the visibility they gained during the pandemic.

Secondly, it appears that COVID-19 and the resulting lockdowns have become an enduring symbol in the far-right canon to represent government overreach and the creep towards totalitarianism. Similar to how conspiracy tropes are reinvented throughout time, this 'symbol' of the loss of personal freedoms and a public 'awakening' to the overreach of the government is likely to be reinterpreted and adapted into future conspiracy rhetoric, even if the particulars of the original conspiracy never came to fruition. Again, this far-right influencer rhetoric is less focused on winning an audience over with logic, and more with invoking symbols of oppression (Barkun, 2013).

Other conspiracy theories that were discussed include Agenda 21 or The Great Reset (mentioned 55 times), presented together due to the tendency for influencers to use them synonymously. The Great Reset is a 2020 World Economic Forum initiative aimed at rebuilding the global economy post-pandemic, which was quickly seized by far-right actors as a globalist plot to destroy society and control the population (Robinson et al., 2021; Schwab & Malleret, 2020). Similarly, Agenda 21 refers to a non-binding United Nations agreement on sustainable development, which has also been construed as a globalist plot by the far-right (Cagle, 2019). These are referenced mainly in relation to climate change

coverage and policies but also using various articles, speeches, and videos by official bodies as 'evidence' of the conspiracy at play through the prospective rollout of tax propositions or climate change measures, discussions of scientists at official events, and promotional materials for smart cities and Agenda 21. Climate change, not explicitly tied to either Agenda 21 or The Great Reset explicitly, was presented as a conspiracy theory an additional 30 times.

The War in Ukraine was also presented as a conspiracy theory 30 times in this sample of influencer content. Due to the time period that data was collected, the War in Ukraine was a dominant current event that generated a high degree of media coverage, both in mainstream media and in fringe forms of media (Ruxton, 2023). Some influencers purported that this was an establishment-manufactured event, in line with the idea that coronavirus was an establishment-manufactured event, and the War in Ukraine was the new manufactured crisis brought into the spotlight to 'distract' us. Others tied the resulting influx of Ukranian refugees to existing anti-immigration rhetoric that borrows from conspiracy theories such as The Great Replacement, in the sense that the establishment was deliberately attempting to bring a high volume of Ukranian refugees into the country to displace or *re*place the native Irish population.

Influencer A, video #21, 0:00-11:38

> *"I have referred several times already to this Irish Times article dated October 6th, 2022. 'Thousands of asylum seekers arrive at Dublin Airport with no travel documents. Figures indicate large numbers losing or destroying passports before reaching immigration control.' I wonder why they'd be destroying them? In other words, illegal immigrants are coming into our country and attempting to claim asylum without the correct documents...Surely, Ukraine needs all the strong, able-bodied men they can get, right? How can the Irish government undermine Zelenskyy's war effort like that? Pretty simple, they're not coming from Ukraine... and now, just*

> *like with two weeks to flatten the curve gradually expands to months of lockdown, we're at Ukraine and indeed other countries. And they need to stipulate 'other countries' because the complete demographic transformation of Europe that the globalists want to achieve can only be made possible by more manufacture migrant crises..."*

The Great Replacement theory was mentioned 19 times. Though The Great Replacement theory is rarely mentioned by name or with respect to its creator, Renaud Camus, the language of replacement is used as a dog whistle to this larger conspiracy canon. The above quote is one such example – though not mentioned explicitly, the idea that white Westerners are intentionally being replaced is evident. This allows viewers who are familiar with The Great Replacement theory to make the connection without naming it outright, and may have the effect of steering viewers towards more content covering the theory (Maly, 2021). They also use the language of COVID-19 and the resulting lockdown symbolically to demonstrate what they perceive as similar government overreach. However, The Great Replacement has a canonical connotation with race; it evokes ingroup threat for white Westerners, asserting that they will be taken over by non-white migrants. In order to make this ingroup threat relevant in this context, far-right influencers must circumvent the reality that native Ukrainians are a largely white ethnic group and many of the migrants fleeing Ukraine are considered white (Balogun, 2023). In this dataset, as expressed in the above quote, influencers still manage to delineate racial boundaries and stir ingroup panic by asserting that the crisis in Ukraine has created a 'free for all' at Ireland's borders, and that non-white migrants are using this as an opportunity to gain access to the nation. This ties back to the discussion of metapolitical whiteness – not only that the greatest threat seems to be coming from non-white migrants, but that Ireland's borders should filter out the undeserving, non-white interlopers (Paul, 2021).

In addition to these pervasive conspiracy theories, several lesser-known or lesser-discussed conspiracy theories also featured in the data. Many of these communicate the same elements and tropes as larger conspiracy theories – government control, ingroup threat, and victimhood. These more fringe conspiracy theories are featured to give a complete picture of the 'texture' of the far-right influencer ecosystem, as well as the ecosystem of its grievances. The conspiracy theory rhetoric, both in this sample and more broadly, does not only function by promoting one or two dominant conspiracy theories, but by incorporating several 'layered' conspiracies into one worldview. This has the effect of impacting metapolitics, and creating distrust in political systems (Butter & Knight, 2020). Considering that individuals who believe in *one* conspiracy theory are more likely to believe in others (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018), it is an important finding that even this relatively small sample of data contains reference to many major and obscure conspiracy theories. By presenting their audience with a variety of theories, it promotes a broader conspiratorial worldview that hinges on distrust of establishment and social institutions.

Transhumanism, the concept that elites aim to introduce new forms of technology, especially technology integrated into human cognition and biology (Cohen, 2025), emerged as a new conspiracy theory in influencer content and was discussed 12 times, although it was only discussed by Influencer A who has gained recognition for their discussion and critique of technology. This was discussed in conjunction with Agenda 21, microchips, and digital COVID vaccine passports.

Other conspiracies were mentioned briefly in the content: Cultural Marxism was mentioned three times, a conspiracy theory that originated in the fringes of the American far-right and was popularised by far-right terrorists such as Anders Breivik. Cultural Marxism links 'political correctness' and 'PC culture' to a plot to destroy traditional values and institutions and portray 'white men as evil.' This conspiracy theory is often referenced in

discussions of LGBTQIA+ rights and the perceived persecution of ‘conservatives’ in academic or educational settings (Busbridge et al., 2020). It is also mentioned in one video in reference to sex education in schools, which is constructed as a ‘family issue,’ and that the family unit should have the freedom to make decisions about whether to educate their children about different gender and sexual identities instead of ‘the state.’ By presenting the issue in this way, the influencers present themselves (and their followers) as the true victims of a regime intent on undermining traditional Irish values. This is relevant to Ireland especially due to the shift from a nation largely structured around Catholic identity, into a more ‘progressive’ nation after the 2015 gay marriage and 2018 abortion referendum (see chapter 3). Influencer A, B, and C see the Catholic identity as an intrinsic part of Irish nationalism. Relevant to this identity is the normalisation of prejudice towards liberal policies and marginalised identities, and the shift away from this has triggered the infiltration of this narrative that those who consider the socially conservative, Catholic-informed values as part of their national identity are being oppressed and erased. Sometimes this was combined with a broader discussion on attacks on traditional ‘Western values,’ which appears as its own category and was discussed five times (Busbridge et al., 2020).

The Great Awakening was referenced only twice, a concept largely associated with the American QAnon movement which involves an almost evangelical, biblical-style mass awakening of the brainwashed public to see the ‘reality’ of conspiracy theories at play. References to this rhetoric involved the need for the great awakening in Irish society or influencers referencing their own ‘great awakening.’ It appears that it is not represented here in the strict sense of a QAnon-style ‘great awakening’ in which the populace ‘awakens’ to the reality of a satanic cabal of elites, but rather a more abstracted version in which the people awaken to the corruption of the government. It should be noted that the language of an ‘awakening’ among the far-right did not originate with the QAnon conspiracy theory. Similar

language has been used in the *Turner Diaries*, evangelical movements, and David Duke's autobiography *My Awakening* (Barkun, 2003; Berlet & Lyons, 2000). It is also similar to the concept of being 'red-pilled' or 'black-pilled,' used as part of the far-right vernacular here to represent a shift towards a radicalised worldview.

Chemtrails was mentioned once, which is often in reference to the conspiracy theory that the chemtrails that planes leave in the sky consist of intentionally harmful substances meant to harm/depopulate the public (Tingley & Waner, 2017). However, in this instance it was referenced as potentially part of Agenda 21, remarking upon how there are more chemtrails in the sky than there used to be, alleging it was for the purpose of 'cloud seeding' and geoengineering, and how this may be related to Agenda 21.

Other conspiracy theories mentioned included Pearl Harbor and 9/11 conspiracy theories were both mentioned twice, alleging that both attacks were a hoax or friendly fire. In a way, it mirrors the longstanding tradition of interpreting attacks and crises as political manipulation and subjugation of the ingroup, which was even seen in the Irish War of Independence (see chapter 3). The cost of living, debt-based economy, and centralised currency were each referenced as conspiracy once, which, for the most part, can be understood as part of Agenda 21 and the government's or elite's attempt to disrupt the economy and make it challenging to accrue and maintain personal wealth; and 5G conspiracy theories was mentioned once, mainly in conjunction with COVID conspiracy rhetoric, as the belief that the installation of 5G towers has intentional ill health effects on the public that could have caused COVID-19 symptoms and that the pandemic was an attempt to cover it up (Ahmed et al., 2020). 'Lizard people' were also mentioned once, in reference to the belief that certain elites are actually a reptilian race instead of human (Braune, 2023), but it was unclear if this was discussed facetiously or meant to be interpreted in a literal sense.

While the conspiracy theories presented in this dataset create a layered narrative intent on creating a metapolitical sense of distrust and ingroup threat, it also reveals that Irish far-right influencers are still using COVID-19 as a touchstone to ground their conspiracy theory allegations at the time of data collection. This analysis sought to understand how influencers would pivot their content after the failure of COVID conspiracy rhetoric to manifest, but it appears they have not pivoted and they continue to use COVID-19 and lockdown conspiracy tropes as a symbolic touchstone. The reluctance to relinquish these narratives surrounding COVID-19 are both surprising and unsurprising given the literature on far-right rhetoric. It is surprising for the idea that the far-right ecosystem thrives on 'highjacking' current events in the media (Darius & Stephany, 2020). Though the effects of COVID-19 will be long withstanding, it is an issue that has faded from the news cycles and, in many ways, proves that these far-right influencers' claims of mass deaths from vaccines and never-ending lockdowns were unfounded.

However, far-right rhetoric also depends on weaponising evocative symbols, regardless of the logic behind them (Douglas et al., 2017). Ireland had one of the most protracted COVID-19 lockdowns in Europe (Hale et al., 2023), and resulted in widespread psychological distress and uncertainty (Collins, 2023). This is one of the reasons far-right influencers, including the ones in this sample, gained such visibility at the time (ISD, 2021). Continuing to reference COVID-19 is not only a strategic callback to their social media success, but is now a symbolic and foundational reference for government overreach. It should be unsurprising that far-right influencers continue to incorporate it into the conspiracy theory narrative even if it has been proven to be logically unfounded. Insisting that COVID-19 lockdowns were a 'test-run' or 'sign of things to come' for what will be implemented under *new* conspiracies creates a sense of threat that society will devolve to such lows again.

In some ways, COVID-19 is being used as rhetorical scaffolding to warn viewers of the consequences of more *extreme* conspiracy theories like The Great Replacement. Though these conspiracy theories that amplify prejudice and ingroup threat are unfounded by any discernible evidence, using the example of the social crisis that was the COVID-19 pandemic are meant to warn viewers that the government should not be trusted to handle such impending crises, and that they are under threat of replacement if it continues.

This demonstrates how conspiracy theories function together metapolitically, to justify grievances and simultaneously bolster ingroup identity by reinforcing nationalist tropes while insisting that this threat to dominance will result in the victimisation and oppression of the ingroup.

8.2.2 Anti-establishment sentiment

Parent Code	Code	Count
Anti-establishment sentiment	Anti-government	82
	Anti-MSM	34
	Anti-police	11
	Anti-education system	9
	Anti-corporatism	8
	Anti-globalism	2
	Anti-expert and scientists	2
	Money as motivator for elite	2
	Anti-authority	1
	Anti-capitalism	1

Table 1.2 Anti-establishment sentiment

Anti-establishment discourse also featured prominently in far-right influencer content in this study. The majority of the anti-establishment rhetoric revolved around anti-government themes, mentioned 82 times, critiquing Irish politicians currently in government (at the national and local level, and candidates from every major party) as not doing enough to help the Irish interest, or even being part of the nebulous globalist elitist forces that enact these conspiracies. In doing so, these influencers uphold a longstanding populist trope of

positioning the establishment government as antagonists to the people (Mudde, 2002). What is notable about the anti-establishment and anti-government sentiment in this dataset is that a.) it is often incorporated with conspiracy theory rhetoric and b.) it admonishes every major party in Irish politics, including SF, which has long been seen as the Irish nationalist 'protest vote' against the two dominant parties (FF and FG) (O'Malley, 2008; O'Malley & Fitzgibbon, 2014). This suggests that far-right influencers are constructing a brand of Irish nationalism that requires a new form of political representation. As discussed in chapter 3, Irish nationalism of the past and the collective national identity was largely based around a rejection of British colonialism in favour of sovereign rule. Now, the establishment government is described as the antagonist in much the same way, which allows them to be constructed as a 'puppet government' complicit in conspiracy.

> Influencer A, video #13, 0:00-4:28 *"...the globalists and their puppets in our governments are delighted with this kind of situation because they get to turn the screw and make our lives extra difficult by creating a situation where power cuts are more likely... Our government has made this possible. They've made this situation possible and they can blame it on whatever bullshit international crisis they want – whatever the crisis of the week happens to be. But, at the end of the day, they're the ones who caused this. They are responsible."*

In doing this, influencers create another ingroup/outgroup dynamic: the ingroup as the 'true' Irish people and the outgroup of the 'corrupt' sellout government. This has the potential to not only mobilise their audience to support the fringe, far-right parties they promote, but also influencing metapolitics to create broad distrust in any establishment party.

Anti-mainstream media rhetoric was another prominent anti-establishment sentiment theme, mentioned 34 times. Though all influencers touched upon their disdain for mainstream

media, it was central for one influencer who was a former journalist. Influencers admonished Irish media companies such as The Irish Times and RTÉ for allegedly spreading misinformation, portraying a false narrative, naming and representing their movements as far-right, and being in control of globalist forces. This is similar to far-right strategies seen in other contexts, where state-sponsored media is admonished in favour of 'doing your own research' (Bleakley, 2021; Harambam, 2020). This strategy negates any attempt by media to disprove conspiracy theories by alleging that they are complicit and encourages the participatory culture of the far-right online ecosystem by portraying it as the only reliable source to get 'the truth' (Alava et al., 2020; Allington et al., 2021; Boler & Davis, 2018).

Inherent in this anti-mainstream media discourse was also a condemnation of the public or 'normies' and their alleged media literacy for trusting news from these sources and not being capable of critiquing it or doing their own research, as these far-right influencers believe they are able to do (Nagle, 2017). This creates a further ingroup/outgroup dynamic within the phenomenon of 'doing your own research' by constructing themselves and their followers as enlightened with privileged knowledge, and the rest of the population as blind sheeple[15]. This kind of anti-establishment sentiment makes conspiracy theory rhetoric more pervasive, because it creates an environment where no one else (other than far-right influencers) can be trusted.

Other anti-establishment rhetoric fell into the following categories:

Anti-education system (mentioned 9 times) mainly in the sense that certain kinds of education should be dictated by parents, especially sexual education. This aligns with some of the Cultural Marxism rhetoric where the far-right believe that 'the LGBT[QIA+] and trans agenda' is being purposefully pushed on children in schools instead of leaving this education

[15] A portmanteau of sheep and people, meant to denote those with a herd mentality, first documented in 1945 to describe crowds (OED).

to the discretion of parents, or those who favour a more 'traditional' education. This can be seen through the same lens as a rejection of the shifting tides of Irish public opinion, as discussed with Cultural Marxism. In a way, though paradoxical, this can be seen as a form of system justification. By blaming the current government, it protects the integrity of the Irish system by asserting that the problem lies in the individuals or conspiratorial 'globalists' in power, and that if these individuals were replaced, the problems would not persist. Similarly, by clinging to the Catholic values and structures of Ireland's past, and rejecting progressive movements, these influencers protect the integrity of the traditional Irish identity and its values, ignoring the possibility that some of the issues with Irish society today lay in the bedrock of this identity (Jolley & Douglas, 2018).

Far-right influencers seem to see the education system in Ireland and abroad as liberal and leftist, and a place where far-right sentiment and ideology is not accepted. In addition to seeing the education system as hostile to conservatives, they view it as a system designed to brainwash individuals and promote conformist attitudes and punish those who share their ideology.

Influencer D, video #46, 3:56-5:09

> *"Like now it seems that the more highly educated someone is, the more vulnerable he is to mass formation. Probably because, uh, on the one hand because uh our educational system does not so much learn people to think for themselves and to speak for themselves... to articulate their own opinion even if that opinion radically goes against what the group believes in... Another reason might be that, uh, the more people aspire a high education and the more they try to get academic degrees and so on, uh, the more conformist they are. ...It's also a possibility that the, uh, the educational system selects people who are conformist in nature. Um, um, but in any case, our educational*

systems fails. It should, it should really cultivate open-mindedness and the courage to speak out um, uh the courage to go against dominant ideology."

In positioning themselves at the fringes of the establishment system, they occupy the space of the victim and the marginalised dissenter. This defends conspiratorial thinking because it closes another door for the possibility of debunking – if the education system is not to be trusted, then its teachings cannot be used to challenge conspiracy theory claims.

Anti-police and law enforcement was mentioned 11 times. An Garda Síochána, as unfairly policing far-right protests and having the potential to become an authoritarian force, especially in the context of hate speech legislation. In some instances, they are described as being an arm of the corrupt state, and even instrumental to the creation of an authoritarian society that is the end goal of conspiracies like Agenda 21. An example of this is the below quote from video #22, detailing how police are complicit in conspiracy narratives:

Influencer A interviewing Influencer C, video #22, 1:07:30-1:08:08

"You can even see this in the fact that they change the colours of the cars to the LGBT stuff – total politicisation of the guards. Or they have the project 2040 logo on the side of their cars. Again, the politicisation of the guards - and it's showing you clearly what the guards are about and the trajectory of the country and the trajectory, I suppose, of the future of policing because it's going to be a multicultural society; multicultural societies require enormous amounts of policing in order to keep them going, cause you have all these different cultures with different values competing against each other, competing for space, all these different ethnicities competing for space, and it's - it's always a recipe for disaster."

Quotes such as this expose how anti-establishment sentiment is 'layered' with conspiracy theory rhetoric and anti-immigration sentiment. An Garda Síochána are

represented here as a tool of the state to enact conspiracy and also creating ingroup threat that the result of this Great Replacement-style conspiracy will result in an overpoliced 'multicultural' society in which resources are scarce and the ingroup loses dominance, creating a more authoritarian society where the police become a weapon of the state against the native people.

Anti-globalism was also discussed twice in the context of anti-establishment sentiment, not in the sense that many conspiracies are alleged to be controlled by globalist forces but instead representing the sentiment that Ireland should reject globalism (economically, politically, and culturally speaking) in favour of a more native, national identity. This mirrors rhetoric of the revolutionary era which promoted the preservation of Irish language and culture, but instead of preserving this in the face of British imperialism, they now represent the globalist effect of the European Union as being the main threat against the integrity of Irish culture (Coakley, 2011; Redmond, 2021).

Similarly, anti-corporatism sentiment arose eight times in the sense that corporations should not represent public interests as well as distaste for corporate work environments. This was sometimes coupled with a glorification of working-class masculinity as more valuable and valid than corporate professions. Capitalism was also critiqued as an economic system, though no other economic system was suggested as an alternative.

Far-right influencers also expressed anti-academic and anti-expert sentiment, mainly scientists and experts called to represent dominant thought, again as part of an education system they see as inherently liberal and leftist. These actors they typically see as being complicit in conspiracies and obscuring the real truth. Again, the effect of this kind of anti-establishment sentiment is that it further seals off the echo chamber, providing a built-in explanation for any source outside of the far-right ecosystem that might disprove this conspiracy theory rhetoric and topple the worldview (Forberg, 2021).

