LANGUAGE

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Constructing Identity Through Discourse of Trump and Tarrant

Abstract. This paper investigates how identity is constructed in the discourse of far-right terrorist Brenton Tarrant and right-wing populist figure Donald Trump. It examines the use of language to create in-groups and out-groups and to legitimize political action through narratives of victimhood and heroism. Although situated in different ideological and institutional contexts, both speakers mobilize emotionally charged, binary rhetoric to construct political identities and define threats. The study applies Critical Discourse Analysis, using Fairclough's three-dimensional model, to analyze two representative texts: Tarrant's manifesto The Great Replacement and Trump's 2023 campaign speech in Waco, Texas. Two recurring motifs—self-victimization and heroism—are examined in terms of lexical, syntactic, and metaphorical features. The analysis reveals notable overlap in rhetorical strategies, including war metaphors, repetition, and pronoun use to reinforce group boundaries. While Tarrant's discourse promotes direct violent action and Trump's remains within democratic norms, both rely on moral urgency and shared grievance to construct authority. The findings suggest that such strategies may serve as a discursive link between populist and extremist ideologies. Although limited to two case studies, the paper offers insight into the rhetorical mechanisms that shape identity and invites further research into their circulation across political spaces.

Keywords: identity construction; critical discourse analysis; far-right extremism; populism; Brenton Tarrant; Donald Trump; political rhetoric

1. Introduction

This paper examines how identity is constructed and performed in the discourse of far-right terrorist Brenton Tarrant and populist right-wing figure Donald Trump. It explores the similarities and the differences in the rhetorical strategies and linguistic devices used to construct political identities –their own and those of their audience.

The analysis focuses on Brenton Tarrant's manifesto titled "The Great Replacement," written before his 2019 Christchurch attack, and Donald Trump's Waco Rally speech, delivered on March 25, 2023.

Tarrant's and Trump's rhetorics play a highly relevant role in their own political movements. Tarrant's manifesto *The Great Replacement,* has been cited by other far-right terrorists, solidifying its status in far-right online political discourse. Baele et al. (2023) describes its influence as the "Tarrant effect", referring to subsequent attacks by ideological sympathizers. Moreover, the manifesto embodies ideas common in far-right groups, such as the titular Great Replacement conspiracy theory (Etaywe and Zappavigna 2024) and a preoccupation with birth rates (Wilhelmsen 2022). Its relevance persists in both academic literature and broader sociopolitical landscape, making it a key text for understanding contemporary far-right discourse.

Donald Trump, a central figure in right-wing populism has contributed significantly to the shaping of political discourse in the United States (Külz et al. 2023). At the time of writing, he is the current president of the US. This suggests that he represents the sentiments and values of a substantial portion of the American electorate.

Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), this study explores how mainstream right-wing discourse overlaps and diverges from the extremist ideologies of the far-right online groups, often labeled the alt-right. CDA is particularly suited to this task, as it focuses on how language shapes identity and power relations.

The comparison between Trump and Tarrant is significant because Trump represents mainstream American populist discourse, while Tarrant embodies far-right extremist rhetoric. Studies of Trump indicate his rhetoric to be closely intertwined with identity construction; Trump's speeches commonly revolve around distinctions between an in-group of white working-class Americans and an out-group based on racial and ideological criteria (Kaltwasser and Zanotti 2023). Correspondingly, Tarrant's narrative centers on constructing a white nationalist identity grounded in nativism and fears of demographic replacement (Buckingham and Alali 2020). Moreover, research on populism has emphasized its discursive construction of "the people" vs "the elite" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017), while studies on extremist texts highlight the role of grievance narratives and conspiracy framing to legitimize violence (Etaywe and Zappavigna 2024; Vanderwee and Droogan 2023). Although several studies (e.g., Ahmed and Pisoiu 2021; Bangstad 2016; Varriale 2024) examine the discursive intersection between populism and extremism, few focus specifically on identity construction across both populist and extremist texts. Therefore, placing Tarrant and Trump side by side allows for an analysis of whether similar rhetorical strategies operate across populist and extremist contexts.

