The Road to Radicalization:
Examining the Effects of Authoritarianism, Perception of Threats, and Motivated Reasoning on Americans’ Radicalization

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Everyone has political opinions. These opinions and political identities can exist on spectrums from left and right. People can have various opinions on both the left and right as they do not need to exist entirely on one side. Scholars have various theories for why and how people have these opinions. They could be from experiences, moral philosophy, parents' political opinions, psychological reasons, friends' thoughts, and what the media and political elites tell them. People can then take different actions to affect the government and the world in accordance with their opinions. They can protest, contact their congressperson, write blog posts, and join organizations. Or they can use radial means through violence and breaking the rule of law. Before discussing the significance of the rising radicalism in America, which will be addressed in the next section, it is necessary to provide background.

Over the past decade or two, people have seemed to become more radical. There have been constant examples of people taking radical actions to advance their agenda, like the mass shootings, lone-wolf terrorist attacks, and most recently, the January 6th insurrection. Recently, a growing number of people have adopted radical solutions to achieve their goals. An example of this is the Tea Party movement in response to the election of Barack Obama (Ray n.d.). It began creating groups that questioned the legitimacy of the election. Later during the pandemic, Americans committed violence and anti-democratic norms intensified.

Due to cultural issues during the pandemic, violence at the local level increased. For example, thirty-three board members across fifteen states received 220 threatening and harassing messages (Borter, Ax, Tanfani 2022). These violent people claim coronavirus and race-education
policies are not merely misguided or offensive but part of a larger conspiracy to commit “treason” or impose “tyranny (Border, Ax, Tanfani 2022). These violent wanted to intimidate officials into stepping down from elected office or change their opinion by instilling terror (Border, Ax, Tanfani 2022).

Trump seemed to galvanize people in a way that others had not. He had a way of bringing people who had not participated in politics into it. Trump broke many of the democratic norms and values as president. He openly called to lock up and investigate political opponents like Hillary Clinton (Montgomery 2020). He brought many conspiracy theories to the mainstream by questioning the legitimacy of the 2020 election (Montomery 2020). After Covid-19 began, Trump questioned medical experts and promoted not medically proven cures while criticizing the Covid-19 stopping masks (Montgomery 2020). There was a lot of violence against people enforcing masks mandates and officials (Kelleher, Tang, and Rodriguez 2021). The foremost among them is the lie that the 2020 election was illegitimate and stolen by the Democrats. Trump helped praise Qanon followers, a conspiracy theory group focused on the deep state, and many others (Tollefson 2021). The lie that the 2020 election was a fraud culminated in the January 6th insurrection instigated by Donald Trump (Tollefson 2021). He told his supporters to march on the capital, and they did. The January 6th insurrection is probably the most prominent example of recent radical behavior in the United States. People acted against the democratic rule of law to overthrow the government and instate Trump as president violently. The government has not completely dealt with the consequences. 60% of Republicans thought the 2020 election was stolen (Leonhardt 2021). It is the culmination of the radicalization of America and has sparked questions about why it happened.
This thesis is about the causes of radicalization. It examines why certain people have radical opinions. While there are many different possible definitions of radical, for this paper, I will use Van den Bos’s (2018) definition of radical will mean supporting actions that go against the democratic rule of law. Radicalism will exist on a spectrum as well. This definition will allow the paper to research what causes people to have radical opinions. Furthermore, it examines what factors could cause those initially low on the radial spectrum to become more radical or radicalized.

1.2 Significance of Radicalism

What causes radicalization matters immensely. Radicalism undermines the democratic order of society. If more people are radical, then it leads to unrest. A rise in radicalism could lead to non-democratic events like riots, terrorist attacks, attacking politicians, and storming the capital. It is necessary to know what factors lead to radicalism so that you can prevent it from happening. You can also try to help deradicalize people by addressing its causes. By removing those factors that cause radicalization, people could be deradicalized. Investigating the causes can look at who is at risk of radicalization. For example, if it is the innate personality, that would be different. Overall it could protect people, prevent attacks, and maintain the integrity of democracy.

Without knowing this information, a lot can change. The democracy in America is at stake. It has been backsliding over the years for various reasons within and outside the law. Voting rights have been rolled back with undo restrictions making it harder for people to participate in voting (ALCU 2021). It is in this situation that increasing radicalization has occurred. There have been increases in hate crimes (Hernandez 2021) and coverage of people
attacking employees and officials trying to enforce mask mandates. The rule of law is not being followed where people are not listening to government mandates for masks or other anti-covid restrictions. If people continue to become radicalized, there might be more terrorist attacks, the storming of capitols, and lone-wolf attacks. Decreasing radicals could help repair the damage to democracy in America. It will also reduce the damage done in the future.

The topic is to study for various reasons. Many people have become radicalized recently due to Donald Trump, Qanon, and Covid-19. It is interesting to examine the reasons behind that radicalization. It looks at those who work against a democratic system. It is necessary to learn more about society, other people’s political opinions, and how they form. Democracy has been under attack, and more and more people are trying to break democratic norms followed for decades. Officials and teachers have been attacked or threatened. It will only worsen as Americans are emboldened by others doing radical change in the future. The United States needs to maintain its strong liberal democracy. If people continue to do radical actions, then a tyrannical leader could gain power and change the United States into an unfree government that does not have the freedom of a democracy.

### 1.3 Thesis Roadmap

This thesis has several sections, so there will be a thesis roadmap. The first part of the thesis after the introduction is the literature review. The literature review will review the various scholars and their answers to what causes radicalization. The research is divided into three schools of thought. The first school of thought is political reasons, including feelings of victimhood, media manipulation, and populism. The second school of thought is psychological factors, including heuristics and stereotypes, motivated reasoning, and group effects. The third
school of thought is authoritarian reasons such as perceived threats and authoritarian politicians. The literature review will examine these theories to understand the previous work done in this field of radicalization.

The research design is based on the literature review. The research design will include the hypothesis that high-authoritarianism, high-motivated reasoning, or high-threat perception will lead to high-radicalism. The research design of this thesis is twofold. Overall, the survey will be broken down into three sections. The first section is a series of questions that measure the participants' authoritarianism level. Then participants will randomly either get questions about how worried they are about various threats, questions for participants ask if they agree with certain policy positions framed as either neutral or pertaining to a particular side or a control. The last section that all participants will be asked is a series of questions investigating how radical their opinions are. After the survey, certain participants with high-authoritarianism or high-radical will be contacted for a follow-up interview. These interviews will expand on the questions asked in the survey. They will try to gain more information about possible reasons this person may be high-radical or low-radical. The answers of the participants will then be compared.

After the survey and interview, there will be a section on data analysis. This section will go through the statistical analysis of each of the four different factors. It will examine the statistical significance of party, threat perception, motivated reasoning, and authoritarianism on people’s radical score. These factors will attempt to examine each aspect's effect on causing radicalism. This examination will mainly be done with the independent t-test if the data is normal or the Mann Whitney U test if the data is not normal. This section will also include an investigation of each of the interviews conducted. It will compare their answers to their answers
on the survey to see if they contradict each other or have similar answers. They will also examine the connection or lack thereof between high-radical and low-radical but high-authoritarian participants.

The final section will be the conclusion. This part will return to schools of thought and find ones that explain the study results. This explanation will be the bulk of the section. This section will also include what I would have done differently to improve the study. Finally, it would consist of possible avenues for future research.
2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Political Explanations

2.11 Victimhood

One major factor explaining the radicalization of people is political factors. Van Den Bos (2018) utilizes various sources to argue that unfairness and victimization lead to radicalization. People can perceive unfairness with relative deprivation when they have less favorable outcomes than expected (Van Den Bos 2018). People also feel deprived when denied the opportunity to voice their opinions in the decision-making processes due to the flawed political structure (Van Den Bos 2018). If people cannot meaningfully participate in decision-making, they can excessively blame “the other” (Van Den Bos 2018). Deprived people may join social movements with the hope of addressing their grievances (Van Den Bos 2018). Moghaddam’s staircase terrorism model shows the effects of deprivation, frustration, and injustice (Van Den Bos 2018). This model argues that people who perceive deprivation are the most likely to move on to the higher floors in the radicalization model (Van Den Bos 2018). This animosity toward the other and the system could then push them to partake in social movements if the status quo does not meet their perceived needs. The person could join a radical social movement and experience group effects which will be discussed later.

In a later paper, Van Den Bos argues that since the experience of unfairness can be emotionally upsetting, it can serve as a turning point that spurs radicalization (Van Den Bos 2020). Perceived unfairness can occur at different levels ranging from macro to micro factors. For example, someone's non-political micro factors include the loss of a job, and macro factors
include when social networks push people to become members of an extremist group. They also include political macro-level includes observing an attack on one's group or the government not supporting their group (Van Den Bos 2020). People may feel frustrated due to unfairness and therefore try to members change the status quo to improve their lives.

Armley and Ender’s (2021) study expanded on Van Den Bos by showing that politicians can cause people to feel like victims to gain their political support. Victims have a larger amount of social respect that non-victims do not. Victims could use this social respect to replace victimizers and replace people in power with allies (Armaley and Enders 2021). As such, it is in the interest of political candidates to make their potential supporters feel wronged and that they are the best candidate to rectify things (Armaley and Enders 2021). Their study found that these manifestations of victimhood occur across partisan, ideological, and sociodemographic lines, suggesting that feelings of victimhood do not just include actual victims or those partisans on the losing side of elections (Armaley and Enders 2021). The experiment used candidate rhetoric to show that political messaging can make supporters feel like victims (Armaley and Enders 2021). This result replicates historical events where victimization has caused people to turn to authoritarian regimes for relief (Amaley and Enders 2021). These regimes usually have strong central leaders that do not support the democratic rule of law. As such, victimization is a possible reason why some people support more radical politicians than others.

Contrary to common sense, connections, not isolation, are more likely to lead to radicalization. This can occur because the connections increase the chance of connecting with previously radicalized people. Hamilton (1982) demonstrated that interwar fascism was often strongest in communities that remained strong rather than in weak communities. Furthermore, socially isolated voters did not have overrepresented support for Hitler (Eatwell 2005, Fennema
2005 as cited in Rydgren 2007). Moreover, voters of the new radical right-wing parties are not isolated and asocial individuals (Eatwell 2003 as cited in Rydgren 2007). Voters who express lower trust and confidence in politicians and democratic institutions are more likely to vote for new radical right-wing parties (Lubbers et al. 2002; Norris 2005, pp. 157–159 as cited in Rydgren 2007). However, Van der Brug et al. (2000) found no evidence that the new radical right-wing party voters are more motivated by alienation and protest than other voters (Rydgren 2007). These findings suggest that mobilization from victims could happen due to the connections between people.

Achen and Bartels (2017) also found mixed results on voters holding Congress accountable due to grievances. Retrospective voting suggests that voters base their choices at the polls entirely on assessments of how much the incumbent party has contributed to their own or the nation’s well-being (Achen and Bartels 2017). However, when voters have ideas about good policy, they may be tempted to vote for candidates who share those ideas. Their study found a modest correlation between constituents’ preferences and election outcomes, implying substantial representation variation. When voters endure natural disasters, they generally vote against the party in power, even if the government could not have prevented the problem. They also compared income growth and popular vote percentage and found that voters forget or ignore how they have felt throughout the incumbents’ term in office in favor of their current feeling. This result suggests that since people hold Congress accountable for things outside their control, like natural disasters and governmental actions, they will respond to perceived unfairness or incompetence to improve their lives (Achen and Bartels 2017). These results suggest that people take action against their victimization even when it is not the government’s fault if it is how they
are feeling at the moment. The idea of retrospective voting could explain why voters vote for more radical candidates if the majority party is not addressing their concerns.