This was tied into the concept that money is the motivator for these various elitist/establishment actors. Specifically, in the sense that certain politicians, mainstream media journalists, and experts had been 'paid off' by globalists to make certain statement or be complicit in certain conspiracies (mainly COVID related). This is aligned with the concept of the 'figural Jew' in conspiracy theory rhetoric throughout history; the idea that greed or monetary gain is the incentive behind the complicity of establishment actors to bend to the aim of a nefarious few (Nirenberg, 2013; Hammerschlag, 2010).

In this sample, anti-establishment sentiment takes many forms, but has similar meanings: it reframes the far-right influencers and the native Irish people as the true victims. This is particularly impactful when combined with conspiracy theory rhetoric, in which the new antagonist is the establishment government and all other institutions seen as aligned with it. By asserting that they are the true source of information, and all other media outlets cannot be trusted, it strengthens the echo-chamber effect of far-right content and delegitimises any attempts to 'debunk' conspiracy theories with outside information. Not only do influencers attempt to influence metapolitics and create distrust by engaging in this rhetoric, they position themselves as victims instead of oppressors in the social world.

8.2.3 Contextualising Ireland

Parent Code	Code	Count
Contextualising Ireland	hate speech legislation	25
	Housing crisis	23
	Weaponising Irish compassion	3
	Ireland's relationship to authority	3
	Irish spirituality	2
	Irish emigration	1

Table 1.3 Contextualising Ireland

Data was coded as 'contextualising Ireland' in order to capture instances where influencers paid special attention to adapting this ideology and rhetoric to the Irish context. While this occurred throughout the data, it was important to capture in its own right in order to examine discursively, the results of which will be discussed in the next chapter. For this (content) analysis, discussion will be limited to *how* influencers engaged with this topic, and recurrent patterns in the data.

It is important to note that engaging in a discussion of Ireland is critical to the creation of perceived authenticity. As discussed in chapter 5, perceived authenticity is one of the crucial aspects of influencer culture that makes influencer content compelling to audiences. Influencers present themselves with a degree of authenticity they allege that other traditional forms of media do not offer (Arnesson, 2022a; Lewis, 2019). Irish far-right influencers leverage this by discussing their observations and experiences of their own context, Ireland. It also serves two important functions on social media: it attracts an Irish audience, who want to understand how these conspiracy theories or ideologies is relevant to their experiences, and it convinces an international audience that Ireland is a context to pay attention to on the global stage.

A bulk of this far-right influencer content concerns itself with applying these various conspiracy theories to the context of Ireland. The housing crisis was discussed 23 times, an issue that received a high degree of media and public attention in 2022, and is linked to conspiracy theories such as Agenda 21 (specifically the abolishment of private property which is often talked about with this theory), and The Great Replacement. It is alleged that people seeking international protection, such as Ukranian people arriving in Ireland, have an easier time finding housing than Irish families.

Another topical event that was covered in far-right influencer content is proposed amendments to hate speech legislation, which was mentioned 25 times. Instead of seeing

themselves as the antagonists spreading hate speech in this scenario, they represent themselves as victims being 'censored' and targeted by the government. This demonstrates that, once again, victimhood is a core tactic that far-right influencers use for legitimacy (Boussalis et al., 2024; Marcks & Pawelz, 2022). Similarly to the 'script-flipping' narrative seen in metapolitical whiteness in which the ingroup is not portrayed as the dominant oppressor, but marginalised and under cultural threat (Paul, 2021).

The proposed changes to the incitement to violence or violence and hate offences bill will create new laws to deal with the prosecution of hate crimes, include gender expression, gender, and disability in the hate speech criteria, and criminalise the denial of genocide.[96] Some influencers discuss the potential enactment of this new legislation as they perceive it as affecting them. All denounce it, Influencer B and C alleging that it is designed to target them as far-right influencers, and Influencer A pointing to alleged examples of hate speech legislation in the UK and Germany to describe how it could violate personal rights. Influencer A discussed how it could lead to police searching your home without a warrant if you were determined to have been posting 'hate speech' online. All four influencers deny that their content qualifies as hate speech, and believe that the definition of hate speech proposed in legislation is not correct.

Influencer A, video #16, 0:00-6:36

> *"So, hurting a politician's feelings by sharing a fake quote gets you raided and fined in Germany. As highlighted earlier, insults are illegal too. One Twitter user had his house raided by police for tweeting at a German politician 'you are such a penis.' Well, over the past six years of growing internet censorship and escalation in hate speech laws, we've certainly slipped so far down the slope of restrictions on free speech that it was only inevitable and only a matter of time that we would reach a point where the*

> *police would raid a person's house for calling a politician a bad name... Yes, 'cause nothing says free speech quite like a police raid on a person's home and the possible seizure of their devices because they expressed an opinion on the internet that an authoritarian government didn't like."*

In addition to these issues facing the country, influencers also use the context of 'Irishness' to discuss far-right ideology. Influencer A discussed how elites weaponise Irish compassion to push immigration, since Ireland and Irish people pride themselves on being welcoming, the country of a hundred thousand welcomes. This represents a broader theme of reinterpreting Ireland's colonial past in terms of collective victimhood, and insisting that the oppression of the past will pave the way for oppression from conspiracist actors in the future (Boussalis et al., 2024; Marcks & Pawelz, 2022). Ireland's colonial past is often discussed in terms of reviving Irish nationalism, and how the Irish nationalism today is not adequate or as intended by the founders of the state. Some influencers discuss how Irish people have 'an internalised inferiority complex' resulting from centuries of colonialism, and how the Irish people still believe they cannot govern themselves as an explanation for what is described as the sell-out, inept current Irish government. Similarly, Influencer A and C influencers allege Irish people have a uniquely obedient relationship to authority. In this sample, influencers draw on the collective victimhood and vicarious victimhood that remain central to Irish identity. In doing so, they weaponise a powerful national frame to create a new type of ingroup threat (Marcks & Pawelz; Noor et al., 2012).

Superficially, it is clear there are specific tactics in use here to make this content meaningful in the Irish context. To gain a more nuanced understanding of how these influencers leverage this cultural and historical context of Ireland in their rhetoric, the findings of the discourse analysis will be discussed in the following two chapters. The

purpose of this analysis was to identify recurring patterns and topics in the data. Other topics that featured in this data involved Irish spirituality (both the social importance of Catholicism and the native Irish's peoples spiritual connection to the land) and the impact of emigration. Both are discussed in more detail in the following chapters, but were used here to lend support to nativism and argue that native Irish people, especially those who did not emigrate, have an entitlement to the land of the nation.

8.2.4 Prejudice

Parent Code	Code	Count
Prejudice	Anti-immigration	50
	Fear of male migrants	7
	Anti-LGBTQIA+	35
	Transphobia	13
	Anti-drag	2
	attack on Western values	10
	Racism	10
	Anti-feminism	6

Table 1.4 Prejudice

Prejudice is one of the hallmarks of far-right rhetoric. Beyond xenophobia, many far-right groups espouse white supremacist ideology, nativism, misogyny, and homophobia. Though this rhetoric can take extreme forms, it is often 'softened' online – either to avoid content moderation or to appeal to a broader audience – and relies on dog whistles and shared vernacular to allude to its more extreme iterations (Brown et al. 2021; Rothut et al., 2023). Akin to most other forms of far-right content, content from these four influencers contained prejudiced rhetoric of all types, but mainly anti-immigrant sentiment. This is unsurprising due to the a.) the volume of immigration discussion in the sample and b.) the idea that anti-immigration sentiment may already be mainstreamed within Irish politics, and therefore more palatable or acceptable to the average viewer due to its normalisation in mainstream rhetoric

although it still conveys nativist and often racist sentiment, albeit softened (Guscuite et al., 2022; Creighton et al., 2022). Within the anti-immigrant sentiment was a pronounced rejection or fear of male migrants, specifically drawing attention to the question of how introducing male migrants will affect the safety of small Irish communities. Part of this discussion was the concern of how these foreign men will target Irish women recycling an enduring trope of protecting the 'purity' of Irish women in order to protect the honour of the nation and symbolic of its cultural endurance (Coakley, 2010; Smyth, 2017; Ward, 1983).

Anti-trans and overall anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric was also prominent, mentioned 35 and 13 times, respectively. Generally, these far-right influencers do not believe that people can be transgender and believe it is the result of liberal and leftist brainwashing, akin to Cultural Marxism. While most refrain from denouncing other LGBTQIA+ identities, they do denounce what they call as the LGBTQIA+ agenda which they also perceive as being pushed in schools and part of Cultural Marxism. Anti-drag sentiment was also included, typically focusing on the outrage around drag queen story time events for children, often aligning drag with an inherently sexual performance and believing that subjecting children to drag is inappropriate and even to be considered paedophilia. It should be noted that homophobic and transphobic sentiment of this sort is popular among other far-right groups in other countries (Ottoni et al., 2018; Unlu et al., 2025). It is also often tied to conspiracy theory rhetoric including Cultural Marxism, which can be observed in this dataset, but also QAnon. The QAnon conspiracy canon alleges that specific elites are secretly paedophiles, and often conflate queer identities with paedophilia (Bloom & Moskalenko, 2021).

Again, the influencers take the position of victim and incite ingroup threat, alleging that the LGBTQIA+ 'agenda' is infringing on traditional Western values. Again, this may be a response to what is seen as the progressive trajectory of Ireland, or perhaps a desire to return to a Catholic form of nationalism. Regardless, influencers portray it as an infringement

on Ireland's cultural values and a threat to the heteronormative 'ingroup' that is structured around the family unit.

Racist ideology and rhetoric was present, mostly taking form of anti-immigrant sentiment such as The Great Replacement Theory. When racism was brought up, influencers across the board denied allegations of racism but critiqued the Black Lives Matter movement and equality measures such as affirmative action. It is important to emphasise that these influencers see the labels of racist and even far-right as pejorative terms, and take measures to distance themselves from this stance while still promoting this ideology.

Influencer A, video #21, 0:00 – 11:39

> *"When the people voice their concerns about something, the politicians who are supposed to be accountable to the people, turn on them, demonising them, belittling their concerns. Or, they deliberately misrepresent the intentions and sentiments behind the protests as hateful, far-right, xenophobic, racist, et cetera. They dishonestly engage the tactic of moral grandstanding and virtue counter-signalling in order to avoid having to actually address the worries of the people. Ultimately, the people of Ireland are the ones who are supposed to be in the driver's seat of their destiny. Our public representatives are elected to essentially do what we tell them to do. Instead, they're acting directly against our interests and are actually acting in the service of their own and we're supposed to accept this."*

Here, racist sentiment is woven into anti-government sentiment and broader conspiracy theory rhetoric. While Influencer A denies allegations of racism, they portray this as a technique to silence native Irish dissidents who should be entitled to the resources of the nation. The government is blamed for acting in their own interest, allegedly as part of some grander conspiracy to undermine the white, native ingroup.

In fact, some influencers take this logic further to deny that racism is a social issue at all in Ireland. Not only do they reject the label of racist, they deny its legitimacy, asserting that it is only a device used to marginalise and silence them.

Influencer C with interviewee, video #56, 33:08 – 33:29

"There is, there is no racism in this country. There is no prejudice in this country, not to the extent that they're trying to make it out...they need that, right, to silence our opinions."

Similar to the concept of metapolitical whiteness, these influencers seem to be moving away from expressing whiteness as biologically superior in favour of native, white ingroup dominance as the natural order or common-sense approach to nationalism (Paul, 2021). However, this rhetoric still not only delegitimises racism as a social issue but also reinforces a racist outlook by fearmongering around non-white migration and the threat to white Irish natives.

Content also covered anti-feminist and misogynist rhetoric (mentioned 6 times). This took the form of denouncing feminism for its ties to liberalism, reinforcing that women's role, specifically Irish women's role, is in the home. This is notably similar to the portrayal of Irish women throughout the history of the state, reinforcing the idea that the most important role for them is in the home and in homemaking positions (Ward, 1983). It also borrows from the popular 'trad wife' rhetoric in which homemaking roles are promoted as a salient, natural identity for women while still playing a passive yet critical role in the effort to maintain ingroup dominance (Kisyova et al., 2022). This was presented with the concept of men's rights, or the persecution of men in gendered issues, such as family law court cases and the discussion of masculinity, often calling into question the masculinity of 'normies' who do not support the far-right movement. This mirrors the language of hypermasculinity of the revolutionary period, notably in the writings of Pádraig Pearse in which masculinity was to

be expressed through defence of the nation (see chapter 3). In both cases, masculinity is mobilised through the idea that it should be expressed through one's willingness to sacrifice for the nation, and defend it against perceived threats (Redmond, 2021).

8.2.5 The far-right influencer network

Parent Code	Code	Count
How the far-right influencer network works	Response to being called far-right	20
	Social media platforms	7
	Personal stories of far-right involvement	4

Table 1.5 The far-right influencer network

Although this thesis only examines the discourse of four influencers, it still offers insight into how the far-right influencer network operates in Ireland and beyond. These influencers were chosen because of the outreach of their content, and their content provides an example for the strategies far-right influencers use to disseminate their message across online spaces. They occupy central positions in the far-right online ecosystem, and are often on the rhetorical frontline when it comes to adapting ideology to new contexts (Baele et al., 2020). In this dataset, far-right influencers demonstrated how they interact with each other, as well as discussed how they see their position in the broader far-right ecosystem and their entry points into content creation.

Content also served to situate influencers within the far-right network and present personal stories of far-right involvement. This involved a discussion of social media platforms including offering viewers alternative platforms on which their content could be accessed, some of which were donation based. Some shared personal stories of becoming involved in far-right ideology, citing a dissatisfaction at work and feeling a lack of purpose before turning to far-right content creation. Others shared the perceived consequences they faced for now being associated with the far-right movement.

Influencer A with interviewee, video #17, 27:02-28:28

> *"But I think rather than engaging too much with the mechanisms of the system, uh, what probably matters more is trying to explain to people, you know – this is part of the job that we do as journalists who are explaining to people and sort of translating. Say, for example, you know, you uh go on some website like the World Economic Forum and they're talking about uh the digital ID system they want to bring in...whatever it might be. And then, you know, part of our job is actually just reading between the lines and going 'well, this actually means this, and if they do this, then they're going to do this.'"*

This quote reveals how influencers see themselves as the kind of opinion leaders (see chapter 5). Not only does Influencer A refer to themselves as a 'journalist,' they describe their role as to translate and explain the conspiracy at play on the global stage. This is almost verbatim Katz & Lazarsfeld's (1955) definition of opinion leadership. By portraying themselves as such, they put themselves in the position to reinterpret current events according to their ideological aims. They are not simply a node in the far-right network conveying information from one source to another, they are actively shaping and reinterpreting it for their audience.

Much of the discussion around the far-right ecosystem consisted of influencers' reactions to being called far-right, either directly or indirectly. Each time, the influencers' denied that their ideology was far-right, or conceded that if that was considered far-right, then they would have to be considered far-right, but it was not a label they assigned themselves. Again, this could be a tactic to soften their stance to appeal to non-radicalised audiences. Other discussions focused on the importance of 'doing your own research' and shouting out other far-right influencers in the space. This had the effect of signposting their audience to

other approved sources and influencers within the network, ensuring that they maintain the echo chamber effect.

8.2.6 Activism

Parent Code	Code	Count
Activism	activism	21
	Calls to action	8

Table 1.6 Activism

As a whole, far-right video creators, especially those who show their face in their content, refrain from openly encouraging violent activism to avoid social repercussion and the removal of their content from online platforms (Rothut et al., 2023). As expected, influencers in this sample made no calls to action that specifically encouraged violence. Most calls to action were vague, mainly focusing on separating oneself from society, especially in expectance of looming conspiracies such as Agenda 21, and learning to become more independent including sourcing one's own food. Others encouraged networking and community-building with other likeminded people. Some encouraged protest, but did not comment on potential violence at protests.

Influencer A, video #17, 1:07:33-1:09:27

"Um, look I mean, it might be that for a time, we – some of us might have to venture across the water somewhere else, right, um, in order to keep the message alive. I hope that that doesn't have to be the case. Um, or it might be that, we might have to spend some time in jail. I mean, I don't know like, it might just – it might actually come down to that, like. The thing is that I don't think we can be afraid one way or the other."

Like the above quote, many calls to action were vague and focused on the willingness to sacrifice in order to continue speaking out (especially with the impending change to hate

speech legislation). They present a scenario in which they are martyrs being unfairly persecuted in order to mobilise followers and position themselves as being silenced.

8.3 Conclusion

This analysis endeavoured to understand *what* the key themes of relevance were in Irish far-right influencer content, as well as what conspiracy theories and ideology were introduced in this data. It also provided a descriptive analysis of how this is adapted to the Irish context, which will be explored further in the following chapters.

Overall, this content analysis revealed that far-right influencer content from these Irish influencers centres mostly around conspiracy theories, with those related to COVID-19 still a major focus, but with the War in Ukraine and Agenda 21 possibly gaining attention, at least during the time of data collection. Far-right influencers in Ireland use a combination of current events facing Ireland and ideas of 'Irishness' to contextualise far-right conspiracy and ideology to their audience. Far-right influencer content has a strong anti-establishment focus that denounces government, mainstream media, scientists, academics, education system, and law enforcement and although all influencers in this sample deny the label of far-right, they openly endorse far-right and prejudiced conspiracy theories such as The Great Replacement. Further, far-right influencers in this sample focus on anti-immigration discourse in their content, encompassing racist ideologies, as well as discriminatory rhetoric.

One of the questions this analysis hoped to answer was how far-right influencers would adapt their content post-COVID. Instead of revealing a pivot away from COVID-centric content, it revealed a new approach: using COVID and lockdown conspiracy as a symbol of the rollback of personal freedoms and a warning of the end goal of conspiracies in the future. This points to the idea that far-right influencers use symbolic references to create fear around impending conspiracies and that just because COVID is out of the news cycle, it

does not mean that it will not be continuously referenced and reinvented in the conspiracy theory rhetoric.

While these influencers showcased anti-establishment sentiment and blamed the Irish government for much of the social ills affecting Ireland, it ultimately works to protect the system as a whole and legitimise the 'traditional' concept of Irish national identity. By advocating for the protection of Irish Catholic values and condemning the establishment government and individual elites, they negate the idea that the social issues affecting Ireland are systemic in nature. They insist that by retreating to the nation of the past and replacing 'corrupt' politicians, Ireland can be restored to its former glory – protecting the integrity of the nation from any flaws that are embedded in its systems and structures.

This analysis also reveals how far-right influencers conceptualise their own role in the far-right ecosystem. By their own admission, they are operating as more than nodes in a network. They view their role as one of the persecuted martyr, but also as an opinion leader to filter and translate information to the public. This suggests that they are not just conduits of information, but that they actively play a role in constructing and deconstructing this ideology for their followers.

Unsurprisingly, influencers shied away from calls for violence or explicit instructions when it came to activism. Though they ultimately evoke fear and threat through their use of conspiracy theory and group dynamics, it seems their influence lies more with shifting metapolitics than issuing direct calls to action. These influencers present a layered conspiracy theory 'tapestry' where the government and elites are corrupt and complicit, creating a profound sense of distrust. It could be that their tactic is to attenuate the relationship between the government and the people instead of advocating for violent activism in order to destabilise the political realm.

This analysis captures the ‘texture’ and broad themes of Irish far-right influencer content. However, it does not examine the nuance of how meaning is constructed in these instances, and the impact of applying this to the case of Ireland. The following discourse analysis chapters will examine how these discursive strategies operate in order to represent the ‘playbook’ of these influencers.

Chapter 9: Discourse analysis: Discursive strategies and contextualising Ireland

9.1 Introduction

While the content analysis provides a descriptive picture of the conspiracy theory rhetoric and ideology far-right influencers employ, it does not address how they position themselves within the far-right ecosystem and how they apply this to an Irish context. It is clear from the content analysis that far-right influencers are using conspiracy theories and their own construction of Irish identity to promote this ideology, but it is important to take a closer look at how this is actually constructed, discursively, to understand the subtext of power dynamics and extremist ideology in their language (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wodak, 2015), and understand how this process operates and is being produced (or reproduced) in Ireland. Because we have witnessed the evolution of far-right politics and movements across the globe, and Ireland's can be described in its nascence (Fattibene et al., 2024a), this is a critical period of time to examine the process of identity and ideology construction in far-right discourse, to see if it mirrors or borrows from more successful far-right movements in other contexts.