This article argues that rhetorical strategies of victimhood and heroism function as a shared discursive toolkit linking populist and extremist texts, which, in turn creates potential pathways for radicalization. To address this, it investigates how Trump and Tarrant use language to construct political identity, define group boundaries, and present themselves as authoritative figures within their respective discourses.

The paper is structured as follows: (1) *Background* on populist right-wing and alt-right ideologies, (2*) Theoretical Framework and Methodology*; (3) *Analysis*, organized around key motifs: self-victimization and heroism; and (4) *Discussion,* reflecting on the findings and their implications

2. Background

2.1. Alt-right

Marwick and Lewis (2017), describe the alt-right as a broad coalition of various groups ranging from online trolls and misogynists to white supremacists. What unites them is their strategic use of online platforms (Hawley 2017). This section highlights the vital aspects of alt-right movements.

Ganesh (2020) claims that the alt-right 'weaponizes' white identity by legitimizing racial pride and framing white victimization, powering resentment toward the non-white groups. The white racial identity is a central issue in alt-right politics. It promotes traditional Western culture as superior, while claiming that it is in decline (Ebata 1997). Their sense of identity is often constructed through "us versus them" rhetoric, fostering a collective identity rooted in feelings of marginalization and self-victimization (Lorenzo-Dus and Nouri 2021). Key elements of the alt-right identity include a focus on masculinity, traditional values, and race (Lorenzo-Dus and Nouri 2021). Alt-right politics rely on exclusion of the "other". Using victimization and superiority to justify exclusionary beliefs and radical actions.

According to Europol (2023) lone actors radicalized through international online communities are the most common perpetrators of right-wing terrorism. Moreover, Buckingham & Alali (2020) argue that the alt-right's victimization narratives resemble ISIS propaganda tactics of fostering feelings of marginalization among its target audience. This type of discourse leads its participants to justify, animosity toward the outgroup, and rationalize utilization of violence to alter the perceived status quo.

2.1.1. The Great Replacement Manifesto

The Great Replacement is a manifesto by Brenton Harrison Tarrant, a 28-year-old Australian who attacked two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, on March 15th, 2019. The attack killed 51 and injured 45.

Before the attack, Tarrant posted links to his 74-page manifesto on 8chan, known to be frequented by alt-right groups (Stephane J. Baele, Brace, and Coan 2021). In the aftermath, many political leaders denounced him, including Donald Trump, who was mentioned positively in Tarrant's manifesto.

The manifesto's title reflects a wider discourse gaining popularity in right-wing circles at the time. Believers of the 'The Great Replacement' theory claim that the white

populations are being eradicated through mass migration to what they proclaim to be white nations. The idea was popularized by Renaud Camus in *Le Grand Replacement*, in which he argued that that non-white immigration is part of an "anti-white" elite conspiracy and he cites Muslim immigration and birthrates as evidence. While the notion of a white decline is not new in far-right thought, Camus's work popularized the term and is said to strongly influence Tarrant (Vanderwee and Droogan 2023).

2.2. The Populist Right-Wing (PRW)

Populism frames society as divided between the "pure people" and the "corrupt elite". Although populism spans the political spectrum (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012), this paper focuses on the right-wing variant. This section outlines key features of right-wing populism, with a focus on its development in the United States.

Despite regional variations, right-wing populist movements share core features. Kaltwasser & Zanotti (2023) identify three defining attributes: nativism, authoritarianism, and populism.

PRW often centers on nativism, which promotes the native population interest and, by extension, views immigrants and diversity as a threat (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017). This contributes to the "us vs them" rhetoric, portraying the native population as a unified group needing protection from the outsiders. However, the outgroup definitions differ dependent on cultural contexts and may be defined along ethnic and religious lines (Kaltwasser and Zanotti 2023).