### 2.12 Media Manipulation

Media manipulation of available information can also cause radicalization. Alfano et al. (2018) argue that technological designers structure media to nudge users toward certain prescribed choices and attitudes (Thaler and Sunstein 2008 as cited in Alfano et al. 2018). Media designs can also cause bottom-up technological seduction to create suggestions based on other users’ data or personalize each user based on their location, search history, or other data (Alfano et al. 2018). They also argue that when people are confronted with these first steps in the suggestive process, they continue following the steps toward more extreme sources (Alfano et al. 2018). People can become more radicalized through the suggestive process.

Alfano et al. studied framing effects by examining semantic tags, or website information, of alt-right and traditional news media (Alfano et al. 2018). The important stories to Breitbart readers can be shaped by the emphasis and coverage given by Breitbart to specific topics and tags (Alfano et al. 2018). Breitbart consumers experience this effect by seeing a world where the most important news is that Mexican cartels commit atrocities in Texas due to the high coverage of those stories (Alfano et al. 2018). The combination of people nudged toward more extreme news sources continues to shape people's information. When people watch one radical source and accept it, they can continue to accept more extreme sources. Consumers of more
right-wing media outlets may also question why the mainstream media does not cover the
proposed important topics that right-wing media outlets cover.

Rydgren (2007) examined studies on the framing effects of right-wing media on
radicalization. The media can set the agenda and framing of political issues (Rydgren 2007).
New technologies and privatization of mass media in many countries mean that the media have
tended to focus on the most scandalous aspects of politics, which may contribute to
anti-establishment sentiments (Mudde 2004 as cited in Rydgren 2007). The media framing and
setting agendas can affect how people think and make decisions by limiting their information.
They could then possibly be persuaded to a more radical viewpoint through rational but faulty
information.

Benkler et al. (2018) examine the effect of the propaganda pipeline on spreading
propaganda and information in right-wing news. They argue that there is no left-right division,
just a left-right media division. This division can be seen where right-wing media is an echo
chamber susceptible to rumor and conspiracy theory and drifts toward more extreme versions of
itself. The rest of the media operate interconnectedly and adhere to professional journalistic
norms.

The propaganda pipeline can transmit narrative from the periphery to the core (Benkler et
al. 2018). They found the effect of the propaganda pipeline by doing a study that looked at titles
and mentions of immigration across news articles. They examined them for the nature and
content of the articles. A propaganda feedback loop occurs when new media outlets adopt a
different strategy by emphasizing partisan confirming news over truth. They then get rewarded
by public members seeking confirmation over fact. Next, politicians seek out those outlets and
members. The public now has confirmation from media and elites about their views contrary to
what they hear from other media people that buy into new media lower trust in other media. Politicians entering the arena now have trouble challenging outlets in the mainstream media, so challengers within the party will have to use the same partisan media. The right media model with outlets and elites reinforces and legitimizes partisan propaganda in the insular system propaganda feedback loops. Another aspect of this propaganda pipeline is that politicians are immune to fact-checking because their core audiences treat the professional fact-checking process as partisan. The mutual interests of extreme politicians and media continue to shape the information available to people. It also legitimizes the more extreme views, which could expand due to its legitimization and rise in power. The combination of propaganda pipeline and suggestive process from Alfano et al.(2018) would mean that someone would consume progressively more extreme sources that politicians legitimize.

### 2.13 Populism

Canovan (1999) argues that populism happens due to two different parts of democracy and can help explain radicalism. Democracy has both a redemptive and a pragmatic part, and the dissonance between them leads to populist mobilization (Canovan 1999). The pragmatic part of democracy is political ideals like peace, stability, and moderation (Bobbio 1984 as cited in Canovan 1999). The redemptive part is a government of the people, by the people, for the people (Canovan 1999). This tension can cause some people to fight the system using more radical tactics if it is supported by the people. Populists direct their grievances at the political and economic establishments and opinion-formers in the academy and the media and appeal to authority (Canovan 1999). Populists claim legitimacy because they speak for the people (Canovan 1999).
Müller continues Canovan’s examination of populism as the pure against the impure (Müller 2016). Populists are antipluralists who support the people, and anyone who is not with them is not legitimate (Müller 2016). Populists argue that they do not actually represent the common good and care about the “real” people (Müller 2016). The real people could fight the system to change it and take power back from the corrupt elite. This could allow for the support of more radical actions against illegitimate groups as part of their legitimate fight for the people.

Right-wing populists take advantage to discern a symbiotic relationship between an elite that does not truly belong and marginal groups that are also distinct from the people (Müller 2016). Müller points to the controversy over Barack Obama’s birth certificate as an example of populist sentiment. The extraordinary obsession of the “birthers” with proving that Obama was both an illegitimate officeholder and an illegal “un-American” figure who had usurped the nation’s highest office under false pretenses (Müller 2016). The people believed, wrongly, that the system had corruptly allowed Obama into power and tried to fight it. This illegitimate opponent would allow people to take more radical actions while feeling legitimized.

Mudde and Kalwasser have a similar definition of populism as “the people” are seen as honest, whereas the elite are fraudulent (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). At the same time, they have severe problems with liberal democracy, most notably minority rights, the rule of law, and the separation of powers (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). Populism is, in many ways, an illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). If there is a perception that the democratic government is illegitimate, people may become more radical and mobilize against it.
2.14 Politicians

Rowland (2021) continues Hart’s examination of how Trump used rhetoric to radicalize his base. Trump also created a strong emotional bond with the white working class and then how he won over the Republican establishment (Rowland 2021). They analyzed Trump quotes and speeches, rallies and rally chants, and tweets. This rhetoric tapped into many white working-class people’s alienation and a sense that they had lost their country and created a strong emotional bond with Trump (Rowland 2021). Trump’s narrative created a sense of group identity by depicting his core supporters as the real Americans compared with the elites who looked down on them and compared with the dangerous Others such as immigrants and refugees who threatened their way of life (Rowland 2021). Trump claimed that the government protected dangerous groups, including immigrants and refugees. In contrast, it did not care about ordinary, hard-working Americans, a message tailored to appeal to members of the white working-class who felt racial and demographic change threatened their place in the nation and who also felt disrespected by elites (Rowland 2021). Trump argues that problems could only be fixed by him (Rowland 2021). This message activated Trump’s core supporters, and after he won the nomination, Republican leaders and the conservative media largely fell in line (Rowland 2021). Trump did not have to radicalize everyone but utilized his rhetoric to convince non-supporters to support him for the greater good of electing a Republican.

Trump created a politics of resentment by creating hatred and fear of dangerous others and blaming elites he depicted as uncaring and demeaning the real people (Rowland 2021). With his attacks on the media, Trump was riling up his supporters and actively stoking anger (Rowland 2021). By labeling critical reporting fake news and referring to the media as “the enemy of the people,” Trump accomplished two aims (Rowland 2021). He aroused anger to keep
his core supporters engaged and undercut criticism by categorizing journalists as enemies of ordinary people (Rowland 2021). To Trump, you are a valued journalist only if you report positive news about him (Rowland 2021). This rhetoric allows Trump to expose his followers to attacks on the media and democracy and validate their opinions. It increases the perceived threat and claims they can fix the problems. As such, more people will support Trump and his more radical agenda.

Right-wing politicians like Donald Trump have effectively radicalized people. Donald Trump uses the paranoid style in American politics, describing how malign forces work behind the scenes to subvert their will (Hart 2020). Donald Trump exploited feelings of fear by claiming with no evidence how a dangerous cadre had deprived them of their birthright (Hart 2020). According to Hodges (2015), the paranoid style has a number of stylistic elements like a focus on hidden schemes, an us-versus-them dialectic, respect for national purity, and an imperative to act quickly (Hart 2020).

Structural thinking is also central to the paranoid style, where everything connects to everything else, and all effects can be traced to some definitive cause (Hart 2020). DiTella and Rotemberg (2016) show that such complicated narratives are especially attractive to rural, less educated whites because they show how easily elites have suppressed them. Half the citizenry believes in conspiracy theories because they “provide compelling explanations for otherwise confusing or ambiguous events” (Hart 2020). Through the spreading of conspiracy and unsubstantiated claims, Trump could get people to believe more radical facts. Trump’s supporters trust Trump, and his conspiracies and rhetoric reinforce their fears. As mentioned in the psychology section, people will believe facts that support their beliefs.
In reviewing survey data from the spring and fall of 2016, Oliver and Wood see that Trump’s supporters were notable for their strong support of conspiracy theories and populism and their high Intuitionism scores (Oliver and Wood 2018). Intuitionists are quick to embrace conspiracy narratives and are highly suspicious of any claims to expertise (Oliver and Wood 2018). Trump’s success, then, partly resided in his ability to connect with voters in a way that seemed authentic, precisely because he was articulating the very folk politics that Intuitionists use to understand the world (Oliver and Wood 2018). His populist rhetoric, emotional outbursts, and quick assumption of conspiracy theories all spoke to their feelings (Oliver and Wood 2018). The Trump voters were not looking for reasoned analysis of the nation’s political problems; they were looking for validation of their apprehensions which Donald Trump provided (Oliver and Wood 2018).

2.2 Psychological Explanations

2.21 Heuristics and Stereotypes

Oliver and Wood (2018) provide an influential study on different ways of thinking. Oliver and Wood propose that people use heuristics to understand a complex world. This action is called magical thinking, where a belief invokes an invisible force that contradicts an alternative, empirical explanation (Oliver and Wood 2018). Instead of using observable facts and logic, they use intuitions (Oliver and Wood 2018). People have two systems of thinking. System 1 thinking is quick, impulsive, and largely unconscious (Oliver and Wood 2018). In contrast,
people utilize System 2 thinking only when motivated to because it is strenuous, intentional, and slow (Oliver and Wood 2018).

Oliver and Wood also use the distinction between intuitionists and rationalists. Intuitionists use gut feelings and faith, and rationalists use reason (Oliver and Wood 2018). Intuitionists may not want to be understood by elites they already see as untrustworthy and evil (Oliver and Wood 2018). Intuitionists outnumber rationalists in America by at least two to one, but the governing classes often try to communicate with the public as if they shared a rationalist perspective (Oliver and Wood 2018). This communication difference could contribute to people’s feeling of alienation and the government ignoring them. This feeling could lead to more radical change because intuitionists often have more conservative attitudes (Oliver and Wood 2018). In the 2013 survey, people with lots of conspiracist beliefs were more likely to say that they get information from alternative health sites or media stars instead of a physician or a nurse practitioner (Oliver and Wood 2018). Intuitionists are far more likely to engage in all types of preventative health behaviors, regardless of whether they are traditional or not. The combination of heuristics and intuitionist beliefs could explain why people accept claims and beliefs that feel true to them but are not factually accurate. It also explains why they do not think critically about their beliefs and radical media claims. This framework shows that people could consume misleading information not based on facts.

Graham et al. (2012) studied heuristics by examining the effects of stereotypes on people’s perceptions of others. Graham et al.’s study of morality and stereotypes of others’ morality argues against the idea that conservatives stereotype more. Liberals endorse the individual-focused moral concerns of compassion and fairness more than conservatives do (Graham et al. 2012). Whereas conservatives support the group-focused ethical concerns of
ingroup loyalty, respect for authorities and traditions, and physical/spiritual purity more than
liberals do (Graham et al. 2012). Conservatives were most accurate about the individual-focused
moral concerns of either side, and liberals were least accurate (Graham et al. 2012). Moderates
were most accurate about the group-focused moral concerns of either side, and liberals were least
accurate (Graham et al. 2012). This study suggests that conservatives would not be likely to
become radicalized because they exaggerated the morals of other groups less. But, looking at the
moral system of conservatives shows why they may become more radicalized where their morals
of ingroup, loyalty, respect for authorities.

