



About the TaCT-FoRSED project

Tackling Conspiracy Theories by Fostering Resilience and Political Self-Efficacy in Democracies

Liberal and constitutional democracies in Europe are currently under massive pressure from authoritarian populism, culture wars and identity conflicts.

The TaCT-FoRSED project closes a scientific gap regarding the interrelation between democracy, identity formation and conspiracy theories.

Using existing research and collecting new data, the project plans to

a) investigate the impact of conspiracy theories on the adoption of an anti-democratic group identity and, conversely, to explore identity factors that strengthen or weaken resilience to conspiracy myths. Based on the realisation that the complexity of value-pluralistic democracies is the counterpart to any simplistic, authoritarian friend-foe thinking of conspiracy beliefs, democratic identity formation processes are also seen as an opportunity to effectively combat conspiracy narratives.

TaCT-FoRSED will therefore:

b) address its key target group of multipliers in the educational fields and develop open educational resources that specifically promote democratic self-efficacy to foster a counter-identity to any conspiracy mentality. These materials will be evaluated together with relevant institutions from different target groups. The project will thus improve the legitimacy of knowledge-producing institutions and political parties by supporting democratic participation.

c) The findings made by TaCT-FoRSED will result in policy recommendations for political stakeholders and educators to make the solutions widely accessible.

The TaCT-FoRSED project runs from 1st February 2025 to 31st January 2028.

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The TaCT-FoRSED team recently met at Carmen de la Victoria, Universidad de Granada, Spain. *Behind the Curtain* brings you updates from discussions at the meeting.

Eight country case studies on democratic identity and conspiracy ideologies completed

Which factors promote or inhibit the spread of conspiracy theories?

The TaCT-FoRSED project has carried out eight in-depth country case studies (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Spain, France, Slovakia, and the United Kingdom) to improve understanding of how conspiracy narratives develop and how they interact with democratic identity across Europe. This work was led by Stefan Christoph, Sebastian Schwarzweller and Oliver Hidalgo (Universität Passau) and Michelle Schweitzer (Universität Leipzig), with contributions from many others of the TaCT-FoRSED team.

Using a multi-level analytical approach, the research examined:

Macro-level contexts such as political institutions, media landscapes, and systemic stressors (e.g., COVID-19, geopolitical crises). Meso-level actors including political movements, alternative media ecosystems, and civil society intermediaries who amplify or counter conspiracy narratives.

Micro-level patterns of conspiracy mentality, political efficacy, trust, and democratic attitudes within national populations.

An initial analysis showed the studies converge on an overall finding that conspiracy beliefs are not merely misunderstandings – they reflect deeper tensions between citizens and democratic systems. Moreover, the analysis showed that conspiracy narratives are becoming politically mainstream and have

moved well beyond fringe subcultures.

Events such as COVID-19, economic shocks and the war in Ukraine serve as catalysts for the spread of conspiracy theories, showing a specific pattern of spread where they take root during a crisis and are subsequently transferred to new issues thus creating a persistent reservoir of mistrust.

The meso level is central to the spread of conspiracy theories. Alternative media, influencers, ‘conspiracy entrepreneurs’ and activist networks often succeed in isolating individuals from mainstream discourse and reinforcing simple ‘good versus evil’ identity frames. There is no single cause of conspiracism, but the interaction of micro-, meso- and macro-level factors is key.

However, strong democratic identity, institutional trust and democratic self-efficacy reduce susceptibility to conspiracy narratives.

This research highlights the need for a ‘public health’ approach where resilience is built before harmful narratives spread. Societies should invest in civic participation, transparent institutions, and avenues for meaningful political engagement.

The full case studies will be published soon, follow us online (see left) to keep up-to-date!





Protocol for Collecting Parliamentary Records Data Released

A means for creating a strong evidence base for analysing questions relating to democracy

Irene Baena Álvarez, Francisco Castillo Eslava and Alejandro Romero Reche at the Universidad de Granada have created a protocol for data collection from parliamentary records.

The protocol provides a comprehensive guide for gathering parliamentary datasets across multiple countries, setting out a structured and replicable approach for sourcing, selecting, and preparing parliamentary extracts. It is based on an executable code written in Python that uses the Selenium library to automate the downloading of PDF documents.

Parliamentary records offer a rich source of insight into political communication, democratic responsiveness, and the ways political institutions interact with public sentiment.

The newly released protocol offers:

A unified methodological framework for collecting parliamentary debates, bills, motions, and related political records from different national contexts.

Detailed guidance on identifying relevant repositories, navigating accessibility constraints, and ensuring consistency across countries.

Standards for documentation and metadata, enabling reliable cross-country comparison.

Foundational input for subsequent analytical work in TaCT-FoRSED, particularly the study of psychological and democratic conditions that influence belief in conspiratorial narratives.

While the protocol has been developed in support of TaCT-FoRSED's particular aims, it may be easily adapted for other parliaments, time periods, and be used to study a range of different research topics unrelated to conspiracism.

The protocol may be found at: <https://tact-forsed.eu/resourcespublications/>



Engaging with Conspiracy Theories, Fostering Democracy conference

Bringing conspiracy theory researchers together

Petr Janeček and Leonardo Schiocchet (Univerzita Karlova) have organised a conference on 'Engaging with Conspiracy Theories, Fostering Democracy' to be held at Univerzita Karlova, Prague on 9th and 10th April 2026.