Authoritarianism typically involves calls for stricter law-and-order policies and uplifting traditional values. PRW often promotes the idea of a strong leader whose role is to protect the people of the nation from external threats. However, it does not mean PRW rejects democracy, but rather, supports a strictly ordered society led by a strong figure (ibid.)

Populism frames society as "pure people" vs. "corrupt elite.", positions itself against the establishment, considered to be a political order formed by the elites, and insists that the government reflects the will of the people (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). In practice, this anti-pluralist approach often means rejection of the idea that minority rights matter (Krzyżanowski and Ledin 2017). Kaltwasser & Zanotti (2023) also argue that this populist notion of representing the will of the people functions as a "democratic shield" to legitimize RWP's more radical positions.

2.2.1. Donald Trump

Donald Trump is a prominent example of a right-wing populist leader (see Kaltwasser and Zanotti 2023). His rhetoric prioritizes native population (meaning white American), notably in calls for border wall. (Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2017). Kreis (2017) finds Trump uses informal style of communication to portray an endeared homeland attacked by the "other" and himself as a defender.

Chosen Trump's speech was delivered during a campaign rally in Waco, Texas, on March 25, 2023. This key moment in his political trajectory reinforced his populist messaging while escalating criticism of political opponents and the justice system. The choice of Waco as a rally location was symbolic due to its association with anti-government sentiment.

3. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1. Critical Discourse Analysis and Analytical Framework

Critical Discourse Analysis is a research methodology that approaches language from the perspective of how it is affected by social power, abuse, and inequality (Van Dijk 2015). CDA refers to diverse approaches analyzing power, ideology, and inequality (Barker and Galasiński 2001). CDA is suited to the study of political identity as it examines how language constructs and maintains power relations between social groups. As identities are not inherent and fixed but shaped through discourse (Grad and Martín Rojo 2008; Liu 2008), CDA investigates how social realities are shaped by language use. Essentially, it helps explain the role of language in the process of negotiating identities in both far-right extremism, and populist right-wing politics.

This study adopts Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model, which involves
1) *Description*, examining linguistic features of the text;
2) *Interpretation***,** analyzing the interaction between the text and its audience;
3) *Explanation*, linking the discourse to a broader sociopolitical context;

This approach supports the analysis of how political identities are constructed and maintained through language, as it examines the text itself, its reception, and its societal implications. The paper is structured around key rhetorical motifs namely *victimhood* and *heroism,* which are central to the construction of political identity in both far-right and populist discourse. Each motif is examined using Fairclough's three-stage framework: description**,** interpretation, and explanation**.**

3.2. Data and Research Questions

This study focuses on two sources. The first one is Brenton Tarrant's manifesto *The Great Replacement*) published prior to the Christchurch attacks in 2019 (16,566 words; Tarrant 2019), representing the ideology of far-right extremism and white supremacist online ideology (alt-right). The manifesto was originally accessed in 2019 through an online forum, and a copy was downloaded before it was taken down. Today, the text is banned and restricted in many countries, and its use here is limited to scholarly analysis. The second is Donald Trump's campaign speech delivered in Waco, Texas, on March 25, 2023 chosen due to its political impact (13,676 words; KPRC 2 Click-2Houston 2023).

Both texts were read in full and systematically annotated. For Trump's speech, transcription was carried out by listening, cross-checking with video captions, and re-playing to ensure accuracy. The same coding procedure was then applied to both texts.

From each text, excerpts that exemplify reccuring motiffs were selected. *Victimhood* and *heroism* emerged a dominant strategies across both corpora. While many additional passages could have been included, to maintain focus only a limited number were analyzed. The selected excerpts are not exhaustive but represent broader discursive patterns of each text; occasional references to the full text are included to contextualize the quotes.

These texts were chosen as representatives of far-right extremism and populist right-wing discourses, respectively. They offer a basis for analyzing the similarities and differences in the linguistic strategies utilized to construct political identities and frame ingroups and outgroups.