This analysis uses the lens of CDA, including PDA and DHA, borrowing from Wodak's (2015) discursive taxonomy, to examine the discursive strategies far-right influencers employ in their content. This chapter takes a primarily linguistic DHA approach according to Wodak's (2015) method. The following chapters will examine broader PDA and CDA findings to discuss the *impact* of these strategies, and how it comes together to represent an overall far-right strategy or 'playbook' in Ireland.

In order to perform the analysis, codes generated in the content analysis were relied on for data selection. Because the aim of this portion of the analysis was to answer the

research question of how influencers use discursive strategies to contextualise and adapt far-right ideology to Ireland, data specifically relating to the Irish context needed to be isolated. In order to do that, data coded as 'contextualising Ireland' in the content analysis was selected and transcribed to perform this analysis. This select data was then imported into NVivo12 in order to perform descriptive coding, process coding, and line-by-line coding as outlined in the methodology.

In this chapter, the descriptive aspect of this analysis will be examined. Beyond drawing on CDA and PDA, this section draws explicitly from Wodak's DHA method which examines linguistic characterisations to understand the discursive strategies of far-right influencers. This chapter will examine the patterns and characteristics of the data, while following chapters will examine the impact of this discourse. In doing so, this analysis will capture both the micro-level units of meaning making as well as the macro-level impact of this discourse.

The following sections will detail patterns and characteristics that give meaning and structure to the Irish far-right influencer playbook of discursive strategies.

9.2 The participatory co-construction of the conspiratorial world
9.3 Constructing conspiracy and assigning conspiratorial terminology
9.4 The co-construction of knowledge and participatory culture: the case of emigration
9.5 COVID-19 as symbolic overreach and shifting blame
9.6 Delegitimisation of counterarguments
9.7 Harkening back to a better Ireland pre-globalisation
9.8 Historic oppression as precedent for current conspiracy
9.9 Shifting the antagonist to Irish government
9.10 Construction of the Irish people as weak 'sheeple'
9.11 Creating tableaus of the issues with modern Ireland
9.12 Immigration as eroding the honour of the nation
9.13 Constructing Ireland as the blueprint for conspiracy theory elsewhere

Table 1.8: Discursive strategies

9.2 The participatory co-construction of the conspiratorial world

As discussed in chapter 5, one of the draws of the online far-right content age is the participatory encouragement of 'doing your own research.' This creates cohesive group dynamics and entrenched echo-chambers, where group members can become consumed by a quest-like desire to garner (mis)information that confirms far-right conspiracy theories, and share bits of accumulated knowledge with the ingroup.

From a discursive lens, this 'conspiratorial world' has to be constructed and re-constructed through language. This section will examine how far-right influencers produce this conspiratorial world in their content about Ireland. This analysis begins with findings from video #29, a video posted by Influencer A in which they interview another Irish influencer on the "state of Ireland" or, how they perceive the problems affecting the state, and the conspiracies at play. The video is one hour and four minutes long, and gives insight into how Irish far-right influencers have begun to adapt far-right ideology and conspiracy rhetoric to Ireland.

This analysis will showcase the discursive strategies used in this content and their effect. The following chapter will examine how these strategies, and their impact, provide the basis for the far-right influencer 'playbook'.

9.3 Constructing conspiracy and assigning conspiratorial terminology

Part of the construction of the conspiracist worldview and contextualising Ireland within this worldview relies on the shared use of terminology across networks. Using far-right terminology in influencer content allows the audience to more easily recognize similar phenomena by assigning a common term and begin to apply similar patterns or events within the far-right milieu to their respective contexts. Irish far-right influencers are presented with a double-edged problem: how to make their audience buy into the idea that far-right conspiracies – ideas focusing on global orchestration, high-level elites, and systematic and

covert government control – are happening in this small country with largely hyperlocal politics, and also holding the attention of an international far-right audience by convincing them that Ireland (again, a relatively small country on the global stage) is important to pay attention to in the realm of far-right conspiracy.

Borrowing terminology from other far-right movements and conspiracy theorists serves as a discursive tool to link the relatively obscure and unremarkable occurrences in Ireland to conspiracy theory happening globally that the Irish audience should pay attention to. It also strengthens the web of online far-right influencers and streamline their communication in video content that features each other, creating this shared language of conspiracy that transcends national and cultural boundaries and is only available to those 'in the know': far-right influencers and their audiences. This, in and of itself, serves as a sort of positioning between the far-right and the masses – those who are privy to exclusive knowledge and those who are not. Relating back to SIT (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), this kind of language performs the function of delineating the ingroup and the outgroup. In this case, the ingroup is socially bound by sharing the exclusive knowledge and unique terminology to describe it. Use of these terms signposts to others belonging in a larger far-right network with its own vernacular and separates them from the general 'masses' that they will come to demonize (Barkun. 2003; Douglas et al., 2009).

One example of this is the idea of 'weaponised compassion,' a far-right buzzword that has been applied to Ireland to explain Irish people's response to immigration. The term 'weaponised compassion' seems to have originated with a conservative commentator William Voegeli (2010) to describe the 'welfare state' of America in his book *Never Enough: America's Limitless Welfare State.* In a 2014 article, Voegeli uses the term to describe liberal politicians leveraging of the discourse of 'kindness' to justify government overreach and the 'wastefulness' of the American welfare system. The term 'weaponised compassion' has since

been widely used by Canadian YouTuber Jonathan Pageau (2022), to refer to a theological concept within Christianity. Pageau (2022) refers to weaponised compassion as the process in which Christians are *manipulated* to believe that social justice concerns ('helping the poor') are the highest of Christian ideals and should be valued over worship. Pageau (2022) used the story of Judas to detail what he refers to as this form of 'antichrist,' in which Judas admonishes Mary of Bethany for washing Jesus' feet in expensive perfume, instead of selling the perfume and giving the money to the poor, and Jesus sides with Mary of Bethany. Pageau ultimately likens this to Christian worship services being suspended during the COVID-19 pandemic in order to protect more vulnerable individuals from the spread of the virus. He ends the video with a warning to Christian churches who place social justice issues above worship, as he argues that, biblically, that is not the correct hierarchy (Pageau, 2022).

Not only is weaponised compassion used in the Irish context as a justification against supporting social issues like immigration, it is used to introduce framing associated with conspiracy theory rhetoric, namely The Great Replacement theory that alleges this is a *plan* to replace native (ethnic Irish) people (Cagle, 2019; Camus, 2012). To frame this issue in conspiratorial terms, they not only borrow the language of other far-right movements (Camus, 2012; Ekman, 2022, Rose, 2022), but they must define and construct an Irish (ingroup) identity that is better and more deserving than the outgroup (non-Irish immigrants).

Influencer A references this terminology and applies it to Ireland in their video:

> *"Yep, it's all about prosperity, and it's about the perceived privilege. And again, I had the, the pleasure of speaking with Jon Pageau and talked about weaponised compassion, that is a guilt-ridden population who usually lives in a more affluent nation that takes a look around and says 'wow, we got it great,' and then they forget, it wasn't always great, you had to work up from*

somewhere and Ireland came a long way real fast." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 34:08-36:43),

Here, the interplay within the far-right and fundamentalist Christian network is displayed, as well as how language is exchanged and applied between these worlds. In the case of Ireland, this is influencer positions himself as the voice of the people and imbues some kind of collective pride about becoming a first world nation, and the sense that this has to be 'earned' or 'worked for' and those who come from developing countries have not done the work to attain this. They argue that this sentiment in combination with the legacy of Irish *emigration* is used to leverage the collective guilt of the Irish people, mobilising what could be described as a collective trauma (Alexander et al., 2004):

"He was interviewing [Influencer B] at East Wall the other night, and [Influencer B] talked about this idea that's-that's often used and has, I think, been used very successfully for the last uh two decades 'cause I've often heard it said by other Irish people whenever you bring up 'do you think maybe we're bringing in too many people into this country' um, which is the collective guilt aspect um, the Irish went everywhere...." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 31:22-34:08)

Again, the speaker mentions the name of another Irish far-right influencer, Influencer B, which reinforces this network or ingroup of far-right influencers and signposts the audience to other 'approved' sources of information. The speaker adds a conspiratorial slant to this idea of collective guilt by describing it as an idea that has been 'used successfully'. Though they do not specify who they perceive as the users of this idea, it is more the language of something designed to meet an end goal, rather than an idea held by the people. However, in this statement, Irish people are framed as complicit in their own subjugation – Influencer A uses the positioning of 'other Irish people' when introducing the

counterargument they intend to delegitimise, therefore creating the dynamic that *other* Irish people are part of this antagonistic force that aims to keep the ingroup subjugated or complicit in these conspiracy plots. In other words, there are two classes of Irish people: those who are privy to the conspiratorial worldview, and those who are not. This represents a two-level process of social categorisation within this discourse (Tajfel & Turner, 1979): first, defining the boundaries of the ingroup as those who qualify as native Irish and those who are not, and second, further delineating the group between those who are 'awakened' and those who are not.

Note as well how the argument is framed, at first: 'do you think maybe we're bringing in too many people into this country.' While far-right discourse is notorious for dog-whistle terminology (López, 2014; Wodak, 2015), far-right influencers engage in a pattern with a similar effect in which they introduce far-right sentiment 'gently' before introducing the far-right conspiracy associated with it, and then reiterating the sentiment and conspiracy in more extreme terms. The 'gentle' sentiment can be observed here in the introduction of anti-immigration rhetoric. The influencer also uses second person: 'when *you* bring up the idea' which may be an attempt to involve the audience or may just be a signifier that the influencer and the perceived audience are on the same side, part of the same privy ingroup. Influencer A presents this question in a much gentler way of phrasing it than how they ultimately frame it at the end of the video. According to this influencer, even this argument is shut down by other Irish citizens by the presentation of the counterargument of Irish collective guilt. The 'collective guilt' the influencer speaks of is directly tied to a national identity that is rooted in shame, and therefore can be exploited under the idea of 'weaponised compassion'.

9.4 The co-construction of knowledge and participatory culture: the case of emigration

In video #29, Influencer A continues to lay the groundwork for conspiracy theory rhetoric in Ireland. As part of this, the invoke the audience, inviting them into the ingroup of the 'awakened' Irish by drawing on the far-right's participatory culture of 'doing your own research,' (Douglas et al., 2017; Harambam, 2020). This section will examine how these strategies are employed in the process of legitimising and constructing Irish emigration

> *"And, I have a lot of things to say about this, uh, firstly, I – they're, they're talking about hundreds of years' worth of, of emigration uh of, by Irish people, um which has, okay, for a huge uh amount of that was actually fleeing the genocide that we euphemistically refer to as the famine, but even when we were, when our people, I should say – because I didn't go and that's an important point to make – um, even when they were emigrating for a better life, um, this is the thing – we are descended, [name], from the people who stayed." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 31:22-34:08).*

The influencer has laid out the counterargument and now is laying out the steps to delegitimise this argument – one of which being the *legitimisation* of Irish emigration that separates the Irish emigrants from the immigrants arriving into Ireland today.

The first point towards the legitimisation of Irish emigration is temporalisation (Wodak, 2015). Because it took place over a long time period (in this case, 'hundreds of years'), the volume is not as 'bad' as it would be otherwise, and therefore, still acceptable. The second point towards the legitimisation of Irish emigration is reserved for those who emigrated due to genocide – which is presented as an *acceptable* or justified reason, as opposed to other, unspecified reasons. It is also unclear whether, by this justification, immigrants into Ireland who are currently fleeing genocide are de facto acceptable.

The legitimisation of Irish emigration ends there, however, as the influencer positions themselves, as modern residents of Ireland, as more worthy. A valuable part of their identity,

for them, is that their ancestors did not emigrate from Ireland (or if they did, presumably came back) and implies that they position themselves above people they did – potentially as a justification of more national pride, more claim to the nation.

> *"Okay, w- you are not guilty of the sins of your father or of your father's father or father's father going back many, many, many, many generations. Uh, if, if someone said to you '[name], you're going to go to prison because one of your ancient ancestors shot someone, um, do you know what I mean? Like this sort of original sin aspect of the emigration thing. Um, this, this really frustrates me that we should have to take in the world." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 31:22-34:08)*

This influencer uses the language of sin to construct an argument that creates distance, temporally and morally, between the issue at hand and culpability to illustrate their point that, as they perceive it, descendants of Irish people who stayed in Ireland are still bearing the collective guilt of those who emigrated, going so far as to describe it an 'original sin.' They then express their personal frustration before switching back to a collective voice of 'we' (meaning Ireland). While the idea of 'taking in the world' is hyperbole, it does invoke a sense of burden, scarcity, and ultimately, doom that helps to construct the idea that Irish people are being taken advantage of.

> *"Okay, well let's look at where the Irish went to in the world, okay, again, these are not the people that – so, when they went to Australia, when they went to Canada, when they went to the United States, or New Zealand, for example, these were European colonies of which they, the Irish, became one of the founding stock." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 31:22-34:08)*

Influencer A uses the same kind of participatory knowledge co-construction that is seen elsewhere in the text – by starting the statement in a collective voice, inviting the interviewer, and audience, to look at the 'evidence' with them creates the effect that this knowledge is co-constructed and the audience is arriving to the conclusion *with* them. They then go on to position Irish emigrants in a position of power, pride, or superiority because they were the founding stock of colonies that were 'culturally compatible.' Note that these jurisdictions were all British colonies, as was Ireland, which is not mentioned by Influencer A. Britain is typically constructed as the antagonist during this time (the height of its colonial power), especially for its erasure of Irish language and culture (Leeson, 2021). In fact, all of these former British colonies listed in this quote suffered similar cultural erasure due to colonisation, but this process is framed almost positively here with the notion of 'cultural compatibility'.

The unacknowledged subtext here is that these jurisdictions were 'culturally compatible' because they all bore the influence of British colonisation. While this is typically framed negatively in this discourse, especially due to the loss of a unique Irish culture, it is used in a positive light here to justify their argument that immigration is only permissible within similar cultural contexts. Inconsistencies of this nature are not uncommon in this data, Irish emigrants are still made separate from other emigrants even when Irish emigrants are described as 'the founding stock' of other colonies which firstly maintains their foremost ethnic and national identity, which is represented as unchanged and important even when assimilating to new contexts, and constructs Irish emigration as a point of pride versus something destructive or threatening. This source of pride is fundamental to the overall argument, but explained in two different ways. First, that those who did *not* emigrate should be proud of this fact, as if it enhances their Irish identity or allows them a more authoritative position on modern Ireland, and second, that those who did emigrate should also see this as a

point of pride on the basis that they were valuable as 'founding stock' in other countries. Both positions separate Irish citizens and Irish emigrants as superior to other emigrants or immigrants into Ireland.

> *"And I always say, the Irish never went anywhere where they made the popu- the native population a minority there. They also weren't going to Africa, the Middle East, Asia, or South America to any great degree. They went to, there were some that were taken to the Carribean as slaves, there were some that were taken to Australia as convicts, um, so, uh p- please explain to me why we should have to take in the third world today because some people in the past somewhere went elsewhere? The – the idea that ev- like, every nation on the planet has a portion of itself that at some point went somewhere else, uh, I just feel – why do we owe the world? Why is it, why is it that it – and it always seems to be the migration is only ever going in one direction, right? It's only coming into the West." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 31:22-34:08)*

Here, the influencer continues to build their own legitimacy by starting off with 'as I always say..." there is authority in repeating themselves, and having a pre-thought rebuttal to the counterargument that the legacy of Irish emigration should prevent anti-immigration sentiment. The following statement borrows language of the Great Replacement theory (Camus, 2012; Ekman, 2022), which is concerned with shifting demographics that will ultimately make white Western European natives a minority in their respective countries. This could be seen as an example of dog-whistling extreme far-right conspiracy theories, in the sense that even though the specific conspiracy is not mentioned by name, it is described with enough detail that most listeners familiar with it would feasibly link this discourse to it. There is a focus on nativism in this statement, potentially signalling to the audience that this

is *not* the kind of immigration we will see into Ireland, instead warning that immigration into Ireland will cause a shift in the demographic by displacing or outnumbering native Irish citizens.

Once again, the influencer uses the collectivisation of 'the Irish' as a monolith, or one distinct group with collective reasons for emigrating, who had agency to decide where to emigrate and to prioritise 'cultural compatibility' in this decision. The influencer then lists examples of where the Irish 'weren't' going – the implication here being that these places would have been culturally incompatible for Irish people. They qualify this statement by saying that they weren't emigrating there *to any great degree*, stressing that a difference between acceptable immigration versus unacceptable immigration is quantity.

They then switch to highlighting emigration with lack of agency or power – discussing the Irish people who were taken as *slaves* and as *prisoners* – two positions with little agency. Also, the language of 'taken' reiterates that this was something done to them, at the power and jurisdiction of some external force. In this sense, emigration is constructed as acceptable because it was not within their purview, it was something enacted upon them. The 'Irish people were slaves'[16] argument is often used in not only American far-right spheres but more broadly in counterarguments to the ongoing civil rights movement and anti-racism initiatives, in order to create a comparison and disrupt the racial dichotomy of slavery.

This argument does not echo those same rhetorical lines per se, but does use the 'Irish as slaves' trope to establish a dynamic of power in which the Irish people are oppressed, at least in some instances, lacking the agency to make decisions around emigration on their own. This serves to construct Irish people in a way that helps build the rest of the weaponised compassion narrative – that Irish people are an oppressed, obedient population prone to being taken advantage of.

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[16] see Handler & Reilly (2017) for discussion on the idea of white slavery

The influencer then shifts back to the present, asking "*please explain to me why we should have to take in the third world today because some people in the past went elsewhere?*" This is a callout meant to expose a lapse in logic, again inviting the audience into this formation of knowledge. They use the collectivisation of 'we' again, referring to modern Ireland, but then create a spatial and temporal difference by saying *some people* in the past went somewhere, which highlights that modern Ireland and modern Irish people are separate (and not responsible) for the Irish people of the past.

The influencer then constructs emigration as a phenomenon which is not unique to Ireland, or inherently different from historic emigration from other countries. They also discuss the nation as a single entity – a portion of 'itself' breaking off instead of individual people, which aids the construction of the idea of a nation in this context as singular, a collective monolith.

By constructing Ireland as a singular entity, and Irish emigration as not burdensome or prolific compared to the rest of the world, immigration coming *into* modern Ireland can be constructed as burdensome and unacceptable – not only in terms of scarcity of resources, but to the integrity of the nation as a singular entity.

The language of guilt and burden is leveraged here – "*why do we owe the world*?" This ties back to the idea of weaponised compassion, and the idea that Irish people are being taken advantage of. Note also that the influencer is electing to speak on behalf of Ireland and taking on the collective voice of burden. They continue to invoke spatialisation as cultural threat (Wodak, 2015)– the idea that migration is only ever going in one direction. "*Importing the third world*," as it is sometimes referred to in these videos, and the constant juxtaposition between Western and non-Western is a dog whistle for the threat that Ireland's culture will be under siege via demographic shift from immigrants from 'non-Western' countries, or as they say here, culturally incompatible countries.

9.5 COVID-19 as symbolic overreach and shifting blame

The content analysis revealed that COVID-19 has remained a salient talking point in the content of these four far-right influencers and that it has become an enduring symbol of government overreach. This section of the analysis demonstrates how COVID-19 is incorporated into other conspiracy theory rhetoric and how this positions the 'elites' as the oppressor.

> *"You talked there about the, I always call it the 'Ireland Last' approach. And it always seems like our policy is one hundred percent Ireland Last. All of the things that we talk about, they focus on 'what about our guests? What about the migrants? What about asylum seekers?' And every time you think you're forgetting a really important part - the people who elected you to be your position. The people who entrusted you with responsibility, not authority, not unilateral authority like you said, to make treaties outside of our - your purview, to enforce them onto us. Like, we had the pandemic treaty thrust on us. Nobody voted for that. Nobody got a say in it." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 14:08-15:43)*

In this passage, the influencer is using the language of other far-right spokespeople to construct the Irish government as the new antagonist. The concept of 'Ireland Last' was first discussed by Influencer A in this sample, and is here assigned a recognisable term. Note that 'Ireland Last' is the inverse of a new far-right political party, Ireland First (Ireland First, 2025). At least three of these influencers have endorsed the creator of that party, it would not be unreasonable to assume that this is a subtle endorsement of the party, at least compared to the current government's approach.