2.22 Motivated Reasoning

Bolsen and Druckman’s (2018) study examined motivated reasoning for how people
process information. In motivated reasoning theory (Kunda 1990), individuals pursue varied
informational processing goals in different situations (Bolsen and Druckman 2018). People can
try to be accurate given the evidence at hand (Druckman 2012, Bolsen and Druckman 2018). If
information contradicts one’s prior belief, the individual rejects it, regardless of its authenticity
(Bolsen and Druckman 2018). For example, the survey found that individuals who subscribe to a
climate change hoax theory will be more persuaded by a scientific consensus message when
presented in a way that does not contradict general conspiracy beliefs (Druckman and Boslon
2018). This study suggests that people will reject information that does not support their point of
view. The only information they pay attention to is information that reinforces their view or more
extreme.
Coe’s (2018) study reinforces Druckman and Boslon’s study, and Glück’s (2019) analysis finds little evidence that people are mindful of the news source. Instead, in line with the theories of motivated partisan reasoning, respondents react to the partisan bias of news, believing news that confirms their partisan biases and disbelieving news to the contrary (Coe 2018). Coe finds that those low in political knowledge, high in self-monitoring, and Oliver and Woods (2018) high in magical thinking are more likely to be susceptible to believing in fake news (Coe 2018).

Self-monitoring is an individual-level trait known to identify those more susceptible to social desirability bias (Snyder 1974, 1979; Snyder & Gangestad 1986; Klar, Weber, and Krupnikov 2016 as cited in Coe 2018). Those higher in self-monitoring show that they are more likely to respond and comply with socially desirable expectations. This theory provides one way for radicalization to happen where people ignore rational information and news that differ from their radicalized worldview (Coe 2018). As such, the only information they listen to reinforces their radicalized mindset.

Van Den Bos provides more information on how rigid thinking limits the information someone can understand. People are more positive about their own groups than about other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 as cited in Van Den Bos 2018). A potential reason for ingroup outgroup effects is that black-and-white thinking or rigidity of human thoughts manifests itself differently (Van Den Bos 2018). Increased radicalization can be associated with more robust shielding from unwanted thoughts and intensified avoiding or rejecting information that is inconsistent with the person’s worldview (Van Den Bos 2018). Rigid thinking maintains people’s radical thinking by preventing facts from changing their opinion. Similar to the findings from Coe, people listen to more extreme information and ignore contradicting information. By selectively listening to information they agree with, they entrench their opinions.
Fear can modify information processing. People’s perception of fear is usually not substantiated by facts (Waring and Paxton 2018). For example, people concerned with immigration overestimate the number of immigrants (Waring and Paxton 2018). People also reject facts that counteract their worldview because they fear that their core beliefs are weak (Waring and Paxton 2018).

2.23 Group Effects

A powerful radicalization cause is a social group. McCauley and Moskalenko 2008 provide a way that group dynamics can radicalize people. According to social comparison theory, opinion positions have social values (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008). All individuals feel pressure to move their opinions toward the mean opinion of the group (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008). Therefore, individuals more extreme than average in the group-favored direction are more admired (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008). No one wants to be below-average in support of the group-favored opinion, and the result is that the average idea becomes more extreme in the group-favored direction (McCauley and Moskalenko 2008). Through this group, dynamic people will feel pressured by the group to become more extreme. This theory suggests that the group does not even need to be radical for people to become more extreme in their views.

Kruglanski and Orehek (2011) continue theorizing about group dynamics and closure effects on the group. The need for closure is defined as the desire for a quick and firm answer to a question and the aversion toward ambiguity or uncertainty (Kruglanski & Webster, 1996 as cited in Kruglanski and Orehek 2011). When there is a high need for closure, it leads to greater adherence to group norms, rejection of and persons behaving inconsistently with these norms
Closure also leads to autocratic decision-making structures, political conservatism, in-group favoritism, out-group derogation, and a preference for homogeneous over heterogeneous groups (Kruglanski and Orehek 2011). As mentioned previously, intolerance for outsiders could build radicalization against the growing status quo of tolerance.

Hollewell and Longpré (2021) examined the association between social media and violence. The cognitive opening is a psychological mechanism that often initiates self-radicalization (Hollewell and Longpré 2021). Wiktorowicz (2005) argues there is a light bulb moment when someone experiences discrimination, socioeconomic crisis, and social isolation and becomes vulnerable and receptive to cognitive processes supportive of radical beliefs (Hollewell and Longpré 2021). Thus, social identity will be shaped accordingly throughout interactions with radical ideologies and radicalized individuals, and a sense of belonging to the group will be developed over time (Hollewell and Longpré 2021). This development of groups could happen through political groups or social media groups.

The group will play the role of prescribing who they are, how they ought to be, and what they are to think, which will define their self-identity (Hollewell and Longpré 2021). Regression analysis revealed that endorsing positive attitudes toward violence and terrorism results from a complex interaction between a lack of empathy and low self-esteem, high involvement in social media, and an understanding of alternative ways to use the Internet (Hollewell and Longpré 2021). These results suggest that a combination of factors like social media might create a light bulb moment that radicalizes people with low self-esteem and self-identity. Since not everyone would experience this light bulb moment, it suggests that only some people would become radicalized.
Hogg (2011) argues that people can reduce feelings of uncertainty by joining a group. It provides us with a sense of who we are and what we should think, feel, and do (Hogg 2011). Group identification can also consensually validate our worldview and sense of self, further reducing uncertainty (Hogg 2011). Uncertainty reduction can be cognitively demanding, so people will only invest cognitive energy in resolving critical tensions (Hogg 2011). As such, people are motivated to join groups to lower uncertainty. Some of these groups could be more radical than others because not all people become radicalized after experiencing uncertainty.

Bloom and Moskalenko (2021) examined the effects of the conspiracy theory group Qanon. People got into Qanon by feeling “not quite right” (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). Qanon is a meta conspiracy theory that folds in adjacent conspiracies (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). Conspiracy theorists like Qanon exploit vulnerability during times of personal crisis, especially those who do not have social support networks, by providing one. When people experience only one problem at once, it does not affect them (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). But when multiple things happen at once, like when a personal crisis such as mental illness or substance abuse tears an individual away from family and friends, it causes them to lose their job and feel government inadequacy (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). People are then unfrozen, where people are left feeling lost and isolated and motivated to connect and find a new system of people (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). The community's views do not matter much because they embrace the group’s radical ideology (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). Currently, proposed institutions have been undermined due to political sex scandals, religious child abuse, and shifting gender roles leading to uncertainty (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). Qanon causes people to withdraw from society and makes them want to interact with the Qanon community (Bloom and Moskalenko 2021). Through the changing of society and joining Qanon, people can be
radicalized. These people felt something wrong with the current society and found explanations in conspiracy theories that continuously isolated and radicalized its members from others.

2.3 Authoritarianism Explanations

2.31 Authoritarianism

There is an influential book on authoritarianism called *The Authoritarian Personality* by Adorno et al. (1950). The hierarchical, authoritarian, exploitive parent-child relationship carries over into multiple situations (Adorno et al. 1950). Some situations are focused on power which concentrates solely on what appears to be strong and rejects the bottom (Adorno et al. 1950). People are continuously molded from above for the overall economic pattern to be maintained. Fear and destructiveness are major emotional sources of fascism (Adorno et al. 1950). Therefore fear and authoritarianism can cause radicalization. Adorno was one of the first scholars studying authoritarianism. Adorno studied authoritarianism as more of a personality instead of what later scholars define as either a cognitive view, preference, or government. This personality was due to a “repression of hostility toward parental authority and its displacement on societal outgroups” (Stenner 2005 as cited in Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Adorno was one of the first scholars studying authoritarianism, and all subsequent authoritarianism studies started from this research.

Parker and Towler further describe authoritarianism at the macro and micro levels. The ruler governs by fiat at the macro level, with the ruled falling into line (Parker and Towler 2019). At the micro-level, the culturally dominant group attempts to impose its beliefs on subordinate groups through oppression and punishment (Parker and Towler 2019).
2.32 Perceived Threats

Perceived threats are essential in mobilizing people and increasing the effects of authoritarianism like prejudice and intolerance. The most significant and consistent interaction effects relate to perceived societal threats (Feldman and Steller 1997). Rather than threats to individuals' immediate well-being, for example, a perceived threat at the societal level arouses the ire of authoritarians and amplifies the impact of authoritarian predispositions on intolerance (Feldman and Steller 1997). Some people have an authoritarian predisposition. In those high in authoritarianism, the mortality threat was associated with more negative attitudes toward a target person that was highly dissimilar to the subject (Feldman and Steller 1997). The threat affects authoritarians by increasing the connection between their predispositions or level of authoritarianism and their political and social attitudes (Feldman and Steller 1997). The increased predisposition is what could cause people to move to extremes. It primes people to act on their predispositions like prejudice and intolerance. This movement is because the radical right includes nationalists and xenophobes who would also have negative attitudes toward people different from them. So the presence of a threat makes people act more negatively toward people different than them.

Stenner (2005) furthered Feldman and Steller’s study by examining threats’ impact on authoritarianism. The authoritarian dynamic is a plausible mechanism for generating expressions of intolerance (Stenner 2005). The authoritarian dynamic includes both authoritarian predisposition and threat conditions that lead to intolerance. The authoritarian predisposition is from attitudes and behaviors reflecting the rejection of diversity and insistence upon sameness. According to their survey, there was no evidence to support that perception of threat increases levels of authoritarian predisposition (Stenner 2005). But, while authoritarian predispositions
may not change, manifestations of authoritarianism intolerance, prejudice, and punitiveness will be more pronounced while feeling threatened (Stenner 2005). Like Feldman and Steller, the enhancement of intolerance could push people further from the current norms of tolerance.

Unlike Stenner’s study, Hetherington and Weiler (2009) find that threats can make people more authoritarian. Hetherington and Weiler utilize a series of questions about child-rearing to measure authoritarianism. More authoritarian people make more substantial than average distinctions between in-groups and out-groups (Weiler and Hetherington 2009). High-authoritarianism also imposes order and minimizes ambiguity (Weiler and Hetherington 2009). High-authoritarians feel the need to enforce and protect the perceived weak social order. This need for conformity leads them to feel negative and act violently toward both minorities and those that are perceived to break the social order. This research suggests that those in high-authoritarianism might be more likely to be radical. They would take violent, intolerant actions toward minorities as well as people breaking the perceived social order. The need for order could overpower the democratic norms of non-violence and the rule of law.

Weiler and Hetherington’s study shows that perceived threat narrows the differences between people with high and low scores in authoritarianism (Weiler and Hetherington 2009). The increased threat often increases the number of people supporting policies or candidates that promise to impose more order (Weiler and Hetherington 2009). Weiler and Hetherington also argue that perception of threats affects political parties differently. Republicans seem to benefit by raising threat perception (Weiler and Hetherington 2009). The critical point is that if the threat is broadly perceived, people across levels of authoritarianism will adopt more conservative preferences (Weiler and Hetherington 2009). If people feel relatively safe from a terrorist threat, their preferences on these issues will move in a more liberal direction, advantaging Democratic
candidates (Weiler and Hetherington 2009). This conservative advantage suggests that people could become radicalized and conservative through perceptions of threats. This explanation could be core to why Republicans became radicalized.