The analysis is guided by the following research questions:

a. In what way do Tarrant and Trump construct ingroup and outgroup identities in their discourse?
b. What linguistic and rhetorical strategies are employed to establish and negotiate those identities?
c. In what way do the discourses of Tarrant and Trump align and deviate in their methods of forming identity as well as presenting it to the public?

4. Analysis

4.1. Victimhood

The first motif discussed is *victimhood*, which both Trump and Tarrant construct through pronoun use, repetition and metaphors of invasion. These strategies position their respective audience as an in-group victimized by a hostile out-group. To illustrate this motif, exemplary focus quotes are presented below:

Trump quote:

> "Never forget the very same people who are always after me are the ones throwing open your borders to millions and millions of illegal aliens. Nobody suffers more than this state. I watch on television the other day, people having homes, they're just being invaded."

Tarrant quotes:

> (1) "I could no longer ignore the attacks. They were attacks on my people, attacks on my culture, attacks on my faith and attacks on my soul. They would not be ignored."
> (2) "Because if we do not destroy the invaders first, our own birthrates will mean nothing."

4.1.1. Trump: Description

Trump uses pejorative vocabulary to portray immigration as harmful to the American people. The noun *aliens* functions as a synonym to *immigrants,* carrying experiential value, while its collocation with *illegal* transforms the negative connotation onto the immigrants themselves. Quantification *millions and millions* amplifies the perceived issue, and the metaphorical phrase *throwing open your borders* has relational value, positioning Trump's audience as victims of the immigrants and the government alike. The passive construction *people having homes, they're just being invaded* frames Texans as helpless, the shift from Trump's usual active style amplifying this effect. The attributive clause *the very same people who are always after me* links his personal enemies with the act of opening borders, blaming them for the audience's predicament. This fosters solidarity between Trump and his audience as victims of a shared enemy. Pronouns *me, your,* and implied *they* in *"the very same people"* reinforces the "us vs. them" dichotomy, casting the policymakers as traitorous out-group aligned with immigrants.

4.1.2. Trump: Interpretation

The quote assumes that tight borders are the norm and that *throwing open* borders is a harmful deviation. The collocation *illegal aliens* presupposes that immigrants pose a threat and cause suffering to Texans (*Nobody suffers more than this state*). The term itself is ideologically contested and carries significant rhetorical weight. The emotionally charged lexical items and passive voice position the receivers of the text within an "invasion" metaphor, which justifies the pejorative tone towards immigrants, as immigration is equated with military assault. These linguistic choices position immigrants and Democrats as the oppressors, the audience as victims, and Trump as part of the in-group who shares their oppression.

4.1.3. Trump: Explanation

The excerpt draws on populist discourse by positioning the people (*your state*) against the perceived elite and immigrants, a narrative already familiar in Republican circles. The subjects are positioned within specified roles – immigrants as invaders, Democrats as responsible for the border crisis, the audience as victims, and Trump as persecuted by Democrats. The emotionally charged rhetoric aims to mobilize the audience to vote for him.

By framing the border crisis as an invasion and linking it to Texans' suffering, Trump naturalizes immigrants as malicious actors. He connects current immigration to longstanding threats by referencing historical conflicts with Mexicans, namely the Battle of the Alamo and the Battle of Gonzales.

This rhetoric creates an identity of victimhood for Trump's audience, and by extension Trump himself. He presents himself as one who empathizes by observation

(*I watch on television*), and by claiming shared victimization. This helps him claim in-group membership despite his elite status, laying the groundwork for his later heroic rhetoric.

4.1.4. Tarrant: Description

The anaphoric repetition of *attacks on* highlights the ongoing nature of the perceived attacks against the producer, while the repeated possessive *my* (*people, culture, soul*) reinforces Tarrant's identification with the in-group and constructs a threatened collective identity. The overwording intensifies victimization; *my* highlights personal attachment of the producer to the subjects. This implies the existence of the opposing "other". Tarrant explicitly asserts his white, European identity, defining the out-group as those outside of this background. This is reinforced by the choice to label Muslim immigrants as *invaders*.