The program will include presentation of individual papers structured into 12 thematic panels, a roundtable on a future learned society for conspiracy theory research and 4 keynote lectures:

Michael Butter (Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen, Germany): *Conspiracy Theory and Democracy*

Karen Douglas (University of Kent, UK): *Consequences of conspiracy theories.*

Eva Hausteiner (Friedrich-Alexander-Universität, Germany): *Too bad: On the affinity between dystopianism and conspiracism*

Andreas Ömerfors (Linnaeus University, Sweden): *'To see is to believe': the visual communication of conspiracy ideation*

The full programme is now available [on our website](#).

This is the first in a series of conferences planned to be held throughout the project - follow us online to keep up to date!

Meet the TaCT-FoRSED team!

As well as our own conferences, members of the TaCT-FoRSED team will be attending:

- *Trilateral Conference: Europe's Future, Friedrichshafen, Germany, 17th -19th June 2026*
- *ECPR General Conference, Krakow, Poland, 8th - 11th September 2026*
- *2nd International Congress on Political Theory, Passau, Germany, 5th - 7th October 2026*

If you will be there too - come and say hello, it would be great to have a chat!

Policy initiatives to counter the malign impact of conspiracy thinking underway

Translating research findings into workable policy guidance

Work led by Kristína Šeřčíková and Alexandra Nosková at the Prague Security Studies Institute is set to encourage new policies and policy changes which aim to prevent future harm to democratic systems caused by conspiracy thinking.



Efforts are underway to evaluate current policies and strategies to identify gaps and inconsistencies; and to collect insights from education practitioners whose experience and feedback will be useful in effecting change. Together with an evaluation of TaCT-FoRSED project results, these efforts will serve as a foundation for the development of data-based, actionable policy recommendations.

The long-term sustainability of this work will be ensured through education of future policy makers and stakeholders. The aim is to produce groups of future leaders well-educated about the issue and equipped with knowledge, tools and a network of contacts to spearhead policies and initiatives in the future.



Large survey of acceptance of conspiracy theories

Which factors reinforce conspiracy accepting identities?



Carol Galais, Marc Guinjoan, Alejandro Fernández-Roldán and Blai Blanchet (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) are set to carry out a large online survey on the acceptance of conspiracy theories across 15 different European countries.

The survey is set up to better understand the prevalence, drivers, and democratic impacts of conspiracy beliefs across the various countries. Specifically, the survey is designed to cover four key lines of inquiry:

- Measuring prevalence: Estimate true belief in sensitive narratives (e.g., COVID-19 population-reduction, chemtrails) using indirect questioning.
- Identifying harmful narrative traits: Test which components (intentionality, secret elites, victimhood, etc.) most affect democratic attitudes.
- Testing debunking strategies: Evaluate whether discrediting via factual approaches or descriptive or injunctive social-norm-based approaches is more effective in reducing belief after exposure to a conspiracy narrative.
- Testing prebunking strategies: Assess whether text inoculation or video inoculation is more effective in reducing susceptibility to the same conspiracy narrative.

The team have developed a coordinated survey flow which is now ready for deployment. The questionnaire is being translated and pre-test evaluations carried out ahead of the launch of the survey which is expected in mid-spring.

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Educational manual under development

Putting research into practice

Sarah Straub and Natalie Scherer at Demokratiezentrum Wien are spearheading the creation of an educational manual which will turn the results of the TaCT-FoRSED project into practical strategies for educators.

The goal is to help educators better understand how conspiracy theories develop and spread, the effect that they have on democratic identity and resilience, and innovative ways to provide learners of all ages with offers that help strengthen their identification with democratic systems and thus become more resilient to conspiracy thinking.

A workshop will be held at the end of March to further develop these ideas.



Democratic resilience digital game box launched

Support for educators in teaching political self-efficacy

Patrick Urlbauer and Hannes Birnkammerer (Universität Passau) have launched an online portal of open educational resources (OER) to support teaching of political self-efficacy and democratic resilience through game-based learning.

The digital game box includes original games developed by TaCT-FoRSED with didactic analyses and educational material; together with externally hosted games selected by us, and supplemented with custom-developed, tailored OER materials; and external games that already have pedagogical resources, supplemented with our analysis of instructional potential according to the goals of TaCT-FoRSED.

There are currently seven games available in the box:

Headline Hunter - A game that trains players to identify trustworthy information in a noisy media environment.

Harmony Square - A strategy game that demonstrates how

disinformation can be manufactured to destabilize a community.

Deine Stimme - A German language game that helps players understand how political choices shape democratic participation.

Bad News - A role-playing game where players create a fake-news empire, learning the tactics manipulators use.

Newsfeed Defenders - A simulation where players moderate a social media feed, limiting misinformation while maintaining trust.

Das Kurierkomplott: A German language game where players unravel a conspiracy through clue gathering, and critical reasoning.

Suzerain: A political simulation where players lead a country, exploring how information, power, and democracy interact.

Work is ongoing to both create further original games and find additional pre-existing ones on relevant themes.

The game box and future updates will be available at: <https://tact-forsed.eu/resourcespublications/>