This is further supported by the following "*what about our guests? What about the migrants?*" They are constructed as guests first (who can overstay their welcome), migrants and asylum seekers second and third. The effect of this statement is conveying that these people are here because of the generosity and hospitality of Irish people first, and necessity second. Again, this links to the argument of weaponised compassion. If people are here primarily because of the generosity and charity of the Irish people, but this charity is forced or manipulated by the government and not virtuous, then there is less of a moral consequence in rescinding some of this generosity. However, if this is reframed to prioritise the necessity of asylum first, this argument loses some of its legitimacy.

Influencer A then shifts to seemingly talking directly to politicians or elected officials. This is again an argument that Irish people should be more deserving of certain rights that those who have recently migrated to the state, but here it is framed in terms of electoral process. Influencer A constructs this argument in the sense that rights and priority should be granted on the basis of engaging in democracy and voting (as opposed to ethnic belonging, which would take this argument in a different direction and potentially be less palatable to a less radicalised audience).

They make a distinction between authority and unilateral authority - the effect of which constructs Irish politicians as acting outside their bounds or role as political figures, in a way which is undemocratic. This argument relies on the legitimacy of democracy, which some far-right actors reject outright (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2019; Mudde, 2007), but Influencer A seems to reject sitting politicians because they are acting for their own means instead of in the interests of their electorate.

Influencer A then uses the COVID-19 emergency legislation to legitimise the undemocratic nature of the government. This is an example of how COVID-19 and the resulting lockdowns have become a vital symbol in far-right discourse (see chapter 8). This

frames government action as undemocratic, and outside of their agreed upon appointed roles. It takes the populist slant that somehow, politicians are acting in their self-interest or the self-interest of other (elite) parties rather than for the people (Mudde, 2007). This helps construct the conspiratorial worldview because it shifts the antagonist onto the government and creates a scenario where they must have a covert motive to make decisions that disenfranchise their electorate. Influencer A uses the language of force and power here, that this piece of legislation was 'thrust' upon the Irish public. In many instances, such language of force and abuse is used to characterize the Irish government, again reinforcing the idea that the Irish people are being beaten down and taken advantage of by a new oppressor.

> *"These unilateral agreements in trade, um, sorry I mean these agreements that are going on, they're basically going on without consultation with Irish people and at no point do they seem to benefit us. And the moment you bring up the conversation it's immediately, unfortunately, pigeonholed into 'it's conspiracy theory.' Really? What about the UN's SDGs, their sustainable development goals? What about Agenda 2040? We have our own Agenda 2040 document in the Irish government which talks about bringing in a million foreign people to this country." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 14:08-15:43)*

This reiterates the framing of government as antagonist. The use of 'unilateral' again stresses that politicians are acting out of the bounds of their perceived role in society, with more power than they should be entrusted with, and which do not benefit the national (or ethnic) group which is the role that they are designated.

The influencer then switches to the perceived marginalisation frame – the 'pigeonholing' of what they believe to be nuanced arguments with evidence into disregarded

conspiracy rhetoric. They are positioning themselves outside of mainstream rhetoric here – but they switch from standing with the rest of the Irish public to standing somewhere outside of it, and being marginalised and othered by the Irish public.

Influencer A then continues to showcase legitimacy for the conspiratorial worldview. This legitimacy justifies their position against the power of the government, and their belief that they are conspiring against the Irish public, and proof that there are extant documents of plans (sustainable development goals). They then include a bid to an Irish audience by contextualising Agenda 2040 to Ireland, with the threat of demographic change that they dog whistled earlier in the video – now they state it more directly. This demonstrates the gentle introduction of *extreme* far-right conspiracy theories into Irish far-right content (Ekman, 2022). Regardless of whether this statement is true or not, it creates tension that there will be major demographic shift in the next fifteen to twenty years, threatening the ingroup and creating resource scarcity. Here, they are legitimising concerns with proposed relevance to the future of Ireland.

> "*Now, you have to forgive me, but I'm old enough to remember when our climate zealots told us that we needed to reduce population – that automation was coming, we needed UBI to support all of this, but now you're telling me we're not procreating fast enough and that we have to bring in foreign people to work? I'm struggling to see how these things sit side by side and how people with a straight face can hold these two positions at the same time." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 14:08-15:43)*

Here, the influencer signposts to their audience that they are about to highlight a discrepancy – they create a juxtaposition to legitimise the existence of conspiracy theories. They aim to demonstrate how the motives of the 'elites' must have change, because the past

and present goals of these conspiracies seem to compete with one another. This is an example of how the conspiratorial world is constructed in this discourse – first, a process of legitimisation through the use of problematisation (Bacchi, 2012), and the delineation of ingroup/outgroup through spatialisation, ethnonyms, and the careful construction of who is 'entitled' to the nation (Wodak, 2015). Then, by using extreme conspiracy theory rhetoric to justify that this a threat to 'the nation' that requires action, similar to the process of securitisation (Buzan et al., 1998). The language gradually becomes more extreme, describing elites as 'zealots' and doing little to soften the implication that this is part of a plan to destroy the Irish nation.

> *"They put forward these, this idea that Irish people have stopped being compassionate, which is obviously and verifiably false, you need only walk out your door and ask for assistance and an Irish person will help you. That's what we do; it's what we're known for. When it comes to charity, there are few countries that can rival the output that Ireland puts out there for charity, despite our own hardships. Now, we can talk about the weaponised compassion element, 'cause I think you – you're, you've kind of lightly touched on it there, which is this idea of, they drop softly numbers, but every time they're, they're priming the communities around the country for this thing of 'well, we have to do our part, we have to take our fair share, we have to do it for the common good, think of those in war-torn areas.'" (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 8:14-9:26)*

Here the influencer once again uses 'Irish people' as a single entity, constructing a national or ethnonational identity, which includes the inherent compassion of Irish people. Describing the idea that Irish people have stopped being compassionate as "*obviously and*

verifiably false" is another bid for legitimacy – highlighting the availability of observational knowledge to prove that Irish 'compassion' is still present, and part of a co-construction of identity and knowledge with their audience. They then switch to a collective voice "*it's what we're known for.*" This serves to construct the idea of *compassion* as an inherent part of the Irish identity, as a basis for proving how the Irish people – at an identity level – are prime targets for conspiracy.

Again, Influencer A uses the term 'weaponised compassion' coined by theological YouTuber Jon Pageau (2022) to describe the phenomena of what they perceive to be happening in Ireland. Presenting a distinctive term for this phenomenon allows them to convey it more succinctly to their audience, tap into the larger (transnational) extremist/conspiracy rhetoric vernacular, and builds a common language for talking about conspiracy in Ireland and beyond. Again, there is an unspecified, malicious 'they' that orchestrates the action in this statement – "*they're priming communities around the country"*.

This logic extends to other conspiracy theories introduced in the data:

> *"It is clear from the way Agenda 21 is being implemented that 'encourage' means compulsion through legislation, taxation, and local authority zoning. So, this is why it can be harder for people to get mortgages in certain rural areas of their country. For example, they're doing this here in Ireland as well." (Influencer A, video #1, 13:49-14:05)*

This passage comes from a video discussing the implementation of popular conspiracy theory Agenda 21 in Ireland. Agenda 21 is a real UN non-binding agreement which highlights sustainable development goals for the 21st century (United Nations, 1992). However, the far-right globally has used this as evidence that certain environmental, economic, and social development initiatives are part of a globalist orchestrated plan to force

the Western world back into a quasi-feudal or communist society wherein private property is obsolete and citizens rely on the government to fulfil all needs (Cagle, 2019).

In Irish far-right influencer content, Agenda 21 is often introduced in the context of the housing crisis. Instead of taking a more holistic view of the housing crisis in Ireland and its causes, influencers portray it as a contrived plan by the Irish government and the globalists to limit private property and that measures to free up existing housing stock i.e. incentivising downsizing, are more tactics to discourage ownership of private property in order to herd the population into dense urban centres where citizens can be more closely controlled and surveilled.

Much of this construction of conspiracy in the Irish context takes the form of almost a participatory co-construction of knowledge either with other far-right influencers (i.e. interviewees on each other's channel) or directly with their own audience.

The passage above takes this form of including the audience in a construction of fact and application of Agenda 21 to Ireland. It begins with a statement of fact "*It is clear*" as in something that should be plainly observables to others i.e. the audience themselves. They then precede to 'read between the lines' of recent housing incentives (in this case, a politician's speech about developing policy to encouraging older citizens to downsize to a smaller home to free up housing) superimposing the popular Agenda 21 narrative that positions the Irish government as the globalist antagonists and that this will soon or covertly will become a mechanism of control or exertion of power. Beginning the next sentence with "*So, this is why...*" is another logical progression and statement of causality that serves to signpost to the audience a cause-and-effect mechanism and also involve the audience in this formation of logic or knowledge.

Far-right influencers in Ireland have leveraged the broader far-right trope of 'doing your own research' to make their audience feel included and privileged to the creation of this

knowledge, collectively, through their content (Barkun, 2003; Marwick & Boyd, 2011). They frame issues in a conspiratorial slant, alleging that social crises like immigration and housing shortage are a *plan* that necessitate resisting the 'outsiders' of society. They invite their audience on the 'logical' progression of ideas that lead to 'evidence' conspiracy, pointing them to things they can debunk or observe in their own experience through this conspiratorial lens. As previously discussed, this heightens ingroup cohesion and bolsters the self-identity of those watching – not only does this attribute value to them for being ethnically Irish and therefore part of the 'deserving' ingroup, but also part of *another* ingroup with privileged knowledge. This represents a two-pronged approach to identity creation within this data that may serve to bolster audience member's self-concept: first, that they are part of the ingroup for being Irish, and that they are part of the ingroup for being awakened (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

This data also shows how conspiracy theory rhetoric becomes more extreme even in the course of one video (comparing quotes from video #29). Whereas in the beginning of the video, the influencers gently dog whistle the idea of "*do you think maybe we're bringing in too many people into this country,"* by the end, they're promoting the idea that "*We have our own Agenda 2040 document in the Irish government which talks about bringing in a million foreign people to this country."* This is a softening strategy that has been observed in other far-right discourse, but in this case, it devolves into the extreme within fifteen minutes, creating a heightened sense of fear and anxiety and, in many ways, necessitating action (Alduy & Wahnich, 2015; Brown et al., 2023; McSwiney & Sengul, 2023).

The co-construction of the conspiratorial world is a process that occurs throughout this sample of far-right influencer discourse. The aim is to involve the audience in this participatory 'do your own research' process of logic formation. But instead of presenting logical arguments, influencers instead present emotionally loaded messages that rely on the

construction of a 'new' Irish identity that belongs exclusively to Irish natives, and then frames this as an identity under threat. By leading the audience through this process discursively, they create the sense that not only must these conspiracy theories and beliefs be defended as truth, but the Irish nation – as it is constructed here – must be defended or risk erasure.

9.6 Delegitimisation of counterarguments

The legitimisation of the far-right movement on Ireland depends on *delegitimising* counterarguments against conspiracy theories and statements from elites and politicians. This can take the form of countering news clips or articles that explicitly call ideology they espouse as far-right, politicians defending new legislation, or even pre-emptively presenting information that 'disproves' that events are genuine.

Because most conspiracies on the surface sound nonsensical to the un-initiated, the de-legitimisation process is important in order to keep viewers' attention on alleged conspiracies happening in Ireland, and make it seem more plausible than it might on the surface (Douglas et al., 2017; van Leeuwen, 2007).

Take the following two quotes as an example of how this manifests in far-right influencer content:

> *"The lowest temperature ever recorded in Ireland was minus nineteen point one degrees Celsius, recorded at Markree Castle on the 16th of January 1881, and the coldest December temperature was minus seventeen point five, but for some reason now we need a national emergency team, huh."*
> *(Influencer A, video #13, 0:00-4:28)*

> *"Yes, 'cause nothing says free speech quite like a police raid on a person's home and the possible seizure of their devices because they*

expressed an opinion on the internet that an authoritarian government didn't like," (Influencer A, video #16, 0:00-6:36)

The first quote comes from a video discussing potential power cuts and concerns about demands on the electricity grid during the winter of 2022/2023, due to what this influencer believes is due to unfair sanctions on Russia, which is ultimately alleged to be part of the Agenda 21 conspiracy. In order to delegitimise the gravity of low winter temperatures necessitating a national emergency team, this influencer reports on the lowest temperatures on record that have occurred in Ireland, as a juxtaposition to the temperatures that occurred in December of 2022.

The following quote refers to a video discussing responses to hate speech violations in Germany, which Influencer A feels are unfairly severe and indicative of what the future of hate speech legislation will look like in Ireland. In order to delegitimise this occurrence, however, the influencer does not produce evidence but instead paraphrases the incident in a sarcastic tone, calling the German government authoritarian. These two examples demonstrate that the delegitimising counterarguments can take the form of presenting evidence where available, but otherwise using sarcasm, derogative names, and reframing within a conspiracist worldview when not.

Some of this content takes the form of directly responding to politicians and other 'elite' or establishment figures in their videos. For instance, in another video, Influencer A responds directly to clips of former New Zealand prime minister Jacinda Ardern speaking on hate speech at the United Nations General Assembly.

In the video, the influencer intersperses clips of Ardern speaking with their response and de-legitimisation of her speech.

> *"Yeah, I'm sure you value free speech so highly. I can just hear the sincerity in your cringe fake emotional delivery." (Influencer A, video #13, 0:00-6:36)*

Here, instead of offering evidence or counterpoints to 'debunk' Ardern's concerns over online hate speech, the influencer uses sarcasm to question Ardern's authenticity. Rather than the logic or basis of her argument, the influencer calls into the question the *emotionality* with which she delivers the speech. By questioning the authenticity of the 'elites' who raise these concerns, they also call into question if the stated reasons are the true motivators for these elites, or if they have ulterior (conspiratorial) motives. This shows, as well, how far-right influencers construct their *own* authenticity (see chapter 5). As discussed, perceived authenticity is one of the tenets of influencer culture that can make influencer content appealing to audiences over more 'mainstream' types of media (Abidin, 2015; Lewis, 2019; Marwick, 2017). By undermining the 'cringe' fake authenticity of politicians in power, they position themselves as the authentic source conveying the truth.

The video continues with the following clip of Ardern:

> *"How do you ensure the human rights of others are upheld when they are subjected to hateful and dangerous rhetoric and ideology? The weapons may be different, but the goals of those who perpetuate them is often the same."*

Influencer A then responds:

> *"Weapons? Weapons? I'm sorry, are you referring to a person's freedom to express themselves online as a weapon? You're a bloody weapon!" (Influencer A, video #13, 0:00-6:36)*

The influencer hinges upon the use of the word weapon – one that denotes violence and denotes responsibility, namely that influencers such as this one are responsible for

spreading intentionally dangerous rhetoric online. Influencers often downplay their role in mobilising violence and activism, and shy away from taking responsibility for any outwardly violent or hateful extremism their content may have inspired. In keeping with this, the influencer rejects Ardern's framing. Instead of spreading hateful and dangerous rhetoric, the influencer reframes the actions expressing oneself online, which they should have the freedom to do. This negates any metapolitical or mobilisation 'goals' Ardern alludes to, and reframes their position as one with little authority, that of the concerned citizen who has the protected right to express themselves. They then turn the language of violence, responsibility, and weapons back at Arden, presumably as some form of name-calling.

The strategies used do delegitimise counterarguments and deny the position of the far-right influencer in the process of mobilising others sometimes relies on facts, but often relies on emotion. In doing so, it reinforces the conspiratorial worldview these influencers are constructing. One of the benefits of conspiracy theory rhetoric is that all counterarguments can be construed as attempts to obscure the truth by elites, and this appears to be the process utilised here. By calling into question the 'elites' or establishment's true motives for pushing any of these policies, or pointing directly to these kind of far-right influencers as a threat, they delegitimise these arguments by relegating them to part of the elite conspiratorial smokescreen meant to keep everyday citizens in the dark.

9.7 Harkening back to a better Ireland pre-globalisation

Throughout influencer content, there is a MAGA-esque thread of discourse that portrays the Ireland of yore as inherently better, or with more integrity, than modern Ireland (Norris & Ingleheart, 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2021). The cutoff between 'good Ireland' and 'corrupt Ireland' is unclear, with different influencers idealising certain periods of time. Influencer B and C's discourse takes the form of arguing against the narrative that Ireland

pre-globalisation was destitute, bleak, and repressive while others point to a turning point as the infiltration of 'liberal politics' - namely the 2015 gay marriage referendum, and the 2018 abortion referendum (Elkink et al., 2020; Pang et al., 2021).

> *"I think the greatest thing that could happen in Ireland now is a complete economic collapse. Basically, that we would, if we could possibly revert back to, you know, the late nine – the late eighteen hundreds. Let's just get beyond the famine, uh, or the genocides as they actually were and, you know." (Influencer C in interview with Influencer A, video #22, 2:05:38-2:06:01)*

This quote justifies a backwards-looking stance for Ireland, asserting that it would be the best possible option to essentially (at least economically) 'revert back in time.' They pick a collective, national trauma to provide a timeline here – the Great Famine of 1845-1852 (Alexander et al., 2004; Coakley, 2011). This serves as, temporally, a 'rock bottom' of the nation – framed here as a genocide – serving to remind modern Irish citizens of a time of oppression, subjugation, and destruction of the Irish culture – akin to what influencers allege will happen again if these conspiracy plots continue. However, they point to the period just after this as the prime time period Ireland should return to. It is unclear from this quote what *specifically* is beneficial about this period in Irish history, but it should be noted that this was arguably a time pre-globalisation where Irish identity was defined by traditional roles within a Catholic society, and still – to some extent, by language and what was considered a distinctly Irish culture, only some of which survived British imperialism. By highlighting this time period as one which Ireland should return to, Influencer C is suggesting that the ideal structure and identity for Irish society lies in the past, and will not be achieved through progressive means.

> *"This thirty year period, sort of a, and it wasn't perfect, peo – the regime loves to do revisionism and look at it as Angela's Ashes or whatever, but uh that thirty year period had uh really good aspects to it and was really, it was interesting. There was, uh, literature, there was, you know, various kind of authors and uh there was a style and it was kind of becoming modern in its own way but again, in its own way. Um, that deserves massive study, that- that time period of what was going on then between, you know, I don't know, Michael Collins and T.K. Whitaker, that type of period." (Influencer B, video #47, 29:23-36:06)*

The thirty years the influencer is speaking of in this passage represents the period of time between World Wars I and II. They represent this as not necessarily and idealised period but certainly a valuable period in Ireland's history. By using 'the regime' (be it in reference to the government, globalists, media, etc.), it suggests that this group has something to gain by emphasising or overwriting history with the destitution in Ireland at the time – here represented by the book *Angela's Ashes*, which is a famous portrayal of poverty in pre-war Ireland – in order to justify moving away from the cultural or historical precedents of the time. Influencer B argues instead that this period had 'good aspects' to it, namely in terms of culture and arts. They insist that this was a time period where Ireland was becoming modern "*in its own way"*. This is the main point of contention here is it became modernised via its own development of arts and culture, not via globalisation which is seen as eroding the integrity of the nation and diminishing culture. This feeds into the conspiratorial rhetoric that there is a regime at play that wants pre-globalisation Ireland to be undervalued, and its own antecedents as a distinct culture, in favour of the modern, globalised vision of Ireland that suits their (conspiratorial) aims. They then use two Irish political martyrs to legitimise their

claims – that the Ireland of this time was a.) distinctly Irish and b.) had more integrity than the globalised Ireland of today.

> *"Uh, in fact, couldn't be less lib – it couldn't be less tolerant. It couldn't be less inclusive - it's, compared to, say, three or four decades ago, uh um a friend of mine was pointing out that, you know, a lot of – a lot of nonsense is spoken about how bleak and repressive and Catholic Ireland's history is and in fact, it doesn't square with the reality as he remembers it, it was a pretty tolerant place. You certainly didn't get into trouble for having opinions or for expressing them down the pub." (Influencer C with interviewee, video #56, 15:16-16:59)*

Another point of contention is Ireland's perceived uptake of 'political correctness' or 'wokeness,' and the abandoning of state ties to the Catholic Church, especially in regards to the above referendums. This passage highlights that sentiment in a way, comparing the influencer's idea of liberalism or tolerance with the experience of holding far-right ideals in modern Ireland.