The pronouns in the second quote reinforce the in-group/ out-group division by directly positioning their interests as conflicting. The collective *our* emphasizes shared identity and vulnerability. Birthrates are central to Tarrant, and their being rendered meaningless implies a serious threat to in-group's survival. This conditional framing presents immigrants as an immediate existential threat. The verb *destroy* carries connotation of eradication, further dehumanizing the *invaders* and framing them as a destructive force.

The opening and closing statements of the first quote frame the speaker's victimization as reaching a breaking point. The personal pronoun *I* adds experiential value of being targeted and being passive, while the modal *would not* expresses a determination to end the attacks, shifting the narrative to active resistance. The closing statement becomes a declaration of intent to overturn the status quo.

4.1.5. Tarrant: Interpretation

The term *attacks* is multifaceted, situating the text within a schema of aggression with defined agents and victims. High fertility rates of immigrants and acts of terrorism are presented as components of a conspiracy to eradicate white people. Conversely, what is being attacked are the vital elements of Tarrant's identity, positioning him as the victim. The use of *our* in the context of birthrates reinforces a shared racial identity with white Europeans, establishing them as the intended audience and encouraging them to see themselves as equally victimized.

References of *culture* and *faith* tap into anxieties about societal change. These passages not only establish victimhood but also reject passivity, motivating actions of violent resistance, similar to what Tarrant did. Violence is justified by drawing from grievance narrative and rationalizing utilization of violence through framing it not as an act of aggression, but necessary defense in a conflict initiated by the out-group.

4.1.6. Tarrant: Explanation

The quotes reflect Tarrant's goal to normalize narrative deeply rooted in far-right ide-
ologies presenting immigration as a threat to white populations. His language is as-
sertive, marked by short, simple sentences and cause-and-effect structures that present
his ideology as natural and unquestionable. Emotionally charged language and the
repetition of *attacks* is used to induce an emotional response in his audience so that
they accept his views as the objective truth. Tarrant presents violence as morally jus-
tified, dismissing any non-violent alternatives. The invasion metaphor is treated as an
accurate representation of reality, creating solidarity within the in-group and mobiliz-
ing support.

   This rhetoric, central to white supremacy's anti-immigration discourse and extrem-
ist online spaces, often functions as echo chambers for the ideology. While his primary
audience were those already sympathetic to his views, Tarrant also sought a wider
reach by sharing his manifesto to Twitter (now X) and sending it to officials and me-
dia. Those already ideologically aligned were encouraged to follow in Tarrant's foot-
steps, while those whom Tarrant saw as a part of his racial in-group, but did not share
his views were potential targets for radicalization. Overall, his "us vs them" rhetoric
aimed to fuel intergroup conflict, as Tarrant openly states his intention to incite a civil
war in the US and create division between Europeans and the *invaders*.

4.2. Heroism

The second motif is *heroism,* which both Trump and Tarrant employ to construct their
own authority and mobilize their audiences. Through the use of modal verbs, exclu-
sive pronouns and metaphors of struggle, each figure presents himself as knowing the
answer to the threats established through the victimization rhetoric discussed in the
previous sections. In Trump's discourse, heroism is framed as Trump's unique ability
to prevent catastrophe, while Tarrant presents it as resilience through militant action
and encourages others to participate in it. To illustrate this motif, exemplary focus
quotes are presented below:
   Trump quote:

> "Standing before you today, I am the only candidate who can make this promise. I will pre-
> vent World War III, which we're heading into. We're heading into World War III and this will
> be a war like no other."

   Tarrant quote:

> "You may stumble. You may fall. But the only way to get to the final destination,
> total victory, is to get up and keep marching forward. No matter what. March."