Hetherington and Suhay (2011) find similar results to Weiler and Hetherington. Typically, authoritarians are already more inclined to hold hawkish opinions and oppose democratic principles, while the less authoritarian tend to support democratic principles and hold less confrontational foreign policies (Hetherington and Suhay 2011). This is because they are more likely to obey authority, conform to conventional norms, and act aggressively toward outgroups (Altemeyer 1981, 1988, 1996 as cited in Hetherington and Suhay 2011). When a threat to public safety occurs, unlike the rest of the people, authoritarians cannot increase their authoritarianism much (Hetherington and Suhay 2011). This finding suggests that many Americans will potentially support anti-democratic policies during threatening times (Hetherington and Suhay 2011).

Mirisola et al. (2014) found similar results to Hetherington and Suhay. They argued that a threat could produce an increase in right-wing authoritarianism among people with low levels of authoritarianism (Mirisola et al. 2014). Lifton (2019) also found that threats reinforce and grow their authoritarianism.

Lahav and Courtemanche (2012) found that subjects reading about immigration as a threat to security were far more likely to believe it to be a compelling argument after being exposed to one of the news frames. The framing effect of immigration is moderated by ideology at statistically significant levels. They found that when basic needs are threatened, such as
physical security, there will be a greater tendency for a coalescence of attitudes across the ideological spectrum (Lahav and Courtemanche 2012). However, these attitudes will diverge as basic needs are secured, and individuals seek higher-order non-material needs or post-material values (Inglehart 1997 as cited in Lahav and Courtemanche 2012).

Dodd et al. (2012) found that compared with individuals on the political left, individuals on the right direction more of their attention to the aversive and responded more strongly to aversive images (Dodd et al. 2012). People on the right are not so much 'fearful' and 'vulnerable' as attuned and attentive to the aversive in life (Dodd et al. 2012). Furthermore, right-of-center policy positions are often designed to protect society from out-group threats and in-group norm violators (Dodd et al. 2012). So people on the right may be more responsive to threats.

Federico and Deason (2011) argue that expertise mediates the effect of threat. Individuals with high levels of political knowledge who believe that the social world is a dangerous, insecure place are more extreme in their conservative, system-justifying orientation (Federico and Desason 2011). In contrast, among those low in expertise and who fail to understand the content of different ideological positions, the belief in a dangerous world is not associated with a more extreme ideological endorsement of the status quo (Federico and Desason 2011). This finding suggests counterintuitively that threats only affect those with political experience. Therefore educated and knowledgeable people could be radicalized more than those with less education.

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Pauwels and Heylen (2020) also found that threat increases authoritarianism.

### 2.3.3 Security

Hibbing (2020) argues similarly to Rowland that Trump utilized rhetoric and took advantage of people’s fear to gain support. For example, Trump reiterated that the enemies were at the gates, barbarians, violent insiders first over outsiders (Hibbing 2020). The central part of Trump voters is security and protecting their family and country (Hibbing 2020). He doubts that Trump voters are authoritarians because they are not submissive, conventionalist, and aggressive (Hibbing 2020). Unlike authoritarians, Trump voters do not subscribe to American conventions like immigration is good and the separation of church and state (Hibbing 2020). People with authoritarian personalities enjoy having someone else in charge (Hibbing 2020). The study showed Trump’s most enthusiastic voters see themselves as more extroverted, agreeable, and conscious than liberals, moderates, and non-Trump venerating conservatives and significantly less neurotic (Hibbing 2020). Trump’s enthusiastic supporters are more likely to be threatened by outsiders and to believe that black people are not getting less than they deserve (Hibbing 2020). Another study found that Trump supporters' personal and social motivating force is security and
strength (Hibbing 2020). They believe that politicians focus too much on outsiders, so they support those who support the insider more (Hibbing 2020).

Securitarians are both authoritarian and libertarian and want a leader who is strong enough to protect their right to defend themselves but not strong enough to take away that right (Hibbing 2020). Trump venerators are less favorable than non-Trump-venerating conservatives toward blacks but not significantly less favorable in attitudes toward women (Hibbing 2020). The results show that Trump venerators are less likely to have the critical authoritarian personality trait of submissiveness and are no more likely to value conventionalism and aggression (Hibbing 2020). They are, however, more likely to display securitarian personality traits like being prepared (Hibbing 2020). They revered Donald Trump because of his deep concern for outsider threats; he fought to preserve insiders’ cultural and physical integrity; he put America first and did not apologize for doing so (Hibbing 2020). This information suggests that someone that provides security to a perceived threat could radicalize people. People would be more likely to support radical candidates like Trump if they address perceived problems.
3.0 Research Design

3.1 Tentative Answer and Hypothesis

My thesis examines the increasing number of radicalized people in the United States over the past ten to twenty years. My topic and research question are significant because a growing number of people have become less hopeful and trustful in democratic institutions and processes. Recent years have also witnessed the rise of hate groups like the Proud Boys, militia groups, and the January 6th insurrection. So this research is necessary to understand the current political climate and what will happen in the future. Examining the factors that increase radicalization could point to solutions to counter radicalization and maintain democratic institutions and processes. My question is, what factors lead to radicalization. My tentative answer is that high-authoritarianism leads to radicalization. Furthermore, even people with low-authoritarianism can still become radicalized due to their perception of threats or motivated reasoning.

Authoritarianism, perceptions of threats, and motivated reasoning are leading causes of radicalization. Scholars have found that the authoritarianism perspective has led to trust in authority figures; ethnocentrism, prejudice, anti-immigrant attitudes; and opposition to democratic values, civil rights and liberties, and human rights (Adorno et al. 1950; Altemeyer 1981, 1988, 1996; Eckhardt and Newcombe 1969; Lipset 1959; McFarland and Mathews 2005; Meloen 1993; Stellmacher and Petzel 2005; Tibon and Blumberg 1999 as cited in Hetherington and Suhay 2011). Authoritarianism leads to these effects because people want order, security, and homogeneity. In pursuit of order and security, they may support strong leaders who provide order.
through more authoritarian governing. These people might use radical or anti-democratic, anti-rule of law, and violence. These factors lead to my definition of radicalization, which will be discussed later.

A general sense of danger could lead to radicalization because it could make even low-level authoritarian people more authoritarian (Hetherington and Suhay 2011). Therefore, similar to those with high-authoritarianism before perceptions of threats, people could become more hawkish and care less about civil liberties (Hetherington and Suhay 2011). The magnitude of their concern in the survey responses will dictate the difference between light concern and extreme worry that could cause radicalization. People who fear and perceive threats may be more likely to take radical measures to remedy their threat when conventional democratic means do not address it.

A vital factor that prevents people from learning opposite information is motivational reasoning which prevents many people from changing their minds allowing only more extreme views to be confirmed. This situation suggests that people look for news sources supporting their views, nudging them toward radicalization through the propaganda pipeline. It also indicates that it is challenging to become deradicalized once radicalized. Oliver and Wood (2018) argue that many people are intuitionists who base their opinions on magical reasoning, heuristics, mental shortcuts, and not rational facts. Instead, respondents react to the partisan bias of news, believing news that confirms their partisan biases and disbelieving news to the contrary (Coe 2018). If information contradicts one’s prior belief, the individual rejects it, regardless of its authenticity (Bolsen and Druckman 2018). All people will only believe information reinforcing their previous beliefs meaning that they could be vulnerable to fake or biased information. People are more likely to believe fake news due to motivated reasoning due to certain traits. This person would be
reading news congruent with their beliefs (Coe 2018). People more likely to believe fake news would also be low in perceived and measured political knowledge, have high trust in media, and high in self-monitoring and magical thinking.

I hypothesize that higher authoritarianism leads to higher radicalization. Furthermore, higher motivated reasoning correlates with an increase in radicalization. Finally, a higher perception of a threat leads to higher radicalization.

3.2 Definitions

Authoritarianism is defined as an individual’s tendency to focus on and impose order and minimize ambiguity (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). Perception of threat means that someone thinks they or society are in danger economically, socially, politically, or personally. In my study, I will be using various questions asking people how concerned are they about topics like being a victim of gun violence or the United States being a victim of a terrorist attack.
Motivated reasoning is when respondents react to the news bias by believing news that confirms their partisan biases and disbelieving news to the contrary (Coe 2018). People can try to be accurate given the evidence at hand (Druckman 2012 Bolsen and Druckman 2018). But usually, if information contradicts one’s prior belief, the individual rejects it, regardless of its authenticity (Bolsen and Druckman 2018).

Radicalization is defined as a process of growing willingness to pursue or support broad changes in society that conflict with the democratic legal order (Van den Bos 2018). This broad definition includes groups that act within the law, that break the laws, or utilize violence (Van den Bos 2018). This definition could include the civil rights movements and other popular social movements. Therefore, for my thesis, I will be restricting the definition of radicalism to include only the use of violence and breaking the law of radicalization. I will not be considering activism to be part of radicalism. So, authoritarianism involves order and conformity, whereas radicalization is about the process of undermining the democratic legal order through activism, extremism, or violent means. Some radicalized views include support for intolerance, violence, and becoming more militant.

3.3 Measurement of Variables

To measure authoritarianism, I will use the extended American National Election Study (ANES)¹ questions utilized by Engelhardt et al. (2021). The extended ANES asks respondents to

¹ Another highly used measure of authoritarianism is the Right Wing Authoritariansim (RWA) scale. The RWA asks respondents various questions to measure authoritarianism on three scales: submission, aggression, and conservatism (Duckitt et al. 2010). It is still widely used, but scholars have criticized it for measuring the dependent effects of authoritarianism (Engelhardt et al. 2020). The RWA questions also mimic the rhetoric of right-wing leaders (Engelhardt et al. 2020). As such, the study could measure how much people parrot back right-wing talking points instead of their authoritarianism (Engelhardt et al. 2020). It is also a comparatively lengthy measure compared to ANES (Engelhardt et al. 2021).
judge which of two desirable traits is more important for a child to have: one of the eight questions is independence or respect for elders (Engelhardt et al. 2021). Scholars have found it useful because it accurately measures authoritarianism. It also assesses authoritarianism without utilizing explicitly political language. It does not prime respondents to think about political or far-right talking points similar to other measures of authoritarianism. The questions are whether the participant would rather their kid be: independent or respectful of their elders, obedient or self-reliant, well-behaved or considerate, curious or good mannered, free-spirited or polite, orderly or imaginative, adaptive or disciplined, loyal or open-minded. Each answer is coded as authoritarian or non-authoritarian. Then the proportion of authoritarian answers provides how high or low the respondent is in authoritarianism. Scores of 0-3 and 5-8 will be coded as low and high-authoritarianism, respectively. A score of 4 will be neutral.

After the ANES questions to measure authoritarianism, I will split Democrats and Republicans into people who get one of three treatments. Some scholars have found that Republicans are more authoritarian than Democrats (Hetherington and Weiler 2009), so these would be a way to get approximately equal low and high-authoritarian people in each treatment. They will either get the motivated reasoning questions, the threat perception question, or the control. The control will be used to examine the effect of the authoritarian level on radicalism.

