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Aaron Helmbrecht
Department of Veterans
Affairs, Office of Information
and Technology, Washington,
D.C., United States

The freedom grift hypothesis: A qualitative analysis of the theoretical conquest of the United States using information manipulation theory

Aaron Helmbrecht

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Abstract

With the left-right political spectrum debunked as a myth (Lewis & Lewis 2022), what system should academics use to measure polarization? It is the principal claim of the Freedom Grift Hypothesis that political polarization is the result of a manufactured divide between Reality No 1 (R1-the Constitution is the sovereign and the government serves the people) and Reality No 2 (R2-the citizens are sovereign and the government is their enemy), and the catalyst driving polarization is susceptibility to manipulation. This exploratory study applied Information Manipulation Theory (McCormack 1992) to reveal hidden messages within conservative messaging. These messages were interpreted and incorporated into a strategy exercise (i.e., a wargame) and presented to 10 participants; five Republicans and a control group. Pilot data from subject responses and media analysis of public figure political discourse showed that people in R2 will believe the citizen is sovereign and the government is their enemy, but without realizing it themselves, and will respond with grief, shock, disorganization, and cognitive dissonance.

Keywords: Russia, information manipulation theory, cognitive dissonance, dark psychology, polarization

Introduction

“The Freedom Grift” author argues that America’s partisan divide is not organic or ideological. It is not Left-Right, Liberal-Conservative, or Republican-Democrat. Rather it is a manufactured divide between R1 (the Constitution is the sovereign and the government serves the people) and R2 (the citizens are sovereign and the government is their enemy).

The argument of a vast multigenerational conspiracy to undermine the Constitution and the government and people of the United States is no fringe conspiracy theory. It is so well documented as to be common knowledge. In, “Democracy in Chains: The Deep History of the Radical Right’s Stealth Plan for America,” historian Nancy MacLean (2017:XX) documents in detail the logistical and tactical plan for a “constitutional revolution...an effort to open the door to an entire rewrite of the Constitution...by entering through the back door, not the front.” The argument for alternate realities aligns with “unequal polarization” in Jacob Hacker and Paul Pierson’s (2005:5) ^[22] “Off Center: The Republican Revolution and the Erosion of American Democracy.”

Though the rise in polarization is undeniable, the conventional lament misses crucial aspects of the change. It suggests a transformation that is somehow equal on both sides, as if the two parties had run away from each other at the same speed. In fact, as we shall see, the move from the center has been spearheaded and driven by the Republican Party.

This work contributes a new piece of the puzzle, shedding light on who is behind this conspiracy and how they are achieving their goals. Regarding the question of “who,” MacLean cites William F. Buckley, founding editor of the *National Review*, and Senator Barry Goldwater as the genesis of modern conservatism with billionaire political operative Charles Koch leading execution (Critchlow & MacLean 2009) ^[15].

Corresponding Author:
Aaron Helmbrecht
Department of Veterans
Affairs, Office of Information
and Technology, Washington,
D.C., United States

The question of “how” is less clear. All agree that disinformation is a factor, but the mechanism of action driving its success remains a matter of debate. Hacker and Pierson (2005:34-184) ^[22] attribute disinformation to news media acting as entertainment business rather than information business and conclude Republicans have made a conscious decision to embrace extremism, “our complaint isn't with American politics. It is with the American people who've shown their true feelings by continuing to elect Republicans.” New evidence suggests this is not the case.

MacLean (2017: XVII) in an updated forward writes:

Indeed, as logic defying as it may seem to the rest of us, the ragtag army of right-wing protesters who stormed the Capitol on January 6, 2021, didn't see themselves as a tiny minority, utter outliers trying to take control away from the majority, not to mention the rule of law and the Constitution. They viewed themselves not only as patriotic Americans, but also as speaking for the majority of Americans...I am not suggesting that the libertarian right played any direct role in the events of January 6. But their decades-long organizing to thwart the will of the majority of voters by stealth and disinformation...is not, I would argue, all that different from the tiny group of inflamed Americans who thought they had the right to impose their desired election outcome on the rest of us.

This paper argues that this phenomenon can be explained using Steven McCornack's (1992) ^[31] Information Manipulation Theory. Using examples from the literature, this paper will apply Information Manipulation Theory to reveal hidden messages that will show that the catalyst driving unequal polarization is susceptibility to manipulation (Buller & Burgoon 1996) ^[8], not a tendency toward extremism.