4.2.1. Trump: Description

The exclusive pronoun with the determiner *the* in *I am the only candidate* establishes Trump's uniqueness, positioning him as the sole figure capable of addressing the crisis The auxiliary modal *will* conveys certainty and promise to prevent *World War III,* a lexical item containing negative connotation of destruction, depicted as an impending and evolving by the use of the present progressive tense (*We're heading*). The repetition stresses the immediacy of danger, while *this will be a war like no other* implies unique danger while leaving the interpretation open, amplifying anxiety.

Another element of Trump's heroic identity is the use of plural pronouns. The phrase *we are heading into World War III* includes the audience alongside Trump, fostering shared destiny. The pronoun *you in* the initial statement *Standing before you today* directly addresses the audience, creating engagement, while the temporal deictic *today* places it in the present. These linguistic choices create an illusion of a dialogue, despite it being a one-way address.

The tone is authoritative, projecting decisiveness and strength through assertive language (e.g., *I am, I will*). These archetypical heroic qualities position Trump as a savior capable of altering the negative trajectory the world is heading towards.

4.2.2. Trump: Interpretation

Trump's speech activates a savior schema, positioning him as a heroic figure who promises protection from imminent danger. To achieve this, he presents a specific threat of *World War III*. The audience, likely already holding negative historical associations with the concept, has this fear amplified by the phrase *and this will be a war like no other*. The increased risk intensifies the perceived danger and elevates Trump's value as the one promising to prevent it.

Trump's promise appeals to a fundamental need for security. By positioning himself as *the only candidate,* he reinforces audiences' belief in his exceptional leadership abilities while undermining his opponents. Hence, he emerges as the decisive, skilled hero who will protect the people from the external threat.

4.2.3. Trump: Explanation

Trump's portrayal as the hero of the people is used to persuade voters that he understands their problems and will protect their interest. The claim that he is *the only one* who can solve the crisis echoes authoritarian discourses, where the leader is portrayed as a strong figure possessing unique capabilities. This theme is highly prevalent in Trump's rhetoric, which naturalizes his identity as a savior fighting against the incompetent political elite.

The quote uses war imagery to help frame: the problem (World War III), the inefficiency of other actors to solve it (Trump being *"the only one"*) and the solution (Trump

becoming the president). Hence, the aim of this quote is to craft a narrative about the political landscape and define Trump's role within it. While this global conflict reference is crucial, he also presents other, local threats, such as immigrants (especially Mexicans), but also in the later part of the speech issues such as critical race theory and transgender rights, framing them as dangerous to children (*any school pushing critical race theory, transgender insanity, and either racial, sexual, or political content on our children*). By positioning himself as the protector from these harms, Trump validates his base's already existing fears and fosters their loyalty and dependence.

4.2.4. Tarrant: Description

Unlike Trump, whose heroic identity is built on being "the chosen one" with special abilities, Tarrant constructs his heroism through actions. His language is direct and engaging, and his own heroism is implied through the imperative structures that suggest a hierarchy; he is the commander, the readers his subjects. The repetition of the second person pronoun *you* assigns the reader an active role in the manifesto; Tarrant "breaks the fourth wall" and speaks directly in short, declarative sentences, creating authority. The modal *may* convays a meaning of possibility, predicting hardship and this being contrasted with the conjunction *but* creates necessity, (*get up* and *keep marching forward*). This shift from a possibility to necessity is crucial in framing a heroic figure who resumes their mission regardless of any hindrances.

Tarrant's heroic framing also relies on his lexical choices, using the fight-is-a-journey conceptual metaphor. *Stumble* and *fall* represent setbacks, while *get up* and *marching forward* symbolize resilience. The phrases *final destination* and *total victory* reinforce this metaphor, creating semantic equivalence. This constructs Tarrant as a mentor and the audience as his apprentices. Notably, the verb *marching* and the rhythmic stylization evoke military association, which solidifies this hierarchy. Short, rhythmic utterances and imperatives (such as *get up* and *march*) convey urgency, demanding action in the present, echoing a martial oration before combat.