I will use a similar methodology to Coe (2018) to measure motivational reasoning. Coe’s method was each participant was asked about their political leaning. They then receive nine news stories from seven news sources ranging from CNN and Fox News to creating fake news sites. The next question was about how believable they found each story and their familiarity with the news source. Coe compared respondents’ political leaning and familiarity with news sources with the believability of the news story. First, I will ask them whether they agree with certain
policy positions that are not cued as partisan. For example, I’ll ask respondents whether they believe there should be increased funding for education from 1 “strongly disagree” to 4 “strongly agree.” Then I will present primed questions like, do you agree with the Democrats' plan to increase funding for education. This will be done for several questions. I will also compare the time it takes for people to answer the question. If they answer the primed questions faster or answer the primed and non-primed questions differently, they may have higher motivated reasoning. The complete list of questions is in the appendix on pages eighty-eight to ninety-two.

To measure threat perception, I will question the participants. I will ask them various questions about how worried they are about various possible threats, from 0 not worried to 4 very worried. An example of a question is how worried are you that you personally might become a victim of a terrorist attack? I will also ask similar questions about a few more scenarios, like how afraid they are of Covid-19 or gun violence on the same scale mentioned previously. A complete list of questions is in the appendix on pages ninety-two to ninety-four. People who answer that they are more concerned about multiple threats will perceive a higher threat than those that score lower.

To measure radicalization, I will utilize the measures created by McCauley and Moskalenko (2009) called the Activism and Radicalism Intention Scales (ARIS) and Radicalism Intention Scale (RIS). ARIS produced a two-component structure, with four items about non-violent and legal behaviors comprising the Activism Intention Scale (AIS) and four items about illegal and violent behaviors comprising the Radicalism Intention Scale (RIS) (McCauley and Moskalenko 2009). Respondents were asked to think about which groups they are most connected to (McCauley and Moskalenko 2009). Then questions were answered on a 6-point scale ranging from 1 disagree completely to 6 agree completely (McCauley and Moskalenko
The questions from Moskalenko and McCauley (2009) are: I would continue to support an organization that fights for my group’s political and legal rights even if the organization sometimes breaks the law? I would continue to support an organization fighting for my group’s political and legal rights, even if the organization sometimes resorts to violence? I would participate in a public protest against the oppression of my group even if I thought the protest might turn violent? I would attack police or security forces if I saw them beating members of my group? I would go to war to protect the rights of my group? I would retaliate against members of a group that had attacked my group, even if I could not be sure I was retaliating against the guilty party?

The measurement of authoritarianism is reliable because several sources have found that ANES measures authoritarianism (Engelhardt et al. 2021) or its effects (Hetherington & Weiler, 2009, 2018, Weber et al., 2017, as cited in Engelhardt et al. 2021). Engelhardt et al. (2021) also found the extended ANES reliably measured authoritarianism. The RIS provides reliable and valid results (McCauley and Moskalenko 2009). McCauley and Moskalenko tested their scale across three studies, two convenience samples and one random sample (McCauley and Moskalenko 2009). McCauley and Moskalenko seem to believe in the accuracy and reliability of its measurement, and so do I since it makes intuitive sense. The measure of motivational reasoning was similar to what Coe (2018) studied. The method I am utilizing is measuring motivated rationale based on the definition of motivated reasoning. Therefore, it should be valid and reliable.
3.4 Data Collection and Analysis

Most of my information will come from my survey. To evaluate my hypothesis, I will survey and interview both survey respondents and members of radicalized groups. My survey will have subjects that will be an equal mix of Democrats and Republicans who voted in 2020. Some scholars have found that Republicans are more authoritarian than Democrats (Hetherington and Weiler 2009). This would be a way to get approximately equal low and high-authoritarian people before measuring it. I will use Prolific for my survey and will include as many people as my funding allows. I am utilizing Prolific because it will enable scholars to choose participants based on various information, including party and voting. Someone referred me to Prolific, which provides more funding for joining their service.

The first question will be the extended ANES scale by Engelhardt et al. (2021). Respondents are asked which of those forced pairs is preferable for their children, and their answers are coded as authoritarianism or not. After the extended ANES, Democrats and Republicans will be divided into three groups to get each treatment. The first group receives the threat perception treatment. The second group will receive the motivated reasoning treatment. As mentioned before, the sample question for motivated reasoning would be “there needs to be more gun control” on a scale of 1 “strongly disagree” to 4 “strongly agree.” The third group will not be asked questions in the control to examine the correlation between high and low-authoritarianism and radicalization without other factors. Finally, each group will answer some questions from the RIS to measure radicalization.

I will conduct interviews with participants who scored highly on authoritarian or radical scales. I could ask in this interview if there needs to be a radical change in elections and Congress. Where they get their news from, what their opinions are on protestors, whether
violence is justified, and their opinions on January 6th. Overall, these questions aim to expand on
the survey and get a more qualitative examination of the situation. It will allow for follow-up
questions and compare their survey answers and interview answers.

In conclusion, my thesis will utilize a survey and interviews to study the radicalization of
ordinary people. The questions are either influenced or directly by other scholars. I hypothesize
that people with high-authoritarianism will be more radical. Furthermore, those with
low-authoritarianism can still be radical if they have highly motivated reasoning or high-threat
perception.
4.0 Data Analysis

Survey

This section focuses on analyzing the data from both the survey and interviews. The early part of the section will examine the differences between conservatives and liberals before moving into the more extensive analysis of the central part of the thesis. It uses statistical tests to examine the radicalism of people with high and low-authoritarianism, high and low threat perception, and high and low-motivated reasoning. This analysis will include graphs of the data and statistical analysis. After analyzing the survey, this paper will analyze people's interviews and their connection with their survey results. Twelve people, seven high-authoritarians and five high-radicals, accepted interviews. The appendix will contain all the graphs, statistical tests, and questions not included in the text.

The statistical analysis of my survey uses Stata. It is an effective statistical program that provides statistical results and graphs. The statistical test will be the independent t-test. This test is for normal distributions of continuous data with only two categorical independent variables and two dependent variables. The assumptions for the independent t-test are the dependent variable is continuous, has no outliers, is normal, has homogeneity of variances, independent variable with two categorical groups with the independence of observations. The Mann-Whitney U test was used if the outliers or normality assumptions failed. The assumptions for the Mann-Whitney U test are that the data are continuous, the independent variable has two categories, the participants have independence of observation, and the distribution of the data both has the same shape.
Statisticians utilize the independent t-test for normal distributions to test the difference in means of two groups. A normal distribution is a distribution of data that looks like the following image on the left. The other distribution of data is skewed, which is on the right of the following example.

(Laerd n.d.).

All the data for this thesis pass the first three assumptions to use the test. All dependent variables are continuous. This means that the radical score for any individual can be any number between zero and six. Each test also has two independent groups: liberal and conservative, high and low authoritarianism, high and low threat perception, and high and low motivated reasoning. Finally, individuals are only in one independent variable group.
4.1 Liberals and Conservatives

Overall the survey included ninety-two Democrats and ten liberal independents for 102 total liberals. The survey also included eighty-six Republicans and twelve conservative independents for 98 total conservatives. While the difference in the radicalization of liberals and conservatives was not the main focus of this thesis. It is a grouping that could provide further information on the cause of radicalization. The breakdown of liberals' and conservatives' radical scores within each independent variable may illuminate more information.

4.11 Statistical Test Assumptions

First, this is the test for all liberals and conservatives in general. The boxplot of the radical data for liberals and conservatives shows that there are no outliers. The group on the left labeled “1” are the liberals, and the group on the right labeled “2” are conservatives.

![Boxplot](image)

Looking at the boxplot, the radical scores for liberals and conservatives were skewed right or to the higher radical scores. This means that most people are in the low-radical category in liberals and conservatives. However, there seem to be more liberals with higher radical scores
than conservatives. This perceived difference will be what is tested to see if it is statistically significant or if it is due to random chance.

After doing the Shapiro Wilk W test confirms that the distribution for conservative and liberal radical score are not normal. Therefore, the Mann-Whitney U test is necessary to analyze the data. Looking at both histograms for radical scores of liberals and conservatives, the shape of both data is confirmed to be the same. Most people of liberals and conservatives had a radical score of zero, and then gradually, fewer people had higher radical scores.

Liberal Histogram                                                   Conservative Histogram

4.12 Mann-Whitney U Test Analysis

After completing the Mann-Whitney U test, the p-value of 0.0009. The p-value is the probability that the difference in medians between radical scores of liberals and conservatives occurs when they have the same distribution (Laerd n.d.). Since the p-value is less than .05, there is statistical evidence that liberals and conservatives do not have the same distribution of radical scores. Therefore the liberals’ median radical score of 1.5 is statistically significantly higher than the conservatives’ median radical score of 1.0.
This is contrary to what I was expecting. Previous research has suggested that conservatives are more likely to be authoritarian. As such, according to this thesis’ hypothesis that conservatives would be more likely to be radical.

4.2 Authoritarianism and Radicalism

4.21 Assumptions of Statistical Test

There are no outliers in the boxplot for both radical scores of high and low authoritarians. The high-authoritarians were highly skewed right, but also had 25% of respondents have a radical score of two and zero. This is compared to the low-authoritarian group, where 25% of respondents had a radical score of zero. Furthermore, 50% of radical scores of low-authoritarians were higher than 75% of high-authoritarian scores.

The Shapiro-Wilk W test confirmed what the boxplots suggested about the data distribution. The data from low and high-authoritarianism is not normally distributed. This result
means that the independent t-test cannot be used for this data. Instead, we will use the Mann-Whitney U test.

The histograms of the high and low authoritarians are skewed right. While the distributions are similar, I think they are different enough to be classified as differently shaped. As such, this test will be able to test whether there is a difference in distributions between high and low authoritarianism.

4.22 Mann-Whitney U Test Analysis

A Man-Whitney U test was done to determine differences in radicalism scores between low and high authoritarians. The p-value is 0.0290. The p-value is low since the p-value is less than .05. The probability that the difference in medians of radical scores of high and low authoritarians occurred due to random chance with the same distribution is statistically low. Therefore, there is statistical evidence that the distribution of radical scores of low and high authoritarians are different. Looking at the boxplot, the low-authoritarian participants had a higher radical score than high-authoritarians.
This is a very surprising result as the hypothesis was that authoritarianism would affect radical scores. However, it was proposed to be an inverse of what my results were. People high in authoritarianism were supposed to be more radical than those that were low-authoritarian. The people with high-authoritarianism had a median of 6 out of 8 on the authoritarian scale. The people with low-authoritarianism had an average of 1 out of 8 on the authoritarian scale. This means that low-authoritarian people tend to be very low, and those who are high-authoritarian are also very high comparatively.

Looking at both low and high activist scores, authoritarians are skewed left. This means that most of them had high activist scores. Furthermore, after doing the Mann-Whitney U test for high and low-authoritarianism activist scores, it had a p-value of 0.6193. Therefore, there is no statistical difference in activist scores between low and high-authoritarianism. This is an interesting result because the level of authoritarianism affected the radical score of participants but not the activist score. This suggests that low-authoritarians were willing to take the support of their group further from being an activist to radical actions.
5 out of 40 (12.50%) low-authoritarians and 13 out of 22 (59.09%) high-authoritarians disagreed democracy ruled by the people is a fundamentally good idea. 7 out of 40 (17.50%) of low-authoritarians disagreed, and 9 out of 22 (40.10%) of high-authoritarianism disagreed that people should accept the results of elections even if they do not agree with them. This is an interesting result because while low-authoritarians are more likely to have a higher radical score, they are less likely to disagree with the above questions that get at the core definition of radicalism.

### 4.3 Threat Perception and Radicalism

#### 4.31 Statistical Test Assumptions

There are no outliers in the boxplot of radical scores of high hand low-threat perception participants. The boxplot labeled “1” is the radical scores of participants with low-threat perception. The boxplot labeled “2” is the radical scores high-threat perception. Looking at the boxplot, the distribution looks exactly the same.
The Shapiro Wilk W test confirmed what the boxplot suggests about the data distribution. The test found that the distribution of radical scores of participants with high and low-threat perceptions is not normal. Therefore it is necessary to use the Mann-Whitney U test.

4.32 Mann-Whitney U Test

Comparing the histograms of both the high and low-threat perception, they have the same shape of skewed right. This result means that the Mann-Whitney U test can be done and compared with the medians.

This uses the Mann-Whitney test to study the median difference in high and low-threat perception radical scores. The p-value of .4081 which is higher than .05. Therefore, there is no statistical evidence that the distributions of radical scores of high and low-threat perceptions are different. So the median radical score for the high-threat perception of one is not significantly different from the median of the low-threat perception of one. This is surprising because the
hypnosis was that people who had high-threat perception would be more radical than those who had low-threat perception. The median threat perception of low-threat perception is 1 out of 8. The median threat perception of high-threat perception is 5 out of 8. This means that people with low-threat perception were very low, and high-threat perception perceived many threats but not all of them.

The Mann-Whitney U test of high and low-threat perception activism scores shows that the p-value is 0.1002. This means that there is not a statistically significant difference between the high and low-threat perception activist scores. Looking at the histogram that both are skewed left. This means that most people rank highly on activism scores. High and low-threat perception participants were both equally likely to have the same activist and radical score.

Low-threat perception participants had 4 out of 49 (8.16%) disagree, and high-threat perception had 1 out of 17 (5.88%) people disagree that democracy ruled by the people is a good idea. 8 out of 49 (16.32%) low-threat perception and 5 out of 17 (29.41%) high-threat perception participants disagreed that they should accept elections they disagree with. There was not much of a difference on the democracy question. But there was a difference about whether people should accept elections. While the actual test did not find that high-threat perception people are more radical than low-threat perception. This answer to the election question is more in line with what was expected.
4.4 Motivated Reasoning and Radicalism

4.4.1 Statistical Test Assumption

The boxplot shows that there are several outliers in the high-motivated reasoning radical scores. It is not ideal to remove them since they are necessary to the data and are not due to an error. Therefore, the Mann-Whitney U test is needed to study the difference in medians of low and high-motivated reasoning on the radical score. Both distributions seem to be skewed right.
The histograms of radical scores of low and high-motivated reasoning show that the distributions are the same shape and they are skewed right. While the shapes are slightly different, I think since they are both skewed right and are similar enough in shape that the data passes the final assumption of the Mann-Whitney U test.

4.42 Mann-Whitney U test

The Mann-Whitney U test shows that the p-value is .9030. This is a large p-value. Because the p-value is greater than .05, there is no statistical evidence that people with low and highly motivated reasoning have different distributions of radical scores. This means that high or low-motivated reasoning did not affect how radical participants were. Interestingly, 2 out of 41 low-motivated reasoning people had 3 or 4 (of 4) unprompted questions take longer than the average questions. In contrast, 5 of 26 high-motivated reasoning had 3 or 4 (of 4) unprompted questions take longer than the average question. Taking longer than average on the unprompted
questions suggests that they answered the prompted questions faster and might have been using motivated reasoning.

Again, this is surprising because I expected highly motivated reasoning people to have high-radical scores. After doing the Mann-Whitney U has a p-value of 0.0118. This means that the difference in medians of activist scores of high and low-motivated reasoning is a statistical difference. High-motivated reasoning has a median of 3 is statistically lower than low-motivated reasoning, with a median of 4. Looking at the histograms, both distributions are skewed left, meaning that more people are on higher activist scales. This is intriguing that motivated reasoning did not affect radicalization and did affect activism. Contrary to what I expected, people with low-motivated reasoning had higher activism.

2 out of 41 (4.88%) low-motivated reasoning disagreed, and 8 out of 26 (30.77%) high-motivated participants disagreed with democracy being fundamentally a good idea. 5 out of 41 (12.20%) with low-motivated reasoning disagreed, and 6 out of 26 (23.08%) with high-motivated reasoning disagreed that people should accept the results of elections even if they disagree. People with high-motivated reasoning were more likely to disagree with the two questions for both questions, in contrast to the overall results of whether motivated reasoning affected radicalization. The answer to these questions is more in line with what was expected of high-motivated reasoning leading to the more radical score.
4.5 Radical

For this section, I compared the correlation between the activist scale and the radical score. See below for the scatterplot of the data. Since there are only so many points, there are multiple data points at each point in the scatterplot. Spearman's correlation test tests for the correlation between non-normal variables. The linear coefficient is .375, and the p-value is .000. This means that there is a statistically significant correlation between the activist and the radical score. However, since the coefficient is .375, it is a weak correlation. This makes sense because people that are more likely to support activism would be more likely to support radical actions.
Interview

4.6 Authoritarianism

I interviewed five people that were in the authoritarian group. There were two Republicans with high-authoritarianism and high-radical, two Republicans with high-authoritarianism and low-radical, and one Democrat with low-authoritarianism and high-radical. All five participants stated that the election and Congress did not need large radical changes. One suggested some changes having more days to vote, and another person mentioned that the election process might need more protection to prevent things from going through the cracks. A couple of people mentioned that Congress needed to have term limits. They all said that violence is never justified to bring about change. They mentioned it because it does not actually change things. Instead, they should hold rallies and non-violent protests that might be
justified in a non-democratic society. Even those that were high-radical said that violence is never justified. The radical people supported organizations that broke the law or used violence, and they would go to war for their group and retaliate against other groups if they attacked their group. One participant that consumed right-wing news said that January 6th was not violent and had been politicized and that they should not be punished harshly besides weekends on the weekend or a fine. Another high-authoritarian high-radical said it was a tussle, not an insurrection, and did not support the exaggeration of the event. The other three people said that January 6th was surprising, unjustified, and embarrassing.

This contrast between the survey and interview is surprising. This could be due to a couple of reasons. It could be due to who they are thinking about. During the survey, they were told to think about their group. While during the interview, they were not prompted about who was committing the violence. One of the Republican participants, after saying violence was not justified, then mentioned the George Floyd police brutality protests. So radical people could think that what their group does is correct. So, they answered on the survey radically and then not radically during interviews. It could also be that people are experiencing a social desirability bias. This bias is that participants answer in a way they think the interviewer wants. Participants are removed from the interviewer during the survey and might feel more comfortable answering their true opinions. Then when doing the interview, they might be experiencing that bias more since they are talking with me.

The interviewees also somewhat conform to the survey findings that low-authoritarians are more radical than high-authoritarians. This is because the one low-authoritarian was radical, and the high-authoritarians were split in half on radical and low-radical.
4.7 Threat Perception

Three people got interviewed during the threat perception. There was one Democrat with low-threat perception and high-radicalism, one Republican with high-threat perception and low-radical, and a Republican with low-threat perception and low-radical. The people felt threatened by climate change, gun violence, terrorism, the economy, climate change, and Covid-19. During the interviews, people added the threat of the Ukraine and Russia war which had recently started. Two of the interviewees, one radical and the other one low-radical, said that the country did not need radical change. Instead proposed some smaller changes like changing to the popular vote, fixing Congress gridlock, and adding term limits for the people of Congress. The other low-radical person said that the electoral process was broken now due to Trump. All three interviewees stated that violence was not justified. Even though one was a radical and during the survey, they agreed highly with supporting an organization that sometimes breaks the law, supporting an organization that resorts to violence, that they would attack a police officer if they were beating a member of their group, and that they would retaliate against members of an opposition group that attacked their group. In the interview, this radical conceded that they mentioned peaceful protests, but sometimes things need to hurt for change to happen. An example they provided was protestors blocking traffic. All three people disagreed with January 6th, they said it was a disgrace and an attack on democracy. Both of the low-radicals got their news from centrists and slightly left news sources that focus on factual reporting.

This difference in opinion on violence could be due to two possible reasons. It could be due to this participant thinking about who was committing the violence. During the interview, they asked whether violence was justified, and they could have been thinking about violence caused by opposing groups, like when they criticized the January 6th riots. In contrast, they were
asked to think specifically about their group during the survey. So violence protecting their group could be seen as justified instead of the opposition. The other example could have been due to a bias called societal expectation bias. This bias is that people unconsciously feel pressured to answer interviewers more accepted by society.

The interviews also support the findings of the survey. There was not a clear pattern of the level of threat perception and radicalness. This helps support the finding that there is no statistical difference between the two groups.

4.8 Motivated Reasoning

There were four people interviewed that were in the motivated reasoning section. There was one Democrat with low-motivated reasoning and high-radical, one Democrat with high-motivated reasoning and low-radical, one Democrat with low-motivated reasoning and low-radical, and one Republican with high-motivated reasoning and low-radical. They all said that Congress and elections did not need radical change. Instead, they would need some slight reform like preventing biased redrawing of districts. The people consumed various news sources, from liberal and centrist media to some conservative news. Most of them said that violence was not justified, even though some of them answered radically during the survey. One radical said that violence would only be justified in situations like Russia, where a shadow government is torturing people. But violence is not justified in a democratic society. They all described January 6th as saddening, a domestic terrorist event, stealing the election.

This contrast then raises the possibility of societal expectation bias or thinking about who was doing the violence. This person, in particular, might be more likely to be due to who
they think about doing the violence. This is because they disagreed with the violence on January 6th and with masks before I asked about their opinions of it.

The interviews help support the findings that there is no statistical difference between high and low-motivated reasoning on the radical score. This is reflected in the interviews where there were both low and high-motivated reasoning that were low and high-radical.
5.0 Conclusion

5.1 Explanations

5.11 Authoritarianism

The literature from previous scholars can help explain why low-authoritarians were more radical than high-authoritarians. The experiment used candidate rhetoric to show that political messaging can make supporters feel like victims (Armaley and Enders 2021). This result replicates historical events where victimization has caused people to turn to authoritarian regimes for relief (Armaley and Enders 2021). These regimes usually have strong central leaders that do not support the democratic rule of law. This result could explain why high-authoritarians were not more radicalized in the survey or interview. They were not exposed to political leaders' rhetoric radicalizing them. The measures of authoritarianism were explicitly different from the RWA, which mimics far-right talking points, so they were not exposed to the same rhetoric that makes people radical.

Hibbing (2020) argued that Trump voters are not authoritarians but securitarian. They want safety and security. This argument could explain why high-authoritarianism was not radical. The conservatives, who have higher authoritarianism than liberals, might have been concerned with security and safety. My measurement of radicalism focused more on personal actions and support of breaking the law and violence. This question would be against his want for order. If the radical measure also included political opinions that were more radical, decreasing the rights of people, they might have been more likely to support radical questions.
Democracy has both a redemptive and a pragmatic part, and the dissonance between them leads to populist mobilization (Canovan 1999). The pragmatic part of democracy is political ideals like peace, stability, and moderation (Bobbio 1984 as cited in Canovan 1999). The redemptive part is a government of the people, by the people, for the people (Canovan 1999). This tension can cause some people to fight the system more radically. Populists direct their grievances at the political and economic establishments and opinion-formers in the academy and the media and appeal to authority (Canovan 1999). So, people whole are low-authoritarian may be radicalized against security forces and an oppressive establishment. Therefore they might be supportive of more radical solutions that involve actions against perceived illegitimate oppressive groups.

5.12 Threat Perception

Federico and Deason (2011) argue that individuals with high levels of political knowledge who believe that the social world is a dangerous, insecure place are more extreme in their conservative, system-justifying orientation (Federico and Desason 2011). In contrast, among those low in expertise and who fail to understand the content of different ideological positions, the belief in a dangerous world is not associated with a more extreme ideological endorsement of the status quo (Federico and Desason 2011). This result would explain why threat perception correlating with high-radicalization would not affect the presumably low expertise participants in my survey. If the survey were done again with people with higher political knowledge, then maybe threat perception would have increased radicalization.
The high-threat perception participants could not have felt threatened enough to have radical opinions. Maybe the threats needed to be more tangible or occur closer after a big event. For example, maybe people might have been more radical if they had the threat of war right after the Ukraine and Russia war occurred.

5.13 Motivated Reasoning

The reasoning for motivated reasoning does not matter could be explained by the propaganda pipeline described by Benkler et al. (2018). This pipeline is where radical news and politicians reinforce and support each other. My measure of motivated reasoning did not test whether people denied facts in favor of the previous opinions. But I did look at how they responded to cues on their views and how fast they reacted to questions. Maybe the effect of motivated reasoning is stronger when it is given by the politicians and news sources themselves instead of through a primed question. That way, they would feel the power of the propaganda pipeline in that situation and not during the survey.

Coe finds that those low in political knowledge, high in self-monitoring, and high in magical thinking are more likely to be susceptible to believing in fake news (Coe 2018). This could explain the results because it is possible that these participants were not exposed to fake news that would radicalize them. Many of the people that spoke in the interviews did not watch far-right conspiracy theories. So it is possible that they did not have the prior experience to have motivated reasoning cause radicalization.
5.14 Survey and Interview Radical

Hollewell and Longpré (2021) argued that the group would play the role of prescribing who they are, how they ought to be, and what they are to think, which will define their self-identity (Hollewell and Longpré 2021). Regression analysis revealed that endorsing positive attitudes toward violence and terrorism results from a complex interaction between a lack of empathy and low self-esteem, high involvement in social media, and an understanding of alternative ways to use the Internet (Hollewell and Longpré 2021). Similarly, people are more positive about their own groups than about other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1979 as cited in Van Den Bos 2018). A potential reason for ingroup outgroup effects is that black-and-white thinking or rigidity of human thoughts manifests itself differently (Van Den Bos 2018).

This research supports the idea that people supported radical opinions during the survey because they were asked to think about their group and then did not during the interview because they were not prompted to think about their group. Because the group they identify with is a core part of their identity, they might be more likely to use violence to protect that group further. Where unprompted, they would not be protecting groups.

Oliver and Wood's (2018) idea of heuristics could further explain the results of radicalization. This action is called magical thinking, where a belief invokes an invisible force that contradicts an alternative, empirical explanation (Oliver and Wood 2018). Instead of using observable facts and logic, they use intuitions (Oliver and Wood 2018). People have two systems of thinking. System 1 thinking is quick, impulsive, and largely unconscious (Oliver and Wood 2018). In contrast, people utilize System 2 thinking only when motivated to because it is hard, intentional, and slow (Oliver and Wood 2018). The radical questions on the survey were not as
explicit, so they may be using the system two thinning since it is hard thinking. Whereas the interview was more direct, they used system one thinking to say violence is terrible.

5.2 Supported by my Research

Overall, most of my thesis results were not supported by previous research. However, my research might support other possible psychological reasons for radicalism like heuristics. Heuristics are a mental shortcut that people use to make thinking quicker and easier about topics. Oliver and Wood’s (2018) idea of magical thinking is that some people have beliefs that are contrary to the fact of real life. My research had different amounts of radicalism in the survey and in the interview, which supports a possible psychological explanation. The difference is that they used different heuristics in each group. During the survey, people were asked about supporting violence and breaking laws to support their groups. Other research has found that people rate their group higher than others. So, they would be using a heuristic that violence must be justified because it is for their group. In contrast with the interview, they were asked directly whether violence is justified. Here they might be using a heuristic that violence is not justified according to the societal norm. There were no meaningful changes between authoritarianism, threat perception, or motivated reasoning between the survey and interview. The main change was the psychological change of who was doing the violence, either the participants' group or no one in particular. This supports the influence of psychosocial factors.

My research is connected to other scholars' thoughts about authoritarianism and radicalization. While most saw a connection between authoritarianism and higher radicalism. My research could support Hibbing's (2020) claim about security. Hibbing argues that Trump
supporters are not authoritarians but securitarians. They only care about security and could support politicians and possibly more radical people if they promise safety. This result is at odds with one explanation that could explain why high-authoritarians might not be as radical as low-authoritarians. If high-authoritarian people want order and safety, they may be less likely to support violence that would threaten their safety. This is supported by my results that found that high-authoritarians were less likely to be radical than low-authoritarians were.

Federico and Deason (2011) argue that expertise mediates the effect of threat. Individuals with high levels of political knowledge who believe that the social world is a dangerous, insecure place are more extreme in their conservative, system-justifying orientation (Federico and Desason 2011). In contrast, among those low in expertise and who fail to understand the content of different ideological positions, the belief in a dangerous world is not associated with a more extreme ideological endorsement of the status quo (Federico and Desason 2011). My research supports this. The participants in my survey are presumably low in expertise. They then were not affected by increased threat perception with high-radicalism.

My research did support other research that found that there was a difference in radicalism based on political leaning. Liberals endorse the individual-focused moral concerns of compassion and fairness more than conservatives do (Graham et al. 2012). Whereas conservatives support the group-focused ethical concerns of ingroup loyalty, respect for authorities and traditions, and physical/spiritual purity more than liberals do (Graham et al. 2012). Conservatives were most accurate about the individual-focused moral concerns of either side, and liberals were least accurate (Graham et al. 2012). This study suggests that conservatives would not be likely to become radicalized because they exaggerated the morals of other groups less.
5.3 Challenged by my Research

The main research that my research challenged was the findings on authoritarianism. Hetherington and Weiler (2009) and Hetherington and Suhay (2011) examined the effects of authoritarians and threat perception on authoritarianism. Their studies found that increased perception of threats increases participants' authoritarianism. This effect was greater in people who were low-authoritarian before the threat. Therefore, increased authoritarianism could lead to an increase in support of anti-democratic measures. This effect is because the threats make the people more likely to support someone who wants order over democratic principles. My research suggests that authoritarianism does play a part in supporting anti-democratic measures but in the inverse way. Contrary to their findings, my study found that low-authoritarians were more likely to support anti-democratic measures than high-authoritarian measures. The measures are slightly different from my measures, looking for personal choices and decisions. This measurement is different from what they looked at, which was the support of more radical policy measures. But they both get at anti-democratic measures. While this does not directly counteract this previous work, it suggests that authoritarianism has a more complicated role in radicalization. And it could work differently depending on whether the radicalization is a person's decision or support of the policy. My research did find that threat perception did not affect how radical someone is. This research is in direct contrast with Hetherington’s finding that increased threat perception leads to higher authoritarianism, increasing radicalization.

My research challenged previous findings on threat perceptions. Lahav and Countermanche (2012) argued that when basic needs are threatened, such as physical security, there will be a greater tendency for a coalescence of attitudes across the ideological spectrum.
(Lahav and Courtemanche 2012). However, these attitudes will diverge as basic needs are secured, and individuals seek higher-order non-material needs or post-material values (Inglehart 1997 as cited in Lahav and Courtemanche 2012). My research challenges this, suggesting that high-threat perception does not correlate with high-radicalism. It could be argued that maybe the threat perception conditions did not threaten the participants enough. But, the research suggests that there is no connection between threat perception and radicalism.

My research challenges ideas about motivated reasoning. Bolsen and Druckman (2018) argued that people could try to be accurate given the evidence at hand (Druckman 2012, Bolsen and Druckman 2018). If information contradicts one’s prior belief, the individual rejects it, regardless of its authenticity (Bolsen and Druckman 2018). My thesis does not support the extension of this research. The extension of this previous research is that since people believe fake news, they would be more likely to support radical actions to fix problems suggested by fake news. In contrast, my study found that people with high and low-motivated reasoning did not have a difference in radicalization.

5.4 Significance of Research

This research has significance in the broader research landscape by providing further information on radicalization. The research also provides many opportunities for future research. The main significance is that it provides possible avenues for deradicalization. It suggests that efforts to lower threat perception and motivational reasoning would not affect the radicalization of people. As such, officials should not focus on reducing the number of threats someone perceives or informing someone about the bias in the media and parties. Both liberals and
low-authoritarians were more likely to have a high-radical score during the survey. This suggests that there might be a mediating factor between political leaning and authoritarianism, and radicalism. People with low-authoritarianism have less of a need for imposing order, therefore, they might be more ok with the disorder that comes with breaking democratic norms.

There was a drastic contrast between survey and interview questions. People were not as radical from the interview questions. Unlike on the survey, liberals and low-authoritarians were not more likely to give radical answers. Instead, a couple of people with high-authoritarian, conservative, and consumed far-right media were the only ones that gave slightly more radical answers. This suggests counter to the survey that is focusing on misinformation by far right-wing news sources might be beneficial. Another possibility is that the causes could be psychological in how people see the world. People might have different opinions when they are alone and when they have to express them to others. This suggests that the might be a connection between where participants are with how radical their opinions are.

5.5 Limitations

This research did have some limitations of the study and what I might have done differently. It was limited to the number of radicals interviewed in the survey. While many people were contacted to be interviewed who were radical, only five of them agreed and showed up for their interview. The research did not interview more prominent radicals advocating for radical positions in the real world or politicians who advocated for the same positions. This result is due to the people contacted for interviews either refusing to be interviewed or not responding to the question. During the interview, I might have tried to ask more specific questions about follow-ups on violence in interviews. While some interviewees had their opinions expanded
upon when asked about the January 6th riots, it would have been more beneficial to have more follow-up questions about under what circumstances violence is justified. In this way, asking why would have helped provide information about their true opinions. I might have tried to go to local radical groups to get more in-person interviews from people. These people would be different from those who signed up to take surveys online and then agreed to talk with an unknown investigator. I might have looked at more psychological reasons besides motivated reasoning like victimhood or heuristics. This explanation will be gone over in more detail in the next paragraph. But a possible solution is that I could have tried not recording interviews to see if people would be more comfortable sharing perspectives that are not the norm.

5.6 Future Research

There are several directions of future research that could be done in light of my research. Future research could look into groups' effects on people’s political opinions. This result could be due to people's friends and parents influencing their opinions or joining radical groups like Qanon and how that influences the individual. People may become more radical by joining those groups. Other research could look into psychological examples. One example of this is heuristics. It could examine if people support violence if their group is doing it. This result could be that if their group does something good since they support it. Further research could also test if low-authoritarianism continues to be radical with other measures of radicalism. It could also examine if people lowering their authoritarianism would increase radicalism. It could also do research that uses the same independent variables with the different measures of radicalism. It could interview more radical people who are more prominent in advocating for radical. It could also interview the people who went on January 6th. The same independent variables, threat
perception, and authoritarianism motivated reasoning for political participation. More research
could be done by measuring radical scores before and after the independent variables to look at
the difference in how radical scores change.
6.0 Appendix

Liberals and Conservatives

party = 1

Shapiro–Wilk W test for normal data liberal and conservative

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>Prob&gt;z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>radical</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>0.87697</td>
<td>10.327</td>
<td>5.185</td>
<td>0.00000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

-> party = 2

Shapiro–Wilk W test for normal data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>W</th>
<th>V</th>
<th>z</th>
<th>Prob&gt;z</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>radical</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0.78012</td>
<td>17.851</td>
<td>6.386</td>
<td>0.00000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ranksum radical, by (party)

Two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann–Whitney) test
party | Obs Rank sum Expected

-------------+---------------------------------
1 | 102 11549 10251
2 | 98 8551 9849

-------------+---------------------------------
Combined | 200 20100 20100

Unadjusted variance 167433.00
Adjustment for ties -12518.11

Adjusted variance 154914.89

H0: radical(party==1) = radical(party==2)
z = 3.298
Prob > |z| = 0.0010
Exact prob = 0.0009

**High and low-authoritarian**

by authoritarianism, sort : swilk radical, noties

-> authoritarianism = high
Shapiro–Wilk W test for normal data

| Variable | Obs | W   | V   | z    | Prob>|z |
|----------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| radical  | 22  | 0.70548 | 7.461 | 4.075 | 0.00002 |

-> authoritarianism = low

Shapiro–Wilk W test for normal data

| Variable | Obs | W   | V   | z    | Prob>|z |
|----------|-----|-----|-----|------|------|
| radical  | 40  | 0.89426 | 4.180 | 3.010 | 0.00131 |

ranksum radical, by (authoritarianism)

Two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann–Whitney) test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>authoritarian</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Rank sum</th>
<th>Expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
high | 22 551.5 693
low | 40 1401.5 1260

-------------+---------------------------------
Combined | 62 1953 1953

Unadjusted variance 4620.00
Adjustment for ties -363.68

--------
Adjusted variance 4256.32

H0: radical(author~m==high) = radical(author~m==low)

\[ z = -2.169 \]

Prob > |z| = 0.0301
Exact prob = 0.0290

ranksum Activist, by (authoritarianism)

Two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann–Whitney) test

authoritar~m |   Obs  Rank sum  Expected
-------------+---------------------------------
high |    22     663     693
low |    40    1290    1260
-------------+---------------------------------
Combined | 62   1953  1953

Unadjusted variance   4620.00
Adjustment for ties   -1179.00

---------

Adjusted variance    3441.00

H0: Activist(author~m==high) = Activist(author~m==low)

    z = -0.511
Prob > |z| = 0.6091
Exact prob = 0.6193

**Threat Perception**

by Threat, sort : swilk radical, noties

---

-> Threat = 1

Shapiro–Wilk W test for normal data
Variable | Obs W V z Prob>z
----------+-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------
radical  |  49 0.79535 9.473  4.789 0.00000
----------+-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------

-> Threat = 2

Shapiro–Wilk W test for normal data

Variable | Obs W V z Prob>z
----------+-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------
radical  |  17 0.87283 2.687  1.971 0.02437

Two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann–Whitney) test

Threat | Obs Rank sum Expected
----------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
1        | 49 1586.5 1641.5
2        | 17  624.5  569.5
----------+--------------------------------------------------------------------
Combined | 66 2211 2211
Unadjusted variance 4650.92
Adjustment for ties -371.06
---------
Adjusted variance 4279.85

H0: radical(Threat==1) = radical(Threat==2)

\[ z = -0.841 \]
\[ \text{Prob} > |z| = 0.4005 \]
\[ \text{Exact prob} = 0.4081 \]

**Motivated Reasoning and Radicalism**

Two-sample Wilcoxon rank-sum (Mann–Whitney) test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Motivated</th>
<th>Obs</th>
<th>Rank sum</th>
<th>Expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>874.5</td>
<td>884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>low</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1403.5</td>
<td>1394</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combined</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>2278</td>
<td>2278</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unadjusted variance 6040.67
Adjustment for ties -514.32
Adjusted variance 5526.35

**H0:** radical(Motiva~d==high) = radical(Motiva~d==low)

\[ z = -0.128 \]

\[ \text{Prob} > |z| = 0.8983 \]

\[ \text{Exact prob} = 0.9030 \]

**Radical**

Shapiro–Wilk W test for normal data

| Variable  | Obs | W      | V     | z       | Prob>|z|
|-----------|-----|--------|-------|---------|--------|
| radical   | 200 | 0.83438| 24.708| 7.379   | 0.00000|
| activist  | 200 | 0.73064| 40.185| 8.498   | 0.00000|

.spearman radical activist

Number of obs = 200

Spearman's rho = 0.3748

Test of H0: radical and activist are independent

\[ \text{Prob} > |t| = 0.0000 \]
Interview Script Script

- Hello, and thank you for taking the time to meet with me.
- If you do not want to continue with the interview, you can always leave.
- Before we get started, would it be ok if I record this conversation? It is ok if you don’t, but recording makes it easier and more accurate. I assure you this will stay confidential.
- I have 8-9 questions to get through in the 10-15 minutes.

Survey questions

1. Do you believe that the 2020 presidential election was legitimate?
2. Do you believe the country’s election process is fundamentally broken?
3. Do you believe other parts of the democratic system like the Congress and the courts are fundamentally broken?
4. Does America need a strong leader to overcome the flaws in our democratic system?
5. Is violence ever justified in efforts to bring fundamental changes to the democratic system?
6. What do you think influenced your political views?
7. Where do you get your news from?
8. To what extent do you think the United States is facing large threats?
9. What are your thoughts on the events on January 6th at the capitol last year?

Questions to do if time

1. What are your thoughts on mainstream media?
2. What are your thoughts on protestors?
Not as important

- What political, identity, recreational, or religious organizations or groups do you belong to?

Survey Questions

Authoritarianism

Although there are a number of qualities that people think children should have, every person thinks that some are more important than others. Although you may feel that both qualities are important, please tell me which one of each pair you think is more important for a child to have.

Would you say that it is more important for a child to be INDEPENDENT or RESPECTFUL OF THEIR ELDERS?

- Respectful of their Elders
- Independent

Would you say that it is more important for a child to be CURIOUS or GOOD MANNERED?

- Curious
- Good Mannered

Would you say that it is more important for a child to be ADAPTIVE or DISCIPLINED?
• Adaptive
• Disciplined

Would you say that it is more important for a child to be FREE-SPIRITED OR POLITE?
  • Free-Spirited
  • Polite

Would you say that it is more important for a child to be ORDERLY or IMAGINATIVE?
  • Orderly
  • Imaginative

Would you say that it is more important for a child to be OBEDIENT or SELF-RELIANT?
  • Obedient
  • Self-Reliant

Would you say that it is more important for a child to be LOYAL or OPEN-MINDED?
  • Loyal
  • Open-Minded

Would you say that it is more important for a child to be WELL-BEHaved or CONSIDERATE?
  • Well-Behaved
Radicalism

For the following questions: please think about a group that you identify with. These may include but are not limited to religious, racial, sexual orientation, gender, or political groups.

I would continue to support an organization that fights for my group's political and legal rights even if the organization sometimes resorts to violence.

- Completely Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Completely Agree

I would participate in a public protest against oppression of my group even if I thought the protest might turn violent.

- Completely Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Completely Agree
I would donate money to an organization that fights for my group's political and legal rights.

- Completely Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Completely Agree

I would travel for one hour to join in a public rally, protest, or demonstration in support of my group.

- Completely Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
- Agree
- Completely Agree

I would join/belong to an organization that fights for my group's political and legal rights.

- Completely Disagree
- Disagree
- Slightly Disagree
- Slightly Agree
Agree

I would retaliate against members of a group that had attacked my group, even if I couldn't be sure I was retaliating against the guilty parties.

Completely Disagree

Disagree

Slightly Disagree

Slightly Agree

Agree

Completely Agree

I would volunteer my time working (i.e. write petitions, distribute flyers, recruit people, etc.) for an organization that fights for my group's political and legal rights.

Completely Disagree

Disagree

Slightly Disagree

Slightly Agree

Agree

Completely Agree

I would continue to support an organization that fights for my group's political and legal rights even if the organization sometimes breaks the law.

Completely Disagree

Disagree
I would go to war to protect the rights of my group.

I would attack police or security forces if I saw them beating members of my group.

I think the electoral results of the 2020 election were legitimate.
I think a democracy ruled by the people is a fundamentally good idea.

Election fraud through illegal votes is a widespread problem that has been unaddressed.

I agree that we should accept the results of elections even if you do not agree with them.
• Slightly Disagree
• Slightly Agree
• Agree
• Completely Agree

People should be allowed to disagree with the majority.

• Completely Disagree
• Disagree
• Slightly Disagree
• Slightly Agree
• Agree
• Completely Agree

Motivated Reasoning

The government should break up technology monopolies like Twitter and Facebook.

• Strongly Disagree
• Somewhat Disagree
• Somewhat Agree
• Strongly Agree

The government should improve education by increasing funding.

• Strongly Disagree
• Somewhat Disagree
• Somewhat Agree
• Strongly Agree
The government should reform the criminal justice system to become more equal.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

The government should create more clean energy to try to lessen the effects of climate change.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

Your beliefs on the legitimacy of the 2020 election are most similar to Fox New's position of there was mass voter fraud and there needs to be tighter restrictions on voter registration.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree
Your beliefs on the effectiveness of the Covid-19 vaccine are most similar to CNN's position that the vaccine is necessary and helps prevent death and severe symptoms.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

Your beliefs on the trial of Derek Chauvin for the murder of George Floyd are most similar to Fox News' position that Chauvin did not get a fair trial and should not have been found guilty.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

Your beliefs on the January 6th insurrection are most similar to CNN's position that the insurrection was caused by far-right and Trump supporters and not the far left.

- Strongly Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Somewhat Agree
- Strongly Agree

Your beliefs on funding education are closer to the Democrats' position of increasing funding for public education.
Your beliefs on the criminal justice system are closer to the Democrats' position of reforming the criminal justice system.

Your beliefs about climate change are most similar to the Republicans' position on climate change of being skeptical that it is caused by humans or that the government can do anything.

Your beliefs about breaking up monopolies are most similar to the Republicans' position of breaking up technology monopolies like Facebook and Twitter.
• Strongly Agree

Your beliefs about having a secure border are most similar to President Biden's position of patrolling the border.

• Strongly Disagree
• Somewhat Disagree
• Somewhat Agree
• Strongly Agree

Your beliefs about resisting China are most similar to former President Trump's position in trade wars.

• Strongly Disagree
• Somewhat Disagree
• Somewhat Agree
• Strongly Agree

**Threat Perception**

For the following questions, please answer how worried you are about the various events from not at all worried to very worried.

How worried are you that you personally might be harmed by climate change?

• Not At All Worried
• Slightly Worried
• Worried
• Very Worried
How worried are you that you personally might become a victim of tyrannical government?

- Not At All Worried
- Slightly Worried
- Worried
- Very Worried

How worried are you that you personally might become a victim of gun violence?

- Not At All Worried
- Slightly Worried
- Worried
- Very Worried

How worried are you that you personally might become a victim of a terrorist attack?

- Not At All Worried
- Slightly Worried
- Worried
- Very Worried

How worried are you about the United States' economy?

- Not At All Worried
- Slightly Worried
- Worried
- Very Worried
How worried are you that the United States might be attacked by a foreign or domestic terrorist?

- Not At All Worried
- Slightly Worried
- Worried
- Very Worried

How worried are you about Covid-19?

- Not At All Worried
- Slightly Worried
- Worried
- Very Worried

How worried are you that a foreign country like Russia, North Korea, or China might attack the United States?

- Not At All Worried
- Slightly Worried
- Worried
- Very Worried
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