

# The Development of Conspiracy Theories During The Freedom Convoy

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## BACKGROUND

The Canadian Freedom Convoy began in early 2022 as a protest against COVID-19 mandates, attracting significant political attention as an unprecedented event that eventually forced Trudeau to invoke the Emergencies Act. Such political attention included the development of conspiracy theories, as the period of fear and uncertainty inspired conspiracist groups to build a narrative against political elites and their malignant nature [1].

The goal may be to attract attention from potential allies/social groups and encourage commitment, coordination, and unity [2]. The Freedom Convoy trended relentlessly on Social Media, with many speaking about their political opinions regarding the crisis. We will analyze the frequency of political content from trending hashtags, as well as the frequency of conspiratorial dialogue, as social media is an excellent avenue for the dissemination of conspiracy theories [3].

**RQ: What is the distribution of conspiracy theories amongst political content in times of crisis like the Freedom Convoy to support an ideology and foster a community?**

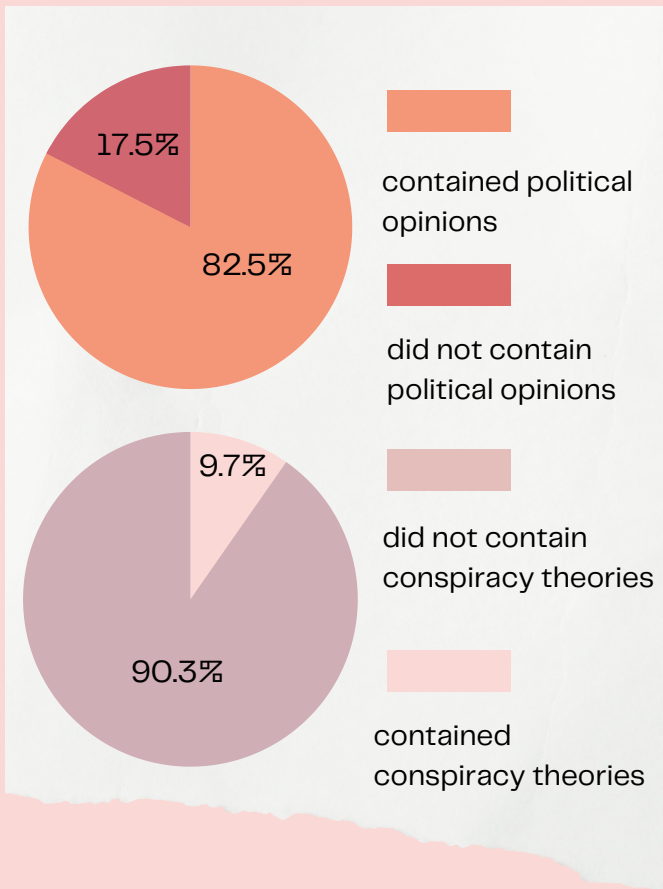
## METHODS

Data Collection was done through the Twitter API and the use of R to scrape for 13,571 tweets with the hashtag '#FreedomConvoy2022' from the time period of late January to late February 2022. Duplicate tweets (suspected to be bots) were removed. Every 20th tweet was used for a random sample (567 tweets), and out of the 13,571 tweets originally scrapped, 34 tweets were from verified accounts to be used as their own sample.

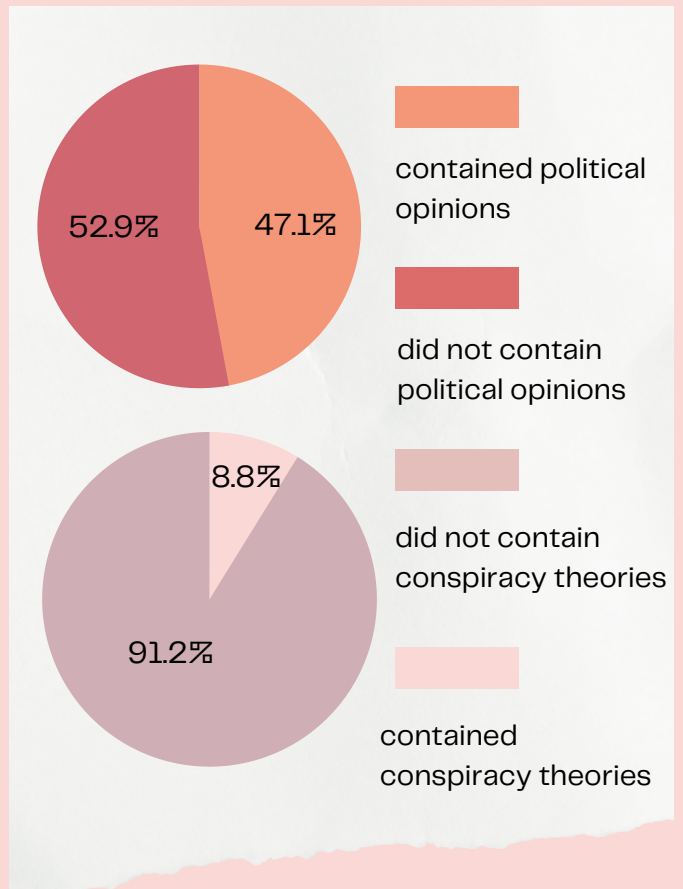
All data was then collected in an excel sheet to track retweets, likes, followers, and content of the tweets. I manually coded for whether the contents of the tweet included a political opinion regarding the Truck Convoy, and whether the contents of the tweet include a conspiracy theory of secret misdeeds done by the elite. Content that was simply reporting news would not count as a political opinion, and disparaging Trudeau or calling him totalitarian would not count as a conspiracy theory, but still be a political opinion.

## RESULTS

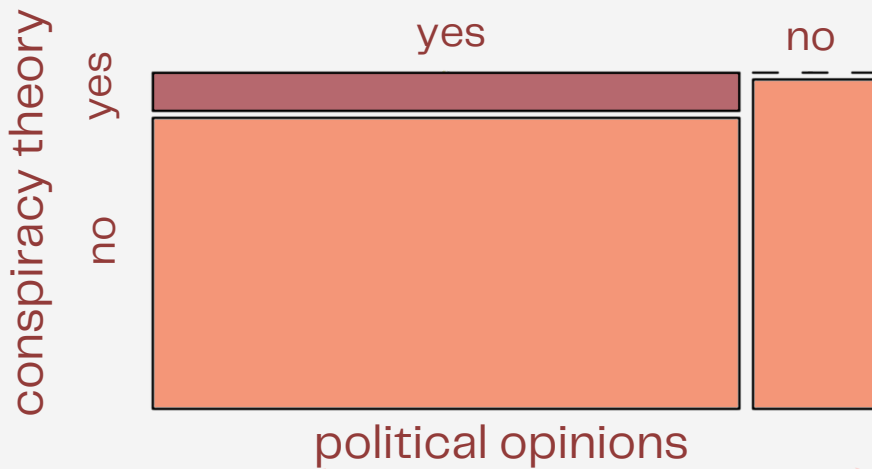
**Figure 1. Pie Charts Highlighting Distribution of Tweets (Random Sample)**



**Figure 2. Pie Charts Highlighting Distribution of Tweets (Verified Accounts)**

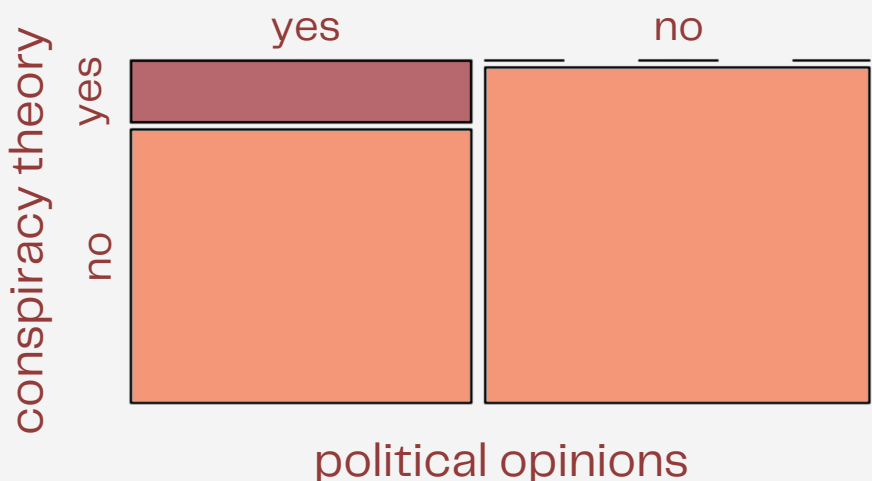


**Figure 3. Mosaic Plot of the Content of Tweets (Random Sample)**



A small proportion of tweets with political content had conspiracy theories as well. However, a large amount of all tweets did have political opinions.

**Figure 4. Mosaic Plot of the Content of Tweets (Verified Accounts)**



Verified accounts were less likely to discuss political opinions and report on events instead. Still, there was a slightly larger amount of crossover between conspiracies and political opinions.

Figure 5. Distribution of Followers/Retweets/Likes (Verified Accounts)

Value	Followers	Retweets	Likes
Minimum	1,994	0	0
Maximum	321,376	5,146	11,978
Mean	39,385	208.2	489

Verified accounts had considerable reach in engagement and followers, and accounts such as @randyhillier (56k followers) have large audiences that are susceptible to his conspiracy theories.

### Popular Conspiracy Theories

- Justin Trudeau is Fidel Castro's son.
- UN Soldiers were deployed in Ottawa to attack Truckers.
- Canada and Russia are secretly working together.
- Canada is using the pandemic to reset its economy, swapping out capitalism for communism.

### Popular Political Hashtags

- #TrudeauForTreason
- #TrudeauHasGotToGo
- #TrudeauTyranny
- #BlackfaceHitler
- #TrudeauIsACoward
- #EndTheMandatesNow
- #CanadaHasFallen
- #FluTruxKlan
- #HoldTheLine
- #TruckersForFreedom

## CONCLUSION

Although conspiracy theories composed a small proportion of all political opinions about the Freedom Convoy, there have been some key findings. A majority of political opinions expressed discontent and anger towards Trudeau, citing that the Emergencies Act is Canada's descent into totalitarianism, while expressing support for the Freedom Convoy. The political opinions are quite extreme, and are an example of political polarization.

The few conspiracy theories expressed support the idea that Trudeau is incompetent, and that the government must be disposed before they strip citizen's rights. Such conspiracy theories appeal to extreme political opinions that already distrust Trudeau. Both support a similar ideology and can thus develop a community against the current Canadian government. Although not many verified accounts expressed conspiracy theories, the few verified accounts did have significant reach of at least a couple hundred people that chose to interact with their tweets, thus attracting more potential allies to the cause.

## REFERENCES

1. Uscinski, Joseph E., and Joseph M. Parent. 2014. American Conspiracy Theories. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Marie, Antoine, and Michael Bang Petersen. 2022. "Political Conspiracy Theories as Tools for Mobilization and Signaling." OSF Preprints. August 8. doi:10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101440
3. Prooijen, Jan-Willem van. 2018. Psychology of Conspiracy Theories. New York, N.Y: Routledge.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to thank the Undergraduate Research Summer Internship program at Western University, and Western Libraries for making this work possible. I would like to thank Professor Mathieu Turgeon for the constant support, as well as Michelle Caplan for the continued assistance and contribution.