Again, they harken back to a 'better' time – the eighties or early-nineties, which are held in public thought to have been marked by political and economic hardship pre Celtic Tiger and Good Friday Agreement, but serves the influencer to reconstruct this period as a better age because it is pre-globalism and before the referendums that were seen as a distinct break with the Church (Elkink et al., 2020; Pang et al., 2021). Influencer C cites a friend as a source, which lends some air of legitimacy, adding someone else's voice in the context, indicating that this experience is shared by someone else. Influencer C leverages their experience to delegitimise the commonly held belief that this period of Catholic Ireland was bleak and repressive, on the basis that they did not face the perceived oppression that they are

facing today. In any means, their measure of Ireland's tolerance is how persecuted *they* have felt in a given context (i.e. 'down the pub').

The arguments presented here concern the construction of a shared Irish identity, and suggest that the ideal Irish identity and Irish nation lay in the past instead of the future. Thus, the only hope Ireland has of glory relies on returning to the ways of the past. There is a subtext here that while not always explicit, is important to note: though the time periods they point to vary, they all contain hallmarks of an Ireland pre-globalisation, pre-policy that separated the Irish state from the Catholic church, and where the population was more ethnically homogenous than it is today. By amplifying these points in the nation's past, even in a mythical way, they can blame the ills of today on issues like corrupt government that does not represent the interests of the Irish people, mass immigration, and what they see as the 'liberalisation' of Irish society,

9.8 Historic oppression as precedent for current conspiracy

In attempting to make Ireland fit within this broad web of conspiracy, and also win audiences' attention when it comes to a focus on Ireland, the influencers in this sample position modern Ireland within its context of colonisation. More specifically, focusing on the oppression – and even conspiracy – Ireland faced in the past at the hands of British imperialism as a precedent that similar kinds of conspiracy can occur in the present and the future. Some of this takes the form of borrowing the language of Irish colonisation and applying it to modern day 'conspiracies'. One prominent example of this is using the term 'plantation' to refer to iterations of what is known as the Great Replacement theory (Camus, 2012).

The Plantation of Ireland refers to the process in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries by which land was confiscated from the Irish population and colonised by the British. This

involved bans on important aspects of Irish culture including language, dress, and religion which was reinforced by penal laws (Park & Kelly, 2023).

Discursively, far-right influencers have drawn a parallel between this historic oppression and its long-term ramifications and the Great Replacement Theory, which is identified as far-right, racist, and xenophobic (Ekman, 2022; Rose, 2022). This theory alleges that there is an orchestrated plan to replace white citizens of the Western world with non-white immigrants. Though a popular trope among the far-right throughout history, the conspiracy theory was named and popularised by French white nationalist Renaud Camus in 2011. Since then, it has been espoused by far-right figureheads and politicians throughout Europe and North America and has been referenced in the manifestos of multiple lone-wolf terrorist actors including those responsible for the Christchurch attack, the El Paso shooting, and more recently mass shootings in Buffalo and Jacksonville (Rose, 2022; Zhou, 2023).

Linking the Plantation of Ireland to the Great Replacement theory serves to contextualise conspiracy rhetoric within the longstanding legacy of Irish repression, and a historical wound that many people in Ireland could relate to. It thus serves to tether far-right discourse to something meaningful in the 'Irish psyche.'

> *"This is the latest plantation of Ireland, and part of the same Great Replacement process that is happening in pretty much every Western nation right now." (Influencer A, video #21, 0:00-11:39).*
>
> *"We will not have our country destroyed by this new plantation. Ireland belongs to the Irish, we are the natives of this ancient land. We will determine its future. Not you." (Influencer A, video #21, 0:00-11:39).*

In the first quote, Influencer A references the Great Replacement theory by name, in reference to the 'plantation' they claim is occurring in Ireland. This is part of constructing the

conspiratorial worldview – it blends Irish history and victimhood nationalism with global far-right conspiracy theory that promotes extremist exclusionary ideology (Lim, 2010). By using terminology that is coined in the far-right context (Great Replacement), they allude to an extremist ideology that has a decade of content attributed to it, much of which uses the theory to justify extreme action against immigrants and ethnic minorities to maintain white dominance. By using this shared terminology, influencers allude to this kind of extremist ideology and calls to action without having to explicitly verbalise it. They also signpost their audience to potentially more extreme content.

They also rely on the spatialisation of *Western* nation to denote the ingroup/outgroup separation here (Wodak, 2015) – it invokes a sense of invasion, specifically of the nation's physical bounds. This supports their stance that immigration "*is only ever into the West,*" a softened strategy to create fear that 'the West' (ethnically white societies, or societies structured around white dominance) is being 'invaded' by those who are ethnically, culturally, even economically 'foreign,' (Brown et al., 2020; Wodak, 2015).

In the second quote, still using the trope of the 'new plantation' - they construct the Irish people as an ethnic monolith with almost a spiritual connection to the land. This is a form of nativism, justifying that native Irish people lay claim to the land due to a temporal (ancient) and spatial connection to it (Betz, 2017; Wodak, 2015).

By incorporating these historic precedents that are tied to Irish nationalism as it related to the fight for emancipation from British rule, this strategy is tapping into a collective national trauma, or the concept of victimhood nationalism (Lim, 2021), to reinvent global far-right conspiracy theory in an Irish context and to establish a sense of fear that oppression, akin to the collective traumas of the past, may happen again. In order to legitimise this rhetorical strategy, they must shift the antagonist to a new oppressor.

9.9 Shifting the antagonist to Irish government

In order to make this framing of Ireland stick and maintain the parallel between oppression in colonial Ireland and the alleged control of a modern, sovereign Ireland, influencers must shift the antagonist from the British to the current Irish government. The government must be positioned as at least complicit in these global conspiracies. One of the strategies used to promote this is the juxtaposition of the glorified nation of the past with the corrupt, conspiratorial Ireland of the present.

> *"Regardless of which strategies the Irish government will make use of, the plan is to further displace the Irish, break down the family and communities, and to ultimately turn our society into renters and not owners of property." (Influencer A, video #1, 24:03-24:25).*

In this quote, the Irish government is directly framed as the antagonist. This clip comes from a video about the ongoing housing crisis in Ireland, an issue that affects many trying to find affordable housing across the country, and a unique stressor when it comes to the conversation of housing asylum seekers and immigrants with a housing supply that is already stretched thin (Burns, 2023; Social Justice Ireland, 2025). Housing policy put forth by the Irish government is often connected in this sample to Agenda 21 conspiracy narratives, where it is alleged that private property will be abolished and the native population will be pushed into a kind of feudal system. By starting with the statement "*regardless of which strategies the Irish government will make use of"* the influencer not only pins the Irish government as the primary antagonist here (usually this takes the form of an allegation that the Irish government is just a puppet government for the shadowy 'globalists' or 'elites'), but this rhetoric also serves as a kind of catch-all in the conspiratorial worldview, that no matter what 'strategies' or policies the government put forth, the conspiratorial motive remains the same. This delegitimises future government housing policies, asserting they are all part of the same conspiratorial 'plan,' pitting the Irish government against the Irish people. This may

seem like a bid for democracy, on the surface – a plea for elected officials to act in accordance with the needs of the populace that elected them. In reality, it is disguised nativism that justifies a backwards-looking view.

The goal of this conspiracy theory, as the influencer alleges here, is to 'displace' the Irish people. The language of spatialisation and displacement here mirrors the language used with the Great Replacement theory discussed earlier in this sample of discourse. In this sense, the influencer is dog whistling a kind of exclusionary nativist ideology, albeit in a way that seems softened and disguised on the surface. They also state that the goal is to break down 'families and communities' - harkening back to a time where the central unit in Irish society was the family (Redmond, 2021). There is nothing explicitly backwards looking about this statement, but framing Irish families as the de facto unit of society, and Irish families as 'under attack' primes rhetoric that progressive policies harm 'families,' and we must look to traditional structures and roles in order to rebuild a functional society. This links to Cultural Marxism conspiracy theories that push for a return back to these 'traditional' structures (see chapter 6) (Busbridge, 2020).

> *"Why is this suddenly a problem now? Because they want to impoverish us further and justify rationing of everything we need. Our government has made this possible. They've made this situation possible and they can blame it on whatever bullshit international crisis they want – whatever the crisis of the week happens to be. But, at the end of the day, they're the ones who caused this. They are responsible." (Influencer A, video #13, 0:00-4:28)*

By structuring this argument around the government's justification of policies i.e. "*they can blame it on whatever bullshit international crisis they want – whatever the crisis of the week happens to be*," they create a conspiracy narrative that is almost self-perpetuating.

That is to say that regardless of what social issues arise or what current events dominate Irish life, that they can always be tied back to these nefarious motives that the new antagonist has – to destroy the Irish nation and Irish people.

By shifting the antagonist to the Irish government, it legitimises the conspiratorial world that far-right influencers construct by identifying a new threat and oppressor. While they can disguise this messaging behind a concern for democracy, it still encourages nativist ideology. It also perpetuates the conspiracy theory worldview by framing the Irish government as operating with the same nefarious motives, regardless of the issue. This front-loads the conspiracy theory worldview and primes their audience to interpret any policy put forth by the Irish government as one with conspiratorial aims, justifying action against it.

9.10 Construction of the Irish people as weak 'sheeple'

Another form of positioning that occurs within the corpus of data is the construction of the masses of the Irish people as weak, spineless, complacent, and the reason conspiracies have been allowed to progress in Ireland. This, again, allows the influencers to position themselves above the masses in some position of authority. Again, some influencers allege that Irish people have an overly obedient demeanour towards authority due to the legacy of colonisation, once again using historic precedents to contextualise how they perceive conspiracy is playing out in the country. Others allege that Irish people of today are too removed from the hardships of the famine and are too accustomed to the comforts of post-Celtic Tiger Ireland to fight for the honour of the nation.

> *"Part of the reason why I think so many in the general public and maybe in, maybe in the media, as well, uh, were so against us is because of the fact that we had no institutional power. People respond to authority and strength and it's, it's possibly one of the reasons we talk about sort of the*

trauma bonding relationship that Irish people have had with their uh, with the authorities, with their, with their government, I should say, down the, down the generations, and how we have continuously voted these people uh back into power." (Influencer A interviewing Influencer C, video #23, 35:16-35:51)

This uses the concept of victimhood nationalism again to build a collective identity, but in a different way. While other sections of the discourse use the idea of collective trauma to construct a national identity and disseminate conspiracy theory content that will resonate with Irish people, now they are using it to delineate identity again but to characterize the rest of the Irish populace as weak 'normies.'

"Irish people have got to stop taking this kind of crap lying down and denying reality or simply using coping mechanisms like alcohol and the escapism of endless entertainment. They have to drop this 'ah, sure, what can you do' mentality. Your abuser will just become more emboldened the more you do nothing and refuse to defend yourself. We are under relentless attack and nothing will change until the masses decide to stand up for themselves. Until then, they have no right to complain about any of this. Either refuse to comply or shut up and continue on the path towards total abject poverty, enslavement, and reliance on the government for everything, for your most basic needs." (Influencer A, video #36, 2:22-3:00).

Here, Influencer A removes themselves from the collective Irish monolith they have created, and instead position themselves above in a position of power and resistance, instructing other Irish people how to do the same. They use the language of interpersonal abuse to describe the Irish people's relationship with their government – this type of language introduces emotional affect and personalises institutional grievances to frame it as individuals suffering abuse. Then, they allege this 'abuse' will get worse as long as people refuse to

defend or stand up for themselves. Although this is not a call to action outright, it does create an urgency that necessitates action – how extreme this action must be is up to the viewer. The consequences, as they outline here, are extreme – abject poverty, enslavement, and loss of personal freedom. Through their use of collectivisation, they also further divide the native Irish populace into two pertinent identities: the weak complacent 'sheeple' who comply, and the enlightened few who defend themselves. It is clear which group the influencer aligns themselves with – they distance themselves using 'Irish people' instead of 'we' to describe the complacent masses. They also claim "*we are under relentless attack and nothing will change until the masses decide to stand up for themselves."* Again, this implies a sense of urgency – that doom is imminent, these extreme consequences are looming, and the only solution is to radicalise or 'enlighten' the masses to this way of thinking – to 'wake up' more people. While ambiguously worded, this provides an incentive for viewers to not only align themselves with the ingroup of native Irish people under attack, but the enlightened few who understand the nature of this attack and have the responsibility to defend themselves and mobilise others. In this way, far-right influencers leverage identity to mobilise their audience.

9.11 Creating tableaus of the issues with modern Ireland

One of the discursive strategies that far-right influencers employ is creating or describing 'tableaus' of modern Ireland that highlight the disconnect between modern Ireland and their idealised version of Ireland, or the leaders of modern Ireland versus the vision that revolutionary martyrs had for the state.

> *"Well there was, there was a very funny and very interesting video uh, uh going around there last night and this morning from Béal na Bláth and, and uh the uh hundredth anniversary of the assassination of Michael Collins, uh yesterday uh where Martin arrived in and is being greeted by [his party]*

and someone had managed to set up a m- uh, an amplifier and a speaker which was replaying on a loop the speech which Martin made in the Dáil where he said we have to move on from this backwards sovereignty type of thing, you know. And they were playing this repeatedly and then all of these henchmen and henchwomen tried to clap it out of existence, you know, but it was really telling.

"Now, there was also a video of the RTÉ report which of course makes no mention of any of this and just has, you can't even hear any murmur in the background of the mic - the microphone is so tuned to Martin's voice. And, uh, it's all, it's like just normal, routine, you know, uh political speech. And this is, you know, remarkable, uh tableau of Ireland – modern Ireland now, of 2022 Ireland. That there really is this fiction on the surface and the lie just below. The lie being revealed – the lie is exposed right there in front of you, but the lie, t-the truth about the lie never gets out, beyond a certain level."

(Influencer C in interview with Influencer A, video #22, 30:03-31:23)

Influencer C creates a juxtaposition to highlight the difference between the mythic, glorified Ireland of the past with the corrupt Ireland of the present. Using the revolutionary figure of Michael Collins, a symbol of the martyrs with idealised values of the nation and the event honouring the centenary of his assassination, the influencer positions the mythic Ireland and the contemporary Ireland in the same space. The influencer references a speech by Micheál Martin, then Taoiseach, in support of Ireland's membership in the European Union and the sovereignty it afforded, instead of the 'backwards-looking idea of sovereignty' (Oireachtas, 2017). Of course, the 'sovereignty' these influencers are advocating is indeed the backwards-looking sovereignty of the mythic nation, one that is exclusionary and 'traditional.' By presenting these narratives together, the influencers try to justify this

position by alleging that modern Ireland is removed, even to the point of betrayal, to the mythic nation of the past and the pursuit of sovereignty the nation was founded on. It further implicates the Irish government in the conspiratorial world by framing this as an observable 'lie' that 'never gets out.' Not only does this strategy justify the very backwards-looking identity referenced, it furthers the conspiratorial narrative and positions the Irish government as the complicit antagonist of the true nation.

9.12 Immigration as eroding the honour of the nation

Far-right influencers construct immigration as inherently harmful to the nation in the sense that it robs it of some intrinsic quality or does not fit with the culture of Ireland. This sometimes takes the form of alluding to the harms of importing 'the third world' or those from underdeveloped countries, sometimes expresses itself in fear for how immigration will change safety concerns in small Irish towns, especially when it comes to Irish women.

> *"Because what we're dealing with here is you're moving people in from cultures where, number one, there's a cultural challenge here. The second thing is a lot of them are coming here for the economic side of it and not the foundational principle of what Ireland is and why it is what it is, which is a huge challenge. Ireland is a unique beast; I went to Canada, I've been to America, I've been all across Europe; Ireland is a very unique beast... So, imagine in the more developing world, coming across and thinking oh, wow, so things like women's rights, LGBT rights, this is going to be a fairly new concept and could be a bit of a culture shock for them. Um, instead of thinking about these and consulting and making sure we're getting the best possible fits, and that we're getting people coming through, we have an open door revolving policy." (Influencer A with interviewee, video #29, 34:08-36:43)*

Influencer A problematise cultural disparities to discourage immigration (Bacchi, 2012). This may be an attempt to distinguish Ireland in the global sphere – specifically its culture. They distinguish Ireland from its European and North American counterparts, reinforcing that Ireland has a culture and identity unto itself, and belonging only to those who are already immersed in it. They also assert that people should be coming to Ireland for its culture, instead of the economic opportunities it presents. Interestingly, they point to Ireland's (relatively) progressive stance on women's rights and LGBTQIA+ rights to highlight cultural disparity between the nation and immigrants arriving to the nation. This is at odds with statements against the LGBTQIA+ and feminist 'agenda' they make in other videos, but again, these inconsistencies and hypocrisies are common (Bull & Simon-Vandenbergen, 2014; Wodak, 2020).

9.13 Constructing Ireland as the blueprint for conspiracy theory elsewhere

Part of the process of contextualising Ireland within far-right conspiracy theory and ideology is selling the idea that Ireland is an important part of the globalist conspiracy at large, so that audiences outside of Ireland will begin to see Ireland as relevant to far-right discourse and a jurisdiction to pay attention to. The far-right influencers in this sample play to the hyperlocal context of Irish politics, but also play into the larger transnational far-right network (see chapter 3) (Coakley, 2012; Macklin, 2013). Fattibene et al. (2024a) found that Irish far-right influencers and groups were engaged with influencers from other jurisdictions. This analysis will examine how these far-right influencers engage this process.

Influencers A and C allege that Ireland is a particularly good candidate for globalist infiltration, whether because of the weak Irish 'sheeple' and willingness to bend to authority, its geographic location, or its allegedly inept government. Some influencers cling to the idea that Ireland is the 'blueprint' or the trial country for the roll out of global conspiracies. This

puts Ireland on the global stage, and also elevates the influencers to a more powerful position, since they position themselves as the only ones speaking out about conspiratorial trends that will (allegedly) begin to affect other countries globally.

> *"Hopefully there won't need to be any blood shed in the process but it might get nasty because, um, they chose Ireland for a reason. If you look at where we are on the world map uh I think we're a lot more strategically significant than people care to realise – we're right between America and Britain, you know, so we have the crown on one side and then we have the, you know, the empire on the other - we're right in between them so don't kid yourself, any, any, you know independent Irish Republic that wanted to go its own way, that wanted to carve its own independent path, that wanted to be not a part of the American sphere of influence and not a part of the British sphere of influence, uh is going to encounter trouble. We're going to, you know, we're going to be made an example of, we're going to be declared an enemy" (Influencer C with interviewee, video #56, 43:52-46:02)*

This influencer uses spatialisation to situate Ireland in the global conspiratorial stage, positioning it as important because of its geographic location (Wodak, 2015). Influencers also have the task of making their respective contexts relevant to a broader audience, not just the Irish audience, but the far-right network globally. By constructing Ireland as a key player in the enactment of these conspiracy plots, it justifies a focus on a relatively small country on the global stage of far-right conspiracy rhetoric. They also construct the idealised, sovereign 'independent Irish Republic' as not only something under threat, but something that will be made an 'enemy' by globalists. In this sense, fighting for and defending the idealised nation with an identity in its own is not only counterculture, but transgressive in the global sphere.

These discursive strategies contextualise Ireland within the broader sphere of far-right conspiracy theory and ideology, and attempt to convince the audience that their survival requires them to understand this.

9.14 Conclusion

By examining these strategies individually through the lens of power and ideology (CDA), political positioning (PDA), and historical context (DHA), analysis reveals that these influencers are engaging in identity work in which influencers de/re-construct Irish identity by creating ingroup/outgroup boundaries (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This takes a twofold approach to ingroup creation: first, the typical ethnonationalist construction of the Irish people (Wodak, 2009); but also creating a distinction between the brainwashed Irish 'sheeple' and the enlightened few. By constructing the mythic nation of the past using historical and local symbols of bygone Irish nationalism, influencers are able to juxtapose this ideal nation with the corrupt nation of today. This also performs a sort of system justification purpose – if the foundation of the state is moral and righteous, then Ireland can be 'fixed' by returning to tradition (Jolley & Douglas, 2018). This allows them an opportunity to re-brand Irish nationalism as something that fits within their worldview, a type of nativism informed by far-right ideology that relies on the exclusion of others (Mudde, 2007). It also allows them to construct the outgroup in accordance with this and blame them for the corruption and degradation of the Irish nation. The conspiracy theories referenced here are the same conspiracy theories that dominate far-right sphere globally (see chapter 4), but are made relevant to the Irish context through a process of using historical precedents and national symbols (Wodak, 2009). The structure of these theories, in which the establishment seeks to gain control over the citizens and obscure the truth, makes these theories both self-reinforcing, since any counterargument is seen as further attempts to hide the truth, and

creates ingroup cohesion by the participatory nature of ‘doing your own research’ to gain access to the obscured truth (Douglas et al., 2017; Harambam, 2020). By portraying other Irish people as culturally brainwashed to be obedient, other counterarguments by the ‘masses’ can be brushed away.

While the conspiracy theory introduced in this sample is still ‘illogical’ on the surface and has little relevance to the Irish context, influencers still make this resonant by pairing it with an emotionally resonant message that reinforces ingroup identity as deservingly above the rest and tapping into existing national touchpoints. This is not a new tactic – conspiracy theories gain prevalence and this degree of ‘stickiness’ not because of their logic, but because of their emotional appeal (Douglas et al., 2017). Conspiracy theories also perform the function of explaining away any logical counterarguments, allowing focus to be on the emotionality of the message (Douglas et al., 2017; van Prooijen & Douglas, 2018). These discursive tactics are being used to create identity, emotionality, and ultimately, calls to action.

This chapter has showcased the findings of the discourse analysis in terms of the distinct linguistic and discursive patterns apparent in this data. The following chapter will the impact of these strategies and how they are shaped into a far-right ‘playbook’ that advance far-right narratives in Ireland.

Chapter 10: Discussion – The Far-Right Playbook in Ireland

10.1 Introduction

A pressing question now is how much this discourse mirrors other successful far-right movements in other countries, and to what degree Irish far-right influencers' strategies are uniquely Irish or imported from abroad. The answer seems to be a combination of both transnational strategies and uniquely Irish context.

Irish influencers seem to be working off a 'playbook,' so to speak, or a repertoire of discursive strategies aimed at making far-right ideology and conspiracy relevant in an Irish context. Some of this relies on leveraging local concerns, historical symbolism, and other collective traumas that appear uniquely Irish. However, this chapter will argue that it is no different from the way other far-right movements and conspiracy theory ecosystems attempt to leverage identity salience and social belonging.

The Irish influencers in this project employ strategies witnessed in other far-right movements in the United States and Europe, but they must first do the discursive work of making this ideology resonant to an Irish audience. Though it cannot be determined what motivates far-right influencers to position themselves this way – whether it be a true belief in this ideology and conspiracy theory or just the opportunity to jump on another social media grift[18] – the impact of this discourse is clear. It uses identity politics to mobilise viewers, sow fear and distrust, and ultimately issue calls to action. Figure 3 details the 'steps' of the far-

right playbook and Figure 4 expands on the impact of each of these steps, which will be discussed in detail in this chapter.

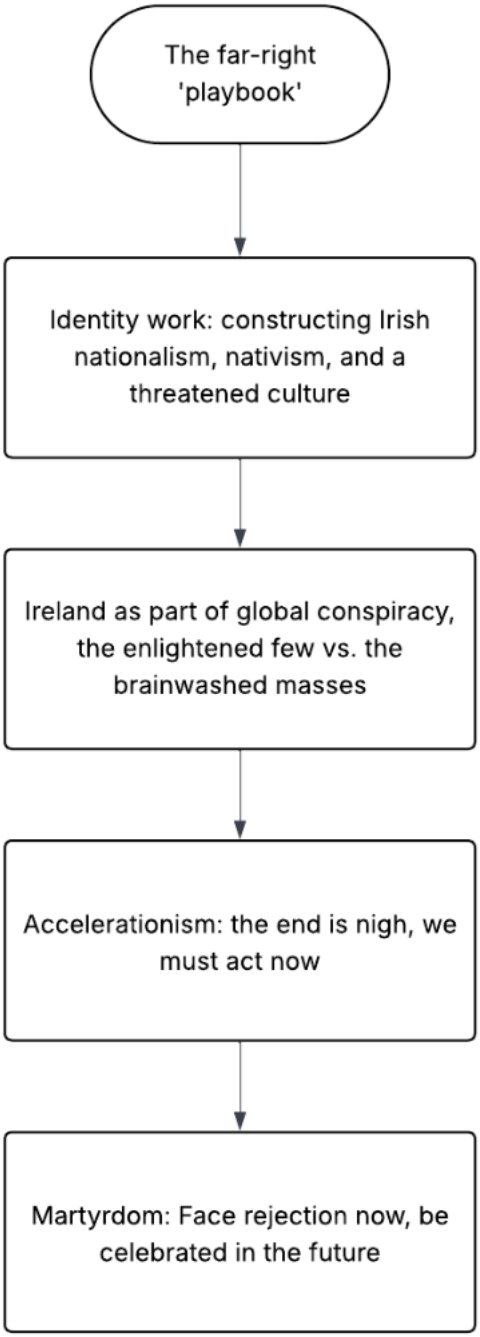


Figure 3: The far-right playbook

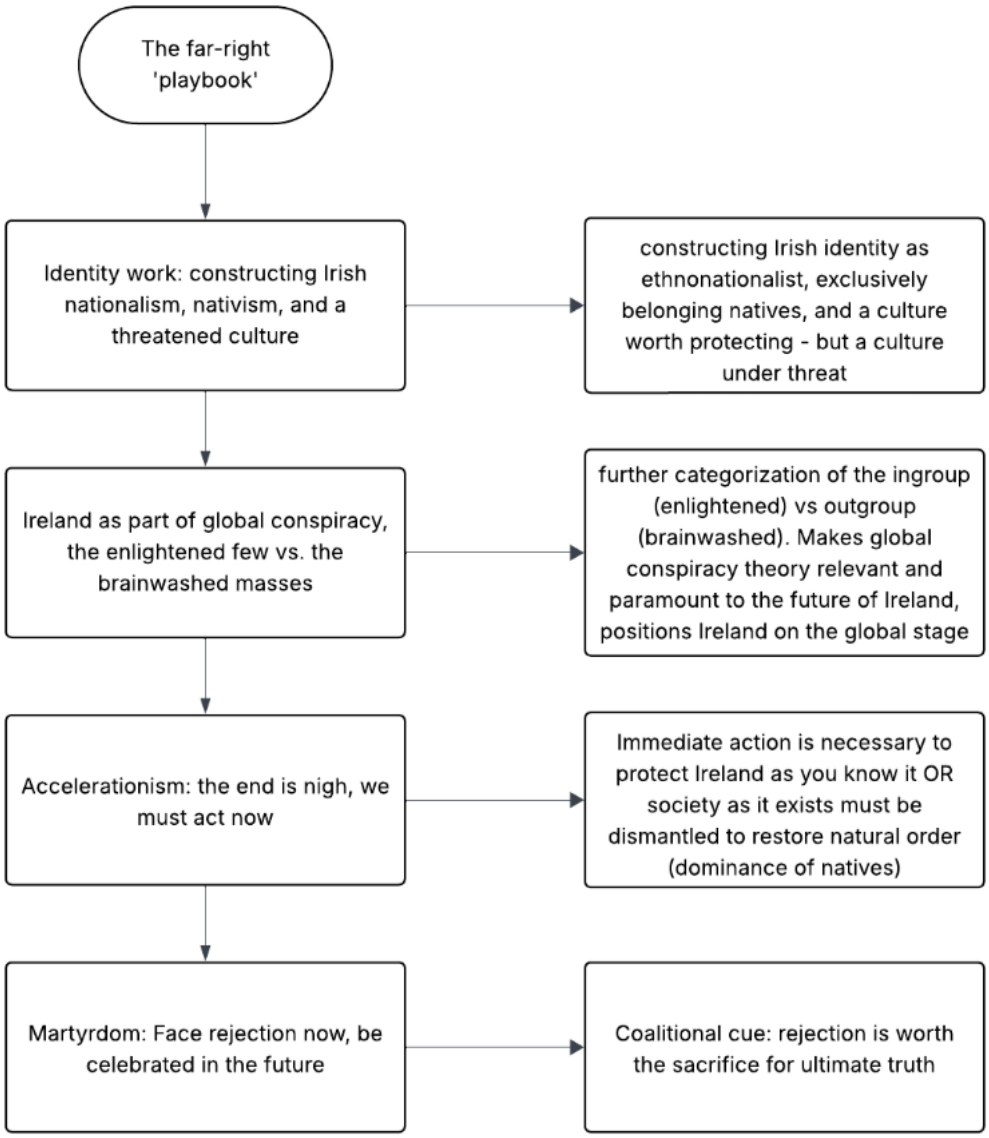


Figure 4: The far-right playbook - impact

10.2 Identity work, Irish nativism, and a threatened culture

Irish identity is in a state of flux – not just for those seeking a nationalist identity to validate their own self-concept, but for the nation as a whole (Dingley, 2015; Jardina, 2019). Returning to Coakley's (2011) question, "If being 'Irish' cannot depend on being a speaker of the ancestral language, and neither implies nor is implied by being a Catholic, on what cultural basis does Irish nationalism rest?" (p. 110). This exposes a vulnerability, as well as a

rhetorical gap that can be leveraged by far-right discourse. As a post-colonial nation, Ireland has a unique relationship to nationalism, and the concept of what it means to be Irish has been constructed and re-constructed throughout time (Coakley, 2011; Creighton et al., 2022; Dingley, 2015). While religion was its own social signifier for much of Ireland's modern history, the distancing between the Catholic church and the state removed some of the structure that some believed was inherent in Irish society (Coll, 2015; Inglis, 1998). Notwithstanding, Ireland is still a nation that has lost a large amount of its language, its custom, and faced decades of oppression by the British on its own soil, and none of these precedents are lost on the modern population. So, what does it mean now that Ireland is a sovereign nation in an increasingly global world?

This is a gap far-right influencer discourse attempts to fill by offering its own definitions of "Irishness" and creating clear ingroup and outgroup boundaries. Far-right influencers offer a.) a new integration of this collective trauma in a global world and b.) a reimagining of Irish nationalism that blames the outgroup.

The first piece of identity work that occurs in this influencer content is concerned with the construction of a monolithic Irish culture and nation (Anderson, 1983; Snow & Anderson, 1987). This borrows from traditional nativist discourse (Anderson, 1983; Wodak et al., 1999) as well as pulling from what they perceive as Ireland's unique history and characteristics that they portray as worth preserving. The concept that Ireland, both as a land with borders and as an almost spiritual and cultural essence, inherently belongs to native white Irish people is used to construct this nativist discourse. Ultimately, this discourse serves to construct a narrative of victimhood and aggrieved entitlement (Boussalis et al., 2024; Kimmel, 2013). Once the groundwork of establishing this narrative and Irish culture in decline is laid, then discourse can move into the perceived culprits in the degradation of Irish culture, and who is benefitting from the perceived oppression of native Irish people.

Irish influencers use symbolic and existing expressions of nationalism and apply it in a new way to fit their ideology. The phrase "Ireland belongs to the Irish," widely used to support Ireland's independence from British imperialism, is co-opted to describe a xenophobic sentiment, and to express contempt for the idea that the country is in the clutches of conspiratorial overlords who will exploit it. The plantation of Ireland refers to a collective trauma in the national psyche – if not a historical conspiracy, certainly an instance of oppression that far-right influencers allege the population will experience again, whether it be a result of The Great Replacement, Agenda 21, or any other conspiracy theory that spells doom and erasure for the 'native' Irish population. Now, it is being applied to the shady globalist elite, and the real target, non-native immigrants, to support a nativist stance that only ethnically Irish people belonging to the 'ancient land' belong on the island. In reality, though it leverages emotionally and historically charged language that invokes the Irish experience, there is nothing new or unique about the strategy that they are employing. Invoking collective traumas such as the Plantation of Ireland represents a broader strategy of leveraging victimhood nationalism to cultivate influence (Lim, 2010; Noor et al., 2017). Wodak (2015) has demonstrated how European far-right movements have recast wars, lost empires, and shifting demographics to legitimise grievances and perpetuate the victimhood narrative, justifying support for exclusionary aims. Movements such as the Patriot Movement and the Militia Movement in the United States have evoked revolutionary martyrs and mythologised the 'patriot' to galvanize followers and construct events such as Ruby Ridge and Waco as examples of tyranny that necessitates defence (Berlet & Sunshine, 2019; Barkun, 2013; Pitcavage, 2001).

With all far-right and nationalist movements, nationalism and what it means to be part of *the nation* is constantly being constructed and re-constructed in discourse. This relies on crises, collective traumas, national symbols, and myths of origin (Wodak, 2009). It makes

sense that far-right influencers would grasp at any of these collective signifiers – especially those where the Irish population experienced widespread oppression and strife – to justify and create emotional resonance with the idea that this oppression and strife will be experienced again, if we do not act now. This provides a new national identity for their audience – one with clearly delineated national boundaries, where the nation not only is a real physical space to defend but an emotional one. This is the same process that can be witnessed in other far-right movements across the globe (Arnold & Markowitz, 2008; Ekman, 2022; Gemignani & Jiménez-Carrasco, 2023; Mudde, 2007; Wodak, 2015), just using local and national grievances and collective traumas to make it relevant in an Irish context.

The use of nostalgia for the mythical, 'idealised' nation of the past is not a new tool for the far-right. Trump's "Make America Great Again" has effectively weaponised this sentiment (Mondon & Vaughan, 2021; Neiwert, 2017), but is far from the first to make use of this trope – nostalgia for a mythic past is a hallmark of far-right discourse (Wodak, 2009). Similarly to the construction of the nation and national identity, it draws on a mythic past – but this strategy has additional functions. Backwards-looking rhetoric like this, especially looking backwards pre-globalisation and towards a more traditionalist, less 'liberal' society serves as a dog whistle. It is a signifier for a time where the 'ingroup' (white natives) were cohesive and dominant, and the 'outgroup' (immigrants, liberals, 'globalists,' elites, etc.) were relegated to the margins, or not an existential threat to the ingroup (van Prooijen, 2024).

This mythical, idealised past is imagined – many of the influencers here did not witness firsthand the eras they are harkening back to – it serves more as a symbol than a reflection of reality (Anderson, 1983). In fact, many of the depictions of Irish life they use ignore the economic hardship, isolation, and oppression that were present and widespread at

the time (Scanlon & Kumar, 2019), and these influencers chafe against the notion that these time periods were hallmarked by deprivation.

The dog whistle here is against globalism, against an argued 'dilution' of Irish culture by outgroup and outside values, and the idea that culture and spirit of the nation should coincide and be subject to its physical borders. This argument also sets the stage for a discursive strategy that is used heavily in far-right discourse – the juxtaposition of the glorious past with the corrupt, and deteriorating, present (Mondon & Vaughan, 2021; Wodak, 2015). In doing so, it creates the rhetorical opportunity to point to the factors that were absent in the glorious past that are now contributing to the weakened present. This presents the opportunity to attack immigration, globalism, liberalism, and other progressive policies and movements as antagonists contributing to the dilution of Irish culture, the degradation of Irish nationalism, and the decline of the nation.

By framing this as a conspiracy or 'plan' rather than a natural consequence of misguided social or economic policy, it performs a system justification role (Jolley & Douglas, 2018). If these elites can be replaced or stripped of their power, then the foundations of the Irish state remain uncorrupted. Though it seems at odds with the concept of accelerationism, it works towards the same aim: to preserve and restore native dominance by whatever means necessary.

These are solution-oriented approaches, and solutions that fulfil the exclusionary nature of far-right ideology (Mudde, 2019). If the flaws of the system are corrupt officials who can be replaced and immigration which can be tightened, then the nation can be returned to its former glory. It is an approach that relies on identity salience (Douglas et al., 2019; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). By constructing the 'ideal' or mythical nation of the past, and constructing its ideal citizens as white natives, it reinforces the idea of ingroup and outgroup identity (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). It reinforces the boundaries of

the nation and the boundaries of ingroup and outgroup belonging, reaffirming the position of white natives even when they feel disillusioned about their place in the nation. Like most conspiracy theory rhetoric, it provides a simplified view of the social world that, even when nonsensical, has an understandable order and structure (Douglas et al., 2017). Instead of accepting the flaws with the structure of the nation, it focuses action towards distinct antagonists – the 'elite' government and outsiders (Jolley & Douglas, 2018). In doing so, it fulfils the main aims of far-right movements – to reinforce ingroup boundaries and mitigate threats to white dominance, regardless of context (Snagovsky, 2024; Paul, 2021).

10.3 Ireland in conspiratorial clutches, and the downtrodden and brainwashed masses

The creation of the 'native' ingroup is not the only form of identity work that is being performed by these influencers. The influencers in this sample also provide another key boundary – the separation between those who are *awakened* to these hidden truths and those who are not. First, far-right influencers in this sample must construct the native ingroup and the national identity according to their ethnonationalist identity. This is a necessary step before further separating the ingroup into the awakened and the brainwashed (Douglas et al., 2017; Rothut et al., 2023; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

What might be considered unique about Irish far-right discourse is its incorporation of Ireland's history into its present-day conspiracy narratives. While this makes the manifestation of the conspiracies uniquely Irish, this is a tactic that is witnessed in other jurisdictions (Bergmann, 2021; Wodak, 2015). Within the Irish context, this takes place in a two-pronged way. First, by using historical precedents of conspiracy and oppression within the revolutionary and civil war period to justify that tyranny can and will happen in Ireland again, and secondly, to construct the Irish population as being moulded by the experience of

collective victimhood and the influence of chosen traumas related to colonial oppression (Boussalis et al., 2024; Volkan, 2001).

Tapping into historical traumas of land seizures and the clearing of native populations from regions of Ireland seized by agents of the British crown, the focus on the *re-plantation* of Ireland builds on a readily available schema widely known and loaded with cultural significance to the population (Lim, 2021; Park, 2022). Leveraging these collective traumas also plants the fear that this kind of oppression could be experienced again by drawing these parallels. In attempting to make Ireland fit within this broad web of conspiracy and also win audiences' attention when it comes to a focus on Ireland, influencers position modern Ireland within its context of colonisation. More specifically, focusing on the oppression – and even conspiracy – Ireland faced in the past at the hands of British imperialism as a precedent that similar kinds of conspiracy can occur in the present and the future (Leeson, 2021). Some of this takes the form of borrowing the language of Irish colonisation and applying it to modern day 'conspiracies.' Linking the Plantation of Ireland to the Great Replacement theory serves to contextualise conspiracy rhetoric within the longstanding legacy of Irish repression, and a historical wound that many people in Ireland could relate to. It thus serves to tether far-right discourse to something meaningful in the 'Irish psyche.' This tactic also portrays an understanding of the power of victimhood nationalism and how to leverage it when constructing a new nationalist identity. Victimhood nationalism focuses on how collective and historic traumas come to define national identity and the national ingroup (Lim, 2021). Far-right influencers understand how these historic events and conspiracies reinforce the idea of the native Irish 'ingroup' as the victims of this oppression, and attempt to replicate the same kind of social categorisation by using these historical conspiracies as precedents for the 'conspiracies' happening now, and fearmongering that the same kind of oppression is imminent.

In order to make this framing of Ireland stick and maintain the parallel between oppression in colonial Ireland and the alleged control of a modern, sovereign Ireland – influencers must shift the antagonist from what was once the British to the current Irish government. The government must be positioned as at least complicit in these global conspiracies, sometimes benefiting directly from them, and separate from the interests of the (native) people.

By assigning motives to the most powerful in Irish (and global) society, they justify how they, as a privileged group, are being persecuted. Far-right discourse that borrows from the Great Replacement theory relies on constructing the white native population as oppressed. They invert the power and prejudice model by introducing conspiratorial plans to subjugate native people, so they become the victims of institutional power (Allport, 1954; Jones, 1997). In this way, they are 'victimised' and oppressed by the establishment. Structuring this argument this way is strategic – it softens the reality that this is a bid to maintain white dominance, instead framing themselves and the ingroup as oppresses of a system built against them with valid grievances that must be aired to protect their existence (Brown et al., 2023; Ravndal, 2018). This creates urgency and reinforces ingroup vs outgroup politics, not as 'racist' but as a measure of self-defence (Paul, 2021).

As discussed in section 9.10, influencers in this sample also delineate between the awakened few and the brainwashed 'sheeple.' This performs another form of identity work: offering the audience to align themselves not only with the native ingroup, but also the enlightened minority who is red-pilled or awakened to the conspiracies at play. By performing this function, they not only position Ireland on the global stage as a key position in these conspiracies (which keeps the international audience engaged), they perform another kind of identity function for viewers within Ireland: an opportunity to be part of the awakened.

10.4 Accelerationism: the end is nigh, we must act

Another ‘step’ in the far-right influencer playbook is constructing Ireland as the site of conspiracy and stoking fear that its cultural or very existence is at risk. This discourse is only compelling when it taps into the latent fears of the destruction and devaluing of identity, and the ruin of a nation as it exists now (Buzan et al., 1998; Wodak, 2009). When the work of constructing a national identity based on nativism and honour is done, then the threats to this constructed nation become real and imminent – it allows influencers to decry what Ireland *will* look like if these conspiratorial plans continue unchallenged, but also what their idealised vision for the future is.

This sample of far-right discourse skirts around outright calls for accelerationism (Kriner et al., 2022; Walther & McCoy, 2021), or a push towards complete societal collapse, but even harkening back to a better time and their proposed activism reveal the position that modern Ireland as we know it must be dismantled. Far-right influencers operate largely within an anti-establishment, anti-globalist/elitist worldview. They reject modern institutions insofar that they do not serve their interest – they are corrupt, puppeteered by globalists who do not put the citizens of the nation first, and have abandoned the values and ideals of the glorified nation of the past.

Certainly, a rejection of these institutions and structures does not in and of itself constitute a call for accelerationism, but influencers thrive on ambiguity (Kriner et al., 2022; Walther & McCoy, 2021). Calls to action must be subtle and nonviolent to fly under the radar of even lenient social media sites like Odysee (Rothut et al., 2023; Tuck et al., 2023, so much of this discourse must focus on heightening tensions, creating this sense of impending doom, and foretelling inevitable collapse.

Influencer A and C encourage distancing of oneself from current institutions and establishment, and believe that some kind of revolution or collapse is necessary. This heightens the importance of ingroup/outgroup division – will the audience choose to be part of the new revolutionary freedom fighters, or the unenlightened masses (van Prooijen, 2024; Tajfel & Turner, 1979)? There is a temporal pressure throughout the discourse that suggests that viewers will have to choose their side, and choose quickly (Wodak, 2015). If they are not part of (or contribute to) the collapse, then they will be at the mercy of its consequences.

> *"Hopefully, there won't need to be any blood shed in the process but it might get nasty..." (Influencer C with interviewee, video #56, 43:52-46:02)*

This is the only 'violent' call to action in this sample of discourse, and it still relies on ambiguity. It does not specify *whose* blood could be shed or how, but it clearly conveys that violence is one of the sacrifices the chosen and enlightened may have to make to defend 'Ireland,' the nation as it is constructed here, and defend Irish life as they know it.

10.5 We the martyrs, face rejection now for celebration in the future

Within this landscape of impending threat where only a minority of the ingroup is enlightened to the true precarity of the nation, these influencers position themselves as the martyrs. Key to this is the idea that they are positioned right in the middle of it, as persecuted figures and opinion leaders, and that they have and will sacrifice a great deal for their cause.

This speaks to how they perceive their position as central but imperilled, but also how they see the future of the nation as imperilled and victimised. This is part of the process of victimhood nationalism, where the history of oppression and the potential of threat is overblown to create a kind of national identity, and to mobilise support for nationalist measures (Lim, 2010). These influencers also enact this victimhood in a highly individualised

sense, leading by example as positioning themselves as the martyrs who are being actively sought out and silenced by elites.

This entrenches the idea that these influencers are true opinion leaders for this movement (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955), and that the audience can trust and rely on their information because they have sacrificed so much for it, and they would not be silenced if it was not the truth. It also perpetuates the nativist stance that they, as natives espousing the conservative traditions and values of the nation, are the true victims in this system.

Within this conspiratorial worldview, influencers position themselves as the oppressed and marginalised 'truth tellers,' almost in a prophetic, doomsday sense (Gentry, 2022). This marginalised and martyred space is crucial for influencers to embody in the discourse because it serves as a coalitional cue of sorts (Mus et al., 2022; van Prooijen, 2018). By positioning themselves as having sacrificed to relay this message, and the promise that they are delivering their followers this secret, privileged knowledge, they build ingroup cohesion. The strongest coalitional cues are those that are perceived to stigmatise or marginalise members within the wider social group (Mus et al., 2022), which is why extremist far-right circles have managed to build such strong ingroup cohesion throughout history (Zhong & Zhang, 2025). The constant talk of oppression, predicting jail time or seeking refuge in another country (ironic to some – but not to them) serves to further justify the gravity of the consequences they will face in the future for speaking out against the conspiratorial elite, adding to this construction of impending doom and collapse.

It is a similar process to certain Christian nationalism groups and doomsday prophecies, such as the Christian Identity movement – they position themselves as the martyrs for the true and righteous cause in a world easily delineated into good and evil, and urge people to follow by their example (Armaly et al., 2022; Barkun, 2003; Gentry, 2022). The constant threat of an impending crisis, a 'judgement day,' where the weak sheeple of the

nation will be forced to face the consequences and the greater populace will have wished they had listened to these prophetic warnings is the subtext hanging over these warnings. This prophecy and fear and the concept of being one of the enlightened few in an obscured world is what creates such strong ingroup cohesion, and makes it so difficult to extricate oneself from these groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Zhong & Zhang, 2025).

10.6 The strategy of the far-right 'playbook'

In looking at this discourse as a whole, and looking at the Dublin riots eight months later, it is clear where these discursive strategies fit in. While it cannot be said that any of these videos directly contributed to the violent activism seen in the nation's capital, and still little is known about the dynamics and organisation of the riot, the pattern of discourse leading up to this flashpoint moment is clear. There is nothing uniquely Irish about this corpus of data except for the symbols they use to convey nationalism, the collective traumas they leverage, and the mythic history they promote – but all of these are tactics observed in other far-right movements (Arnold & Markowitz, 208; Ekman, 2022; Gemignani & Jiménez-Carrasco, 2023; Mudde, 2007; Wodak, 2015). What is seen here is the leveraging of local grievances and national symbolism to reinvent far-right ideology in a new context (Anderson, 1983; Ravndal, 2018).

Irish nationalism, in its original sense, may indeed be a protective factor against this more nativist brand of nationalism, but it is not wholly preventative. While, politically, anti-

establishment and nationalist parties have remained the protest vote while maintaining (relatively) inclusive and left-leaning stances has protected Ireland from the formation and political success of a cohesive far-right party (O'Malley, 2008; O'Malley & Fitzgibbon, 2014), the dam is weakening. Far-right sentiment has always been present in Ireland, and though there are many individual factions of far-right groups who have varying goals – their goals may be less political, and more *meta*political – to influence the way Irish people think about politics and create distrust and chaos in Irish systems (Fattibene et al., 2024a; Lynch et al., 2025).

The role of far-right influencers is a performative, discursive one (Rothut et al., 2023; Lewis, 2019). Not only do they serve as opinion leaders and role models of a fulfilling, far-right identity to their followers (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955; Surronen et al., 2022), they serve as a vehicle to construct and disseminate far-right ideology in new contexts. By harnessing the power of local politics and national symbolism, they create a strong emotional pull behind their message. They also create a fear - a sense of impending collapse, a vision of subjugation that mirrors and exceeds the oppression of the past. The message is clear: if you do not act now, Ireland as you know it will be destroyed, and you will pay the price.

These emotionally resonant and Manichean messages perform well on social media algorithms which favour snappy, emotionally-laden discourses. Even though these influencers have been deplatformed from major social media and video-hosting sites (YouTube, X, Facebook, etc.), they are still adept at traversing the social media world. Far-right influencers, as a whole, understand what performs well on algorithms, how to signpost their following to a new platform once they get banned from the last, and how to word their messages carefully enough that they can skirt allegations of outright extremism and advocating violence while still dog whistling enough for their enlightened followers (Baele et al., 2020; Boler, 2018; Forberg, 2021; Lewis, 2019; Rothut et al., 2023).

Although the Irish far-right movement is still unstructured, memetic, and disorganised (Lynch et al., 2025), it does not take much organisation or structure to cause the kind of social consequence that occurred in Dublin. Influencers provide some kind of organisational centre point in a largely memetic community (Baele et al., 2020), and position themselves as figureheads that apply ideology to a new context and reproduce far-right discourse as it applies to Ireland. This process focuses on identity and belonging within a society in flux. Even when far-right influencer discourse does not result in driving viewers to extremism, it also performs the functions of mainstreaming these ideas, making them more acceptable and softening them by degrees until they are more palatable to a wider audience (Brown et al., 2023). It also creates more chaos and further dissolves trust in institutions (van Prooijen, 2022).

These far-right influencers create a 'new' version of nationalism that is exclusionary – where the white natives are the only 'deserving' citizens that can lay claim to the nation. They construct the Irish nation as firstly, valuable and worth defending and secondly, something that belongs exclusively to the Irish people. In order to make this a call to action to their audience, they must demonstrate that this is a culture under threat. This justifies their xenophobic rhetoric, as does alluding to conspiracy theories that blame shadowy, unnamed 'elites' but reinforce racial and ethnic ingroup and outgroup and stoke the flames of threat to white dominance. They may do this by incorporating collective traumas and invoking the imagery of the oppression of Ireland's past, but this strategy is not unique, it simply shows an understanding of how to manipulate far-right narratives.

The bleed of far-right conspiracy theories like QAnon, Agenda 21, or the Great Replacement was, at first, perplexing to see in the Irish context given that many of these theories do not 'logically' fit within the Irish political system. However, the contagion of these conspiracy theories and the ideology they promote have little to do with logic – they

rely on emotional resonance (Douglas et al., 2017). Even though there is little space in Irish politics for a far-right political party to take hold, there is still the opportunity to weaponise local grievances, uncertainty, and a moment of Irish identity in flux.

10.7 The future of far-right discourse in Ireland: Generation 2.0 and next steps

What is clear is that these influencers enjoyed a rise in popularity due to the COVID-19 pandemic (ISD, 2021; McDermott, 2021), which allowed them to ingratiate themselves into mainstream Irish discourse like never before. The pandemic and subsequent lockdowns were a time of widespread distress and uncertainty. Under these conditions, conspiracy theories flourish. It is not that these influencers were more active than before, simply that they attained a degree of visibility that had eluded them before. In fact, many of these influencers had far-right social media platforms spanning back years before the pandemic, attempting to capitalise on every other social crisis with an arguable lack of success. Claiming the nascent anti-vax and conspiracies of control associated with the pandemic quickly made them the authority of any dissenting stance, and bolstered viewership. One YouTube video from an influencer on anti-vax conspiracy theories had nearly one million views when it was removed from the platform (Bohan, 2020).

This period of time was chosen because it was a crucial turning point in the trajectory of far-right discourse in Ireland. In terms of influencers, it would determine whether their influence would hold or wane now that COVID-19 was no longer a global emergency, and how they would pivot their content to remain relevant.

The analysis showed that the content did not even have to pivot much – COVID-19 and its related conspiracies were still among one of the most discussed topics, now used as ‘proof’ that conspiracies of control were operating in Ireland. However, now that they had captured mainstream attention, anti-immigrant and extreme far-right sentiment retained a grip

that it had not managed to garner before. What we were seeing, relative to other contexts, was the generation 1.0 of far-right influencers. Even without the backing of any political support, influencers managed to finally tap the one issue that would give them access to the mainstream, and they exploited it as much as they possibly could. It is no surprise that tensions rose and activism occurred in response to the pandemic and anti-lockdown sentiment, and now in response to anti-immigration sentiment.

However, the far-right movement has surged forward since the time of data collection. Many more anti-immigration protests have popped up all over the country. Online, far-right sentiment can feel inescapable. Influencers have taken harder stances on immigration, cosied up to explicitly fascist movements in other countries, and aligned themselves with Trumpism (Gallagher, 2025). And while the election results of both the 2024 European and general elections still only show meagre support, it is a definitive margin of growth. Independent candidates from the Irish Freedom Party and the National Party were voted into office, the first avowedly far-right politicians to do so. This came after the National Party, Ireland First, and The Irish People formed a new alliance, self-named the National Alliance (O'Keeffe, 2024; Wall, 2024). Several of the leaders from these parties have established social media platforms where they share their ideology, or even got their start on social media. However, this is still only a fraction of far-right parties registered in the Republic, some of which reject joining forces mainly due to in-fighting (O'Keeffe, 2024; O'Toole, 2023).

What we are seeing now can be described as generation 2.0 or even generation 3.0 of the far-right influencer phenomenon. Although their political backing is sparse and weak, this new generation and evolution of far-right influencers has seized the attention of the Irish population and is operating on symbolic victories. At the time of writing, former MMA fighter and contentious public figure Conor McGregor is fresh off a visit to the White House for St. Patrick's Day, despite holding no political office. President Trump referred to him as

‘his favourite Irish person.’ This comes shortly after McGregor was convicted in civil court of rape charges, and shifted his social media presence to regurgitate the anti-immigrant rage bait that has been created and disseminated by Irish far-right influencers for years. Now, he has announced his bid for presidency (Bailie & Lawrence, 2025). It is a symbolic ploy that may never materialise, but still it represents where Ireland is in the process of far-right mainstreaming. The same process has occurred in numerous other countries – a maligned public figure rising to the forefront, bolstered by years of dedicated far-right influencer content that shapes this nationalist identity.

Chapter 11: Conclusion

11.1 Introduction

This thesis endeavoured to answer the questions of a.) how far-right influencers are adapting far-right ideology to cater to an Irish audience and garner support for their movement including b.) how conspiracy theories are used as discursive tools, c.) how they adapt conspiracy theories and ideology from other contexts and adapt them to Ireland, and d.) what discursive strategies are used by far-right influencers to construct meaning in online spaces.

In looking at these strategies as a whole, it is clear that the answers to these questions are an interconnected repertoire of discursive strategies or 'playbook' that allows these influencers to construct their own version of Irish identity, position themselves as the enlightened martyrs, and drum up fear that Irish culture is under threat and action is necessary to preserve their way of life and restore native dominance over the nation.

By drawing on SIT, these findings demonstrate how Irish far-right influencers not only construct the boundaries between the white, native 'ingroup' and the migrant 'outgroup' (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), but also the boundaries between the brainwashed Irish public and the enlightened few, and in doing so, invite the audience to partake in this co-construction of truth with them. Utilising the insights from discourse analysis (including a DHA and PDA approach to CDA, which has been used to understand far-right rhetoric in other jurisdictions), this research demonstrates how these individual strategies –many of which have been documented throughout time – operate together as a playbook to form calls to action.

Online, veiled far-right sentiment is a cheap currency, and its rage-bait formatting is almost guaranteed to perform well with social media algorithms (Darius & Stephany, 2020; Forberg, 2021). More concerning, there is a shift from censorship to mainstreaming. After Elon Musk's acquisition of Twitter (now X), the politically-linked billionaire began platforming and retweeting far-right Irish influencers, using their content to paint a global far-

right narrative (Gallagher, 2025). Instead of being an avowedly anti-elitist movement, far-right influencers have now started playing directly into the hands of elites (at least those who share their far-right ideology) (Genieys & Darviche, 2025). The result is a troubling connection to the global far-right limelight, even mainstream discourse. Though these influencers are speaking directly to the Irish context, they are also situating themselves within the global far-right context, and pitching content to a global audience that consumes this kind of content irrespective of country of origin.

Often research on the use and adoption of conspiracy theories focuses on the cognitive component of the adherents, particularly regarding the *logic* of the conspiracies, the need for critical skills to invalidate the theories and the degree to which individuals believe in the theories in question (Compton et al., 2021; Ventsel, 2016). Ultimately, whether far-right influencers actually believe in these conspiracy theories is obsolete. What has become clear is that conspiracy theories are the symptom of a proliferating phenomenon of far-right politics, identity, and extremism rather than the cause.

While conspiracies are often associated with particular events or regions of the world, increasingly we are witnessing the adoption of what could be considered very local conspiracies globally. Ireland is not immune to such happenings, and we are witnessing the influence of global far-right conspiracies in Irish online social media spaces, and also the interpretation of these conspiracies for Irish audiences.

11.2 History and trajectory: the shift from ‘no far-right presence’ to growing concerns

While it was long thought that Ireland was somewhat immune from the influence of the far-right, due in part to its colonial heritage, the experience of the Troubles, the relationship with the UK and religious (rather than racial) divisions dominating the recent past, this is no longer the case (Lynch et al., 2025). Ireland is experiencing the increasing

creep of the far-right in politics, online ecosystems, in protest communities and in extremist activity much like its European neighbours. The patterns and trajectory of this rise of the far-right, while uniquely Irish, is similar to that witnessed in a range of other jurisdictions.

Ireland experienced some of the colonial and post-colonial factors that gave rise to conspiracy theory in other contexts, and not without reason. During the revolutionary period, conspiracy both on the side of the British troops and the Irish resistance was common and detrimental, arguably leaving a deep scar in the contemporary Irish psyche (Leeson, 2021). No society is immune from conspiracy, and belief in conspiracy theory is relatively common across all populations, regardless of ideology – but there is a distinction between the historical precedents of conspiracy and widespread conspiracy belief and the far-right motivated conspiracy theories permeating the Irish context now (van Prooijen & Douglas, 2017).

There are some dynamics within Ireland's civil war politics that serve as 'protective' factors against the momentum of explicitly far-right parties – namely, that SF still remains the anti-establishment party, that dominates Irish nationalist sentiment and is nominally a left-leaning establishment, though this is rapidly becoming irrelevant (O'Malley, 2008; O'Malley & Fitzgibbon, 2014). However, what is increasingly witnessed in Ireland is not the explicit rise in popularity of new far-right parties, but the mainstreaming of far-right ideas (Gallagher, 2020 Harrison, 2024). Perhaps the legacy of Irish nationalism with all its nuance continues to rank above exclusionary politics and ethnonationalist sentiment for populist Irish voters, but the influence of the far-right playbook should not be ignored.

The various factions of fringe far-right politics in Ireland continue to change allegiances and restructure often, given to the insular nature of their leadership – many of these party's leaders have long and marred histories with each other (O'Keeffe, 2024; O'Toole, 2023). However, recent elections show a small but undeniable margin of growth,

resulting in some of the first representation in the Republic (O'Keeffe, 2024; Wall, 2024). Though these parties are at times barely organised and often mocked and sidelined, they are still growing in their power and influence.

And this political reality is not entirely separate, but far removed from the reality that is happening online – Irish far-right influencers have gained international audiences and surprising allegiances (Gallagher, 2025). This is not happening in its own contained bubble – the Dublin riots in November 2023 showed the momentum that far-right sentiment has gained in Ireland (Moore, 2023).

This research captures a snapshot of that moment in Irish far-right discourse. Though it cannot be determined if any of this content directly *led* to the violence seen in Dublin and subsequent demonstrations, it is clear how these types of far-right influencers manipulate the Irish context and sow the seeds for legitimisation of grievances with carefully worded calls to action. What is clear, now looking back in hindsight, is that this is the first generation of Irish far-right influencers who were successfully able to harness this far-right 'playbook' to mobilise Irish people.

11.3 The significance of the far-right 'playbook': Identity work and emotional ploys

Far-right discourse relies on creating a shared national identity that belongs solely to the native people (Wodak, 2009). In the case of Ireland, this is no different, except for the specific examples of Ireland's collective trauma, its colonial and revolutionary history, and its Irish republican martyrs (Alexander et al., 2004). This is not a phenomenon that is unique to the Irish context, rather most far-right identity work relies on the conservative precedents of the nation, using this to harken back to a better time (Norris & Ingleheart, 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2021). In doing so, they suggest that the time period pre-globalisation and pre-liberalism was better, more aligned with the core of the nation. The irony is that regardless of nation,

nearly every form of far-right discourse relies on this same construction of nationalism (Anderson, 1983; Wodak, 2009). There is nothing unique about the nation that they are championing, rather they are combing their own national context for examples that fit this already established far-right script.

In fact, far-right influencers exploit this post-colonial context to their advantage. The idea that the collective trauma of colonisation and oppression takes root in every Irish person is not unique to the far-right space by any means, but far-right influencers use the concept as a rallying cry (White, 2016).

Using idioms and symbolism for the Irish sovereign nation softens the impact that this discourse has – as if to say, 'this is a phrase or symbol that is unproblematic, that you are familiar with, so by extension, applying this to immigration and shifting demographics is allowed, is no more harmful or different than pointing out the oppression Ireland faced from British imperialism.' In reality, this is not the case, as further marginalising 'outsiders' into Ireland has consequences nearly as severe as the more traditional racist discourse, yet the fact that it is hidden under so much dog whistle terminology makes it more palatable to an audience who might otherwise reject outright racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2003).

Far-right discourse has had to rely on this sort of downplaying and softening in the twenty-first century (Allchorn, 2020; Brown et al., 2023; Paul, 2021). Though many extremist and outright racist groups still exist with high membership and influence and the institutions of the Western world still operate with innate structural inequality, to be platformed and mainstreamed, the ideology must take the form of 'common sense' racism or at least acclimate the audience slowly (Ekman, 2022; Wodak, 2015).

Because of this and tightening restrictions on social media platforms, influencers have had to become experts in toeing the line of outright extremist rhetoric. This takes the form of

the traditional softening and downplaying, but conspiracy theories also perform this function as well, no matter how outlandish (Rothut et al., 2023).

Implicit in this self-prescribed martyrdom is the idea that even though they are maligned now, they will be celebrated eventually. Similar to other doomsday rhetorics, like some Christian nationalist groups, there is the sentiment that 'we should have listened to them' and in time we will realise they were speaking the ultimate truth (Armaly et al., 2022). Though individual 'lone wolf' terrorists are prone to be sanctified, the real martyrdom among far-right figureheads is the prospect of living through stigmatisation and marginalisation for their beliefs (Rose, 2022; Zhou, 2023). The execution or death here is metaphorical, as can be seen in this data, as far-right influencers mourn the death of their careers, their mainstream influence, their social standing, or their relationships. Similar to doomsday rhetoric where a great reckoning is always looming, conspiracy theory rhetoric and white supremacist rhetoric paint a similar picture (Armaly et al., 2022). In a world where 'elites' are garnering more and more control and the pure, native race is being erased – through the weakening of borders, through dilution, through demographic shifts – the same sense of inevitability and fear is fostered that we are reaching the point of no return, and all one can do for the cause is garner as many converts as they can and prepare for the end times.

This may also be how some of these influencers grapple with their loss of social standing, as some were once respected (relative term here) public figures in other fields. Their suffering becomes testament to the fact that their message is a righteous one, much like how martyrs are portrayed in biblical literature (Pageau, 2022). Their contemporary ridicule thus becomes part of their testimony to their commitment to the cause, and instead of laying down their lives or sacrificing in some other way, they then attempt to garner followers to their side. It also galvanizes followers not only in that it rallies an emotional response to the

injustice of their treatment, it also promotes allegiance by making them the receiver of this enlightened knowledge and fringe perspective.

This is part of how far-right influencers attempt to legitimise the far-right movement in Ireland. Especially since this is a movement that has remained fringe in Ireland for so long, with the popular opinion believing that only a select few extremist people make up the movement (Hennessy, 2017). The far-right influencers instead want to portray it as a powerful grassroot movement that is gaining momentum.

Ultimately, this is part of their two-pronged strategy of identity construction. First, they construct the native Irish identity that is at the centre of their ethnonationalist, far-right discourse. However, they also refine this by positioning themselves and their followers as the enlightened, awakened martyrs who are leading the way, and superior to the blind sheeple who will have wished they joined the movement when they had the chance.

Their accelerationist stance may seem at odds with the assertion that they are, in reality, trying to preserve structures that have been in place for centuries. Still, this rhetoric and conspiracy theory can be seen as a sort of system justification. These influencers advocate action and removing oneself from the mechanics of society if these 'conspiracies' persist – however, it is ultimately just a ploy to ensure that the status quo is maintained (Jolley & Doulgas, 2018).

This can be seen through the use of revolutionary national martyrs as these symbolic thresholds for sovereignty and glory that the nation must attain. In fact, even the assertion that the nation must return to its former glory is indication that they believe, at one point, the nation was great and glorious. This denies the possibility that the foundation and values that the nation was founded on may, in principle, be flawed and must be abandoned to be able to truly progress.

The idea of aggrieved entitlement, coined in Kimmel's (2013) *Angry White Men* discusses this idea. What does a country have to gain by reverting back to a time before the (relatively) progressive attitude of the twenty-first century? The dog whistle here is that it was a time where they attained a higher level of privilege in society, or at least the entitlement to it – an entitlement they still feel simply based on the fact that they are natives of the nation (Norris & Ingleheart, 2019; Stefaniak et al., 2021).

This expresses that the only oppression they are concerned with, as the bench marker for a glorified nation, is the perceived 'oppression' they face. Even though pre-globalisation Ireland was rife with social inequality, and was indeed repressive for the many of its citizens, it is still seen in a favourable light here because it represents a time where far-right sentiment was normalised, and where nativist stances were not just tolerated but also expected, to some degree (Hoppen, 1989; Inglis, 1998).

They see this as a system in which, though there are flaws, ultimately serves them. This is why they will utilise all sorts of conspiracy and allegory to point fingers at the current government, the outsider elites, instead of having to acknowledge that the nativist principles the nation was founded on may not serve the modern world (Jolley & Douglas, 2018).

By no means are far-right influencers espousing the same kind of Irish nationalism that the revolutionary martyrs that they invoke believed in. Nor do they actually seem to hold that brand of revolutionary brand of Irish nationalism sacred. Rather, they use this as a rhetorical shortcut to infiltrate nativism into this already existing ideology. Since Irish nationalism (as it relates to its separation from Britain and the goal of a unified Ireland) is already an established and supported political platform, far-right influencers gain traction by exploiting this already popular discourse (i.e. Ireland for the Irish, the plantation of Ireland) for their own gain.

Though some of their more mainstreamed audience might reject outright racism and xenophobia, by exploiting these phrases and discursive cues that already exist within an established framework, they put up the guise of 'stretching' an acceptable stance to include their antagonists - 'elites', migrants, asylum seekers, etc.

They use this and the 'common sense racism' stance to exploit an already tenuous relationship between native Irish people and new arrivals. At the time of data collection, Ukraine was facing a humanitarian crisis due to the ongoing war, and the Irish government green-lighted the arrival of Ukrainian refugees into Ireland, as part of an EU policy (Bielenberg, 2024). Anytime there is a documented influx of new arrivals into Ireland, there is the potential for tension, especially since the ongoing housing crisis grows into a larger and larger stressor. The housing supply is so low in Ireland that regular citizens struggle to own or even rent property at all, much less for an affordable rate, across the country. The question always remains how Ireland will manage to house an increasing population when the housing threshold is routinely not being met, and housing conditions grow worse (Social Justice Ireland, 2024).

A rhetorical challenge far-right influencers face is reconciling this anti-migration, nativist stance with the legacy of Irish emigration. In terms of demographic-altering shifts, no amount of immigration into Ireland contends with the emigration from Ireland and the resulting Irish diaspora, the impact of which is still felt today, with the housing and economic crisis meaning that many Irish people still choose to emigrate. In fact, several Irish far-right influencers have admitted that they have done stints in Canada, Australia, etc., but this is seen as a fundamentally different process then Great Replacement-esque rhetoric and immigration into Ireland.

11.4 The far-right playbook and the codebook as empirical tools

In addition to this analysis, this thesis has produced two tools that can be used by researchers to organise and analyse the discourse of far-right movements. Firstly, the codebook (see Appendix A) which was generated as part of the content analysis. As mentioned, the structure of far-right ideology, as it manifests in content, tends to overlap and merge several facets of ideology together (Mudde, 2007; Miller-Idriss, 2020). By deductively structuring this codebook around known far-right talking points (and inductively from the content), this codebook provides a reliable structure for analysing far-right content. It can act as a glossary or sorts for researchers, providing context on popular conspiracy theories and dog-whistles, and as a roadmap to researchers in need of structure and transparency when analysing far-right content. Though it is designed for the Irish far-right context, both the codebook and the playbook have the potential to be adapted to other contexts. By generating the codebook, it allows for these facets of far-right content to be quantified and defined in a consistent and transparent nature, and has the potential to unify far-right content analysis across contexts.

Similarly, the far-right playbook may be used as an empirical tool. Research has focused on what far-right discourse consists of, and even individual strategies used. However, the far-right playbook examines the *impact* of these strategies together, showing a pathway to calls to action. This has the potential to not only aid future research in far-right discourse, but also inform policy and reporting on far-right movements. As discussed in chapter 2, counter-extremism policy on far-right conspiracy theories has largely focused on inoculating audiences in an attempt to debunk misinformation before it has a chance to spread (Compton, 2025). The playbook demonstrates the emotional and psychological functions conspiracy theories play as part of the far-right strategy, which may help inform more comprehensive and effective policy in the future.

Though the playbook merges theory with data from the Irish context, several of these strategies have been observed in other jurisdictions, which suggests that the playbook may be applicable beyond Ireland. By examining and norming the playbook on other contexts, research can examine where these far-right movements converge in their discursive strategy and where they diverge. Doing so will inform future research which will in turn inform strategies to combat the rise of the far-right with clarity and precision, instead of fear.

11.5 Limitations and future research

Of course, there are limitations inherent to this project that present opportunities for future research. The sample size of influencers in this project was small, only examining four. As discussed, it is likely that these influencers have likely been replaced by a new generation of far-right influencers in the fast-moving online sphere. However, it captures a pivotal snapshot in Irish far-right discourse, and the same strategies have been observed not only throughout jurisdictions but also throughout history. Future research should focus on this new generation of influencers, or a larger sample, to see how enduring these strategies are or if they fall in and out of use.

Similarly, the playbook must be examined in other contexts to determine its transferability. Because the outputs of this project are empirically centred on Irish data and the Irish context, we must not assume that the playbook can be applied to other jurisdictions without additional research. Though these strategies have been observed elsewhere, each context is still shaped by its own social and political history. We can see this in the varying manifestations and even goals of different far-right movements globally. Since, by definition, far-right movements can take many forms, researchers should avoid adopting a ‘one size fits all’ approach to researching and targeting far-right movements (Mudde, 2002). As shown, Ireland’s manifestation of the far-right is heavily influenced by the postcolonial heritage of

the state, and the strategies and messaging use differ even from far-right movements across the border in Northern Ireland. Thus, each country's manifestation of the far-right is bound by its own context, but the playbook will be a useful tool in determining what discursive features are shared and how the sociohistorical context influences the messaging.

11.6 Is the playbook working? Calls to action and ingroup threat

Perhaps Ireland will never see a far-right political party rise to the forefront; its political history seems to still somewhat prevent that, but it would be remiss to consider it immune from the same far-right process that has been detrimental to politics the world over. These influencers have skated from platform to platform, been censored from the most mainstream ones, but their influence remains (Bohan, 2020). They seized the opportunity to pander to the emotional and identity needs of the public during an unstable time, and they will certainly continue to use every contentious event as proof of their righteousness. They did not change tactics after COVID, nor did they ever admit that their predictions about prolonged lockdowns or microchip vaccines were wrong, simply used them as indications of something bigger to happen down the line. It does not matter if their specific premonitions come to fruition or not, what matters is that they continue to stoke the flames of an impending doom that their followers can only be safe from if they join the 'awakened' side and fight back.

Current strategies aimed and 'debunking' conspiracy theories themselves and inoculating the public from their influence only tackle a piece of the issue (Compton, 2025; Lewandowsky & van der Linden, 2021; McGuire, 1961). The far-right's conspiracy theory rhetoric targets an emotional identity-work need in an audience faced with a changing reality. The 'logic' of these narratives is truly unimportant – if it upholds an individual's sense of identity and fulfils a social sort of cognitive closure, it becomes harder to abandon even when

faced with legitimate counterarguments (van Prooijen & Jostmann, 2013). People believe in these conspiracies the same way other people believe in God or ghosts or aliens – because it provides some overarching order to the world that they want to subscribe to, and reassurance that unknowable things work a certain way (Wood & Douglas, 2018). The difference is that these conspiracies often feed directly into extremism, it is how they are designed. At the root of The Great Replacement, QAnon, Agenda 21, New World Order, etc. is the same white supremacist, anti-Semitic, anti-elitist sentiment that has metastasised into countless other conspiracy narratives throughout history (Uscinski, 2018). These are simply the current generation of conspiracy theories, inspired loosely by current events, meant to tap into the existential anxieties of the population. It follows a centuries if not millennia-old playbook of recruitment and group cohesion (Nirenberg, 2013). The far-right of today understand how to tap in and manipulate these narratives to achieve their aims and garner support, ultimately to inspire action.

This is not simply a matter of critical thinking. Though it is perhaps the most objective aspect to target, designing critical thinking and 'debunking' protocols will not address the emotional needs targeted by conspiracy theories (Compton, 2025; Lewandowsky & van der Linden, 2021). Doing so requires a more comprehensive, societal approach to the problem.

Far-right conspiracy is so pervasive today because it is one of the only 'acceptable' ways to dog whistle extremist, racist, xenophobic, discriminatory speech that is now publicly shunned compared to the past, though it will continue to exist in mainstream political discourse. What is unique now is how these conspiracies are harnessed by far-right influencers online (Rothut et al., 2023). Algorithmically, it has led to an echo chamber that, in most cases, will lead directly to extremist content if not interrupted (O'Callaghan et al., 2015). Additionally, those feeling isolated and unsure of their standing or identity in

uncertain times are presented with an online community and built-in social network in these online ecosystems (Douglas et al., 2017). Influencers use such emotionally-charged language to retain followers and bolster the ingroup outgroup microcosm of their followership and macrocosm of society. Critical thinking aside, it is difficult to extract oneself from a social ecosystem that provides so many functions.

Though this thesis only focused on data from four influencers, even the limited sample of discourse analysed portrays how the same strategies of identity construction, drawing on national memory, and creating ingroup threat shows how these strategies are repeatedly leveraged. These are strategies that have been documented in other jurisdictions (Barkun, 2013; Mondon & Winter, 2020; Wodak, 2015). Though this discourse does not seem to have impacted Irish politics (though the election of select independent far-right candidates may suggest the weakening of this dam), its impact on *meta*politics is undeniable. This discourse ultimately erodes trust in Irish institutions and promotes the idea that the only way to return to the glory of the past is to turn away from the political system in place. It creates a sense of threat that Ireland as we know it is under attack – unless we act now.

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Appendix A

Codebook

1. **Conspiracy rhetoric:** any rhetoric pertaining to a covert plan by a secret group of elites or globalists attempting to control society

    1.1. **The Great Awakening & QAnon:** conspiracy rhetoric pertaining to the QAnon conspiracy theory that alleges that an elite (often leftist) group of politicians and 'elites' are paedophiles or otherwise engaged in harming children and that a 'great awakening' is occurring in society in which the public is realising the corruption of the elite. Tied closely to anti-leftist sentiment and Trumpism.

    1.2. **The Great Replacement:** conspiracy rhetoric alleging that elites or globalists are attempting to replace the native white Western European population with non-white immigrants through mass migration, or otherwise radically alter racial demographics in Western European countries

    1.3. **Agenda 21/The Great Reset:** conspiracy rhetoric tied to The World Economic Forum's The Great Reset or the UN's Agenda 21 that alleges these are plans to restructure the economy and society to enforce a feudal state. Climate change initiatives, fifteen minute cities, and other economic and urban plans are often used as evidence of this conspiracy theory.

    1.4. **Transhumanism:** conspiracy rhetoric pertaining to the belief that technology is being implemented by elites in order to control the public or restructure society

    1.5. **War in Ukraine:** emerging conspiracy rhetoric pertaining to the War in Ukraine, often that it is a fabricated issue by elites or globalists to

justify sanctions on Russia and the creation of an energy crisis that will advance Agenda 21

1.6. **Climate change**: conspiracy rhetoric pertaining to the idea that climate change is a hoax or is not occurring, often tied closely to distrust of experts & scientists and the Agenda 21/The Great Reset conspiracy theory that alleges climate change initiatives will be part of a greater conspiracy to restructure society

1.7. **COVID:** conspiracy rhetoric pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, including that the virus was a hoax and an attempt to increase complicity in society or take away certain freedoms

1.7.1. **Anti-vax:** the belief that the COVID-19 vaccines (and others) are harmful to the public or an attempt to cull the population or install tracking measures in individuals

2. **Prejudice:** belief that the native population is inherently superior or more deserving of certain status and the belief that certain marginalised groups are inherently inferior or threatening to society

2.1. **Anti-Islam:** criticism of the religion of Islam and belief that certain religious beliefs are harmful to society or promoting terrorism

2.2. **Anti-LGBTQ+:** invalidation of LGBTQ+ identities and favouritism of heteronormative policies. Belief that and LGBTQ+ 'agenda' is being pushed in schools and condemnation of Pride activities.

2.2.1. **Anti-drag:** belief that the practice of drag is harmful to society, sometimes a threat to children and insinuating drag queens are paedophiles.

2.2.2. **Transphobia:** belief that there are only two genders and that those who identify as trans are confused, suffering from mental illness, etc. Discouragement of accepting trans identity or education on trans issues, sometimes referring to this as 'grooming children'

2.3. **Xenophobia:** dislike or intolerance of those from other countries other than Ireland

2.3.1. **Anti-immigration:** belief that immigration policy in Ireland should be stricter than it is and/or belief that 'mass' immigration is responsible for social ills in Ireland

2.3.1.1. **Fear of male migrants:** rhetoric concerning the amount of men arriving from other countries and the effect this will have on Irish society or the conspiratorial belief that a disproportionate and undisclosed amount of immigrants are 'military aged men'

3. **Anti-establishment:** Distrust or call for abolishment of dominant institutions or establishments in Ireland

3.1. **Anti-government:** distrust of the current Irish government and belief that they are not responsible or accurate representation for the Irish public or the belief that we should get rid of the democratic style of government

3.2. **Anti-MSM (mainstream media):** Belief that mainstream media (most typically RTÉ) is complicit in certain conspiracies or has an agenda to make the public believe certain things

3.2.1. **Criticism of how the public process information:** criticism of the non-far-right public (sometimes referred to as 'sheeple'

or ‘normies’) for not being critical or sceptical enough of mainstream media narratives, politicians, etc. and enabling the destruction of society

3.3. **Anti-education system:** belief that the education system and schools in Ireland have an agenda to brainwash students or make them more liberal and left-leaning than they would otherwise be, sometimes calls to abolish the traditional education system

3.4. **Anti-globalism:** the belief that we should prioritize nation-specific structures and ways of operating rather than adopting policy on a global basis. Note that this is ideologically related, but different to the belief that ‘globalists’ are the actors behind dominant conspiracies

3.4.1. **Criticism of American influence in Ireland:** criticism of the influence of American culture, political styles, etc. in Ireland

3.5. **Anti-elitism:** distrust of the ruling class, often alleging they are complicit in conspiracy theories

3.5.1. **Anti-corporatism:** criticism of corporations and the affordances allowed to them, criticism of corporate work structures

3.5.2. **Anti-experts & scientists:** distrust of experts and scientists, often alleging they are paid off or complicit in conspiracies

3.5.3. **Money as motivator for ‘elite’:** the belief that certain members of the elite or establishment class are being offered money to endorse certain conspiracies or agendas or the belief that social issues have arisen due to the glorification and pursuit of wealth in society

4. **Activism:** discussions and beliefs related to the course of action that should be taken to avoid the perceived consequences society is heading towards

4.1. **Calls to action:** an explicit bid to followers to engage in certain actions to combat highlighted issues

5. **Contextualising Ireland:** far-right issues or conspiracy rhetoric as they apply to Ireland or events facing the country

5.1. **Religious factors:** discussion of Ireland's history with religion and religious institutions and how it has shaped Irish society, or how the decline in religiosity has affected Irish society

5.2. **Irish spirituality:** superiority of Irish spirituality or using motifs from Irish spirituality to justify far-right ideology

5.3. **Housing crisis:** discussion of the housing crisis in Ireland and what issues and events are perceived to be contributing to it

5.4. **Internalised inferiority:** the idea that Ireland's history of colonisation resulted in an internalised belief that Irish people are inferior or incapable of self-government

5.5. **Irish nationalism:** rhetoric surrounding the Irish nationalist movement and the idea that Irish people should govern a united Ireland

5.5.1. **Anti-British:** criticism of British influence in Ireland especially as it pertains to British rule and imperialism

5.5.2. **Irish ethnonationalism:** the belief that those who are ethnically Irish are superior to other or more deserving of certain resources

5.5.3. **Irish masculinity:** rhetoric concerning the alleged inherent nature of Irish men or roles designated to Irish men

5.5.4. **Irish Republican movement:** rhetoric concerning the Irish Republican movement or prominent Irish Republican figures,

sometimes aligning the far-right movement in Ireland to the Irish Republican movement to gain legitimacy