4.2.5. Tarrant: Interpretation

Although Tarrant's quote directly addresses recipients, the manifesto was distributed when the attack was already underway, so it was not a literal call for support. He acted as a "lone wolf", a common choice of far-right actors, aiming not to receive aid, but to construct a heroic self-image that others could imitate. Tarrant imagines his action as inspirational, positioning himself as a hero – therefore superior – and worthy of giving orders. To increase the motivational aspect, he acknowledges potential hardship, which aids the audience in understanding that he is not only a commander, but a mentor guiding the future hero.

The quote implicitly creates a subject position for the reader: a determined individual willing to struggle for victory – racial segregation and elimination of "the other" – who becomes a heroic figure, persevering as instructed by their mentor.

4.2.6. Tarrant: Explanation

As discussed, this quote creates a heroic identity for the reader and portrays Tarrant as a martyr whose actions should be repeated. Tarrant ensured this by posting the manifesto in online spaces frequented by susceptible audiences.

The quote finalizes *The Great Replacement*; a text embedded in the far-right ideology which argues that white populations are deliberately being replaced by non-white immigrants. Tarrant's vision of *total victory* is reversing demographic shift and ensuring white dominance. The straightforward language and the direct call mobilize those who feel that their identity is under threat. Tarrant also situates himself, albeit indirectly, as a strong leader, is reminiscent of populist ideals. This is notable because, although far-right terrorists tend to act as lone wolves, there is a pattern of inspiration from previous terror attacks. And as in *The Great Replacement* Tarrant endorsed Breivik, the 2019 El Paso Walmart shooter named Tarrant as an inspiration, showing that Tarrant's call for action succeeded. This chain of inspired attacks reveals a two-fold aspect of the online far-right extremist identity: the individual acts alone to make a name for themselves but relies on community replicating their acts to advance their political goals.

Tarrant's discourse ignores alternative solutions. The focus on singular *total victory* and *only way* eliminates nuance in understanding the demographic change. This binary us vs. them rhetoric, common in extremist ideologies, reinforces division and can fuel extremism in susceptible populations already primed to accept such narratives.

5. Discussion

This study found that both Trump and Tarrant rely on narratives of victimhood and heroism to construct their political identity, though with different political consequences. This finding resonates with recent studies showing convergence between populist and extremist rhetoric, especially in the contexts of anti-immigration, elite-people dichotomy and existential threat narratives (Bangstad 2016; Langer 2024; Wodak, Khosravi-iNik, and Mral 2013; Ahmed and Pisoiu 2021).

While Trump's rhetoric uses populist framing, he echoes tropes found in extremist texts. The metaphor of invasion, emotional appeals, and militarized language align him with the "people" against a corrupt elite and dangerous outsiders. Importantly, his positioning as both victim and savior allows him to legitimize authoritarian leadership while retaining proximity to his base. Tarrant's rhetoric, while more overtly violent and exclusionary, similarly frames himself as victim-turned-hero and his audience as potential heroes in a struggle for racial survival where violent resistance is the only solution.

By focusing on the identity construction, this study contributes to the debates on the relationship between right-wing populism and extremism through showing the overlap in the identity construction, specifically in the victim to hero framing. This supports viewing populist and extremist discourse as points on a continuum, rather than separate categories. Both rely on emotionally charged binaries and conflict-laden rhetoric that may enable pathways of radicalization. From practical standpoint, this raises concerns about how mainstream populist identity construction and its rhetoric may legitimize extremist ideologies.

While this analysis is limited to two figures, the parallels in their rhetorical strategies reflect an ideological continuum. The key distinction lies in the scope of its intended consequences—one seeks votes, the other advocates violence. At the same time, some scholars argue for a conceptual separation between populism and extremism(Mayer, Ajanovic, and Sauer 2020; Varriale 2024), which indicates that further research is needed to determine whether these parallels are isolated or indicative of a broader discursive pattern across the right-wing spectrum.

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