Literature review

This literature review will begin from the fields of communication and psychology to provide a necessary understanding of deception and manipulation concepts. This understanding will qualify us to identify and interpret information manipulation within the history and political science literature. Once revealed and interpreted, these messages will show an alignment between conservative principles and the interests of Russian grand strategy. We will look to the security and intelligence field for evidence of possible Russian involvement in the radicalization of the GOP.

Information Manipulation Theory

H.P Grice's (1975) theory of conversational implicature says that people hold certain expectations about the discourse of others. Operating on The Cooperative Principle (a presumption of good faith), they assume others will adhere to four conversational maxims to satisfy the conversational demands: Quantity (be sufficiently complete), Quality (be truthful), Manner (be clear), Relation (be relevant). This system can be exploited by breaking faith.

Information Manipulation Theory (McCornack 1992) ^[31] says that deceptive messages derive from covert violations of the conversational maxims. Interpersonal Deception Theory (Buller *et al.* 1994) ^[9] specifies three types of

deception: Falsification (lying), Equivocation (distortion), and Omission (concealment).

David Buss (1987) ^[10] identifies three mechanisms by which personality and social processes are linked: Selection (how people choose to enter or avoid existing environments), Evocation (how people unintentionally elicit predictable reactions from others), and Manipulation (how people intentionally alter, shape, exploit, or change the social environments they inhabit).

I am now assuming the role of a “communist” Russian agent. From this perspective, I will apply Information Manipulation Theory to the political science literature to show how a devious communications strategist could exploit conservative principles as an instrument of war against the United States.

Left-right political spectrum

For the first example we need look no further than the book titles by MacLean (2017) ^[29] and Hacker and Pierson (2005) ^[22]. Both use the left-right political spectrum as a categorization system for polarization. New research by Hyrum Lewis and Verlan Lewis (2022) has debunked this system as a myth.

I want the media using the left-right spectrum because it is rigged to my advantage. I have ownership of the “Right” side of the spectrum and, by default, the “Left” side is assigned to my opponent. Daniel Casasanto (2009) ^[11] found that right-handers tended to associate rightward space as positive (i.e., righteous) and leftward space as negative (i.e., sinister), with the opposite true for left-handers. Since approximately 90% of the population is right-handed (de Kovel *et al.* 2019) ^[16], I have manipulated the media into giving me this advantage over my opposition before any arguments are made.

Conservative principles

Historian Donald Critchlow (Critchlow & MacLean 2009: VII-14) ^[15] argues, “Conservatives gained power because of their commitment to individualism, free markets, limited government, traditional family values, and a strong defense.” Above all else, “Conservatives believed that communism was a direct threat to the United States.”

This declaration cannot possibly be genuine because the principles conflict with each other. Individualism is mutually exclusive to traditional family values. Limited government is mutually exclusive to a strong defense. Declaring to support all of these principles simultaneously is absurd. Clearly deception is present in the messaging. Why would a “communist” Russian agent want to advocate for these principles?

Sun Tzu says, “The supreme art of war is to subdue your enemy without fighting.” I want to use deception to engineer my enemy's voluntary surrender. By declaring ownership over the information, I claim the right to define the terms. To compel the voluntary surrender of the United States, I just need to covertly change the definition of “freedom” to mean “surrender” and “individual liberty” to mean “treason.” Then I simply tell the American people to vote for unconditional freedom and fight for individual liberty.

Analyzing the language of these principles, “freedom” in this context clearly means to surrender your will for political power. Individualism and limited government clearly mean those who exercise their political power are the enemies of

freedom. By declaring for a strong defense, traditional family values, and opposition to communism, I am using misdirection (Kuhn *et al.* 2014) ^[26] to create a point of interest projecting strength, security, and trustworthiness while drawing attention away from how I have distorted the informational terms.

Individualism and the role of the State

The conventional wisdom noted by Critchlow and MacLean (2009:64) ^[15] is that “the modern American ‘Right’ was, in essence, a much-needed and healthy reaction against the New Deal...which aimed at the radical transformation of the role of the State in American life, and whose goal was the aggrandizement of government power at the expense of the individual”.

The correct answer for “the role of the State in American life” is to use the appropriate amount of government power for the task and purpose at hand. All responsible citizens should be active participants in their government. It's a lot of work, and usually not a lot of fun, but that's what you have to do if you want to live free and not surrender to the Russians. Clearly deception is present in the messaging.

By separating “individualism” and “government power” to opposite ends of an artificial spectrum, I have oversimplified politics down to a false choice. Applying the principle of selection (Buss 1987) ^[10], those who lack the capacity to participate in democratic politics can have the illusion of political participation if they join my group.

Volumes of analysis could be written applying Information Manipulation Theory to conservative literature. From Enlightenment-era philosophy distorted to apply to modern democracies (Oreskes & Conway 2013) ^[34], to the Tea Party movement targeted to people who already had proper representation (Arceneaux & Nicholson 2012) ^[4], to information distortion leading to the 2003 invasion of Iraq that US diplomat Henry Brady Kiesling said “undermines democracy and qualifies as large-scale manipulation (Thompson 2018)” ^[45], to the curious abandonment of conservative principles to promote democracy abroad with military force (Monten 2005) ^[32] the moment Russia started invading west (Nazarenko & Nesterenko 2023; Reinhart 2018) ^[33, 40].

From 1945 to the present, literature analysis supports three conclusions: (1) Evidence of information manipulation is present throughout the literature; (2) The information manipulation is highly sophisticated and targeted against the United States government; and (3) The principal benefactor of the information manipulation has been the Russians.

Intelligence brief

The resulting Cold War (1945-1989) fostered a harshly polarized view of economic systems, with “communists” decrying the corruption of the capitalist system and “capitalists” condemning the tyranny and violence in Communist regimes. Perhaps because of the horrible violence in the East, many Western intellectuals came to see everything associated with Communism as evil, even-and crucially for our story-modest or necessary forms of intervention in the marketplace such as progressive taxation and environmental regulation, and humanitarian interventions such as effective and affordable regimes of health care and birth control...But

for many observers in the West, the Soviet Union's collapse gave rise to an uncritical triumphalism, proof of the absolute superiority of the capitalist system (Oreskes & Conway 2013:41-3) ^[34]. “The Collapse of Western Civilization: A View from the Future”

Western Cold War history is more often expressed in terms of *communism vs capitalism* rather than *Russia vs the United States*. This is significant because the former is exploitable by Information Manipulation Theory. It is the Russians responsible for the horrible violence in the East, but Western intellectuals don't associate evil with Russia. They associate evil with communism (Oreskes & Conway 2013) ^[34].

By declaring myself the enemy of communism (Critchlow & MacLean 2009) ^[15], I claim the right to define the term. I can transfer the psychological association of evil from Russia to an artificial construct called “Communism.” Then I simply define Communism to apply to the United States and change my name to something people like better (something like Conservative or Republican). And if I can do it, does that sound like the type of thing the Russians would do?

Russian doctrine on deception

Intelligence analysts (Matherly *et al.* 2020:29-30) ^[30] cite two concepts important to Russian strategic thinking on deception: reflexive control theory (RCT) and *Maskirovka*. Reflexive control is “a means of conveying to a partner or an opponent specially prepared information to incline him to voluntarily make the predetermined decision desired by the initiator of the action.” *Maskirovka* is defined as “deliberately misleading the opponent with regard to one's own intentions, causing the opponent to make wrong decisions and thereby playing into one's own hand.” RCT stipulates that “the adversary who better understands their opponent's decision-making process and utilizes it against them is more likely to succeed”.

Early Soviet doctrine continually employed deception for revolutionary objectives, “for them the real war is the political warfare waged daily under the guise of peace” (Atkinson 1966: VII). The purpose of which was to “disorient and disarm the opposition...to induce the desire to surrender in opposing peoples...to corrode the entire moral, political, and economic infrastructure of a nation” (Kintner & Kornfeder 1963:XIII) ^[24].

Under Vladimir Putin, Russia has incorporated *Maskirovka* as its asymmetric advantage against the technological superiority of the West (Pagen 2020:61) ^[35]. Putin has mastered “the art of ruling...finding a way to derive benefit from...the feelings of others and not in wasting one's own energy in order to destroy them. [Putin] is capable of liberating himself from blind control of his own feelings [and] is also capable of exploiting the feelings of others for his own purposes.” Putin ensures the careful attention and consideration of political, psychological, and constructivist realities to harness and deliberately manipulate target audiences for power consolidation and opposition suppression.

Russian grand strategy and psychocultural profile

Timothy Snyder and other writers call Russia “a schizo-fascist state where the Kremlin accuses Ukraine and the West of being extreme right while itself being akin to a

fascist regime” (Kuzio 2024) ^[27]. A concept important to understanding Russian communication culture is *Vranyo*. Diane Chotikul (1986:66-7) ^[13] defines *Vranyo* as “dissemination of untruths which have some grounding in reality.” I prefer the definition by YouTube’s Perun (2022) ^[37], “Empty bullshit... often with a purpose. You know I’m bullshitting; I know you know I’m bullshitting. But I’m going to go ahead with it anyway and deliver it with a straight face...” *Vranyo* is a culture of strategic deception institutionalized within Russian society (Chotikul 1986) ^[13], and it has no respect for Grice or The Cooperative Principle. When Russia is obviously lying, it’s not because they’re crazy or stupid, it’s a strategic deception.

Russia sees itself locked in an eternal struggle against the West. The 2015 National Security Strategy casts Russia as the subject of geopolitical encirclement by “hostile states” the United States and its allies which seek to disrupt and contain Russia’s efforts to achieve great power status (Vidal 2023). While Russia tends to acknowledge Western military capability, they view Western culture as a decadent, inferior civilization (Kuzio 2024; Pagen 2020) ^[27, 35]. As Russia has prioritized information warfare, refining it for the digital age, the United States has yet to recognize a Psychological Domain of War (Ajir & Vailliant 2020) ^[1].

Information warfare attacks not only “the underlying cognition of the human brain, but the broader psychology of an individual, including their mental state; perception; cognitive, emotional, and social processes; and behavior” (Ajir & Vailliant 2020:8) ^[1]. Modern Russian strategy is that “information now has primacy in operations, while more conventional military forces are in a supporting role. The main battle space, from the Russian perspective, is in the people’s mind, the necessity for hard military power being minimized” (Rațiu & Munteanu 2018:193) ^[38].

Russian tactics against the West

Putin views “enemy image” (Alexander *et al.* 2005) as the “primary perception to be exploited, constructed, and advanced against the West” (Pagen 2020:69-70) ^[35]. Enemy image exploits an *us vs them* mentality promoting in-group favoritism and out-group derogation between two historical foes. Matherly *et al.* (2020:34) ^[30] says Russia strategically uses disinformation to create division, or schismogenesis, of the American public to cause maximum chaos and distrust among the US populace.

Matherly *et al.* (2020:35) ^[30] concludes that overall, people are susceptible to the spread of disinformation and “the United States is at risk of critically falling behind near-peer adversaries in the realm of Information Operations.” Pagen (2020:65) ^[35] concludes “the influence campaigns in the Soviet era and under President Putin represent a long term, indirect, and low-risk approach to undermine and weaken an opponent from within in order to promote political objectives and alter the correlation of power in Moscow’s favor in order to win the clash of civilizations with the West”.

Theoretical Framework

Recently an increasing number of studies have begun to examine the concept of polarization of reality. Alesina *et al.* (2020) ^[2] found that “Republicans and Democrats (as well as Trump and non-Trump voters since 2016) view the same reality through a different lens...The direction of causality is unclear... Regardless of the direction of causality...What

is striking, rather, is to have different perceptions of realities that can be factually checked”.

Roderik Rekker (2022) ^[41] argues the concept of factual belief polarization introduced in 2021 should be added as a core pillar to the taxonomy of polarization. “Citizens are divided not only in their attitudes and their feelings toward each other, but also in their factual beliefs about reality.” Rekker also notes, “few articles that have systematically examined and conceptualized this phenomenon”.

Kathrin Glüer and Åsa Wikforss (2022) ^[20] introduce the concept of knowledge resistance in political polarization as, “resisting available evidence,” and that, “the general mechanisms of resisting knowledge aren’t well understood yet.” Numerous studies have linked the phenomenon of knowledge resistance to cognitive dissonance (Sude & Knobloch-Westerwick 2022; Strömbäck *et al.* 2022; Kossowska *et al.* 2022) ^[44, 43, 25]. Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1957) ^[19] says the distance between one’s perception of reality and the presentation of facts will create discomfort motivating them to reduce the tension by changing the way they perceive the situation. Cognitive dissonance can engender feelings of psychological embarrassment, prompting changes in attitude and behaviour to relieve the discomfort (Urien 2025) ^[46]. The “perceived hostility with respect to one’s belief (cognitive discrepancy) can enhance the intention to seek out attitude-consistent information”.

Thus, the existence of alternate realities and factual belief polarization is well supported by the literature. In “Reality Rules,” mathematician John Casti (1997:2) ^[12] writes, “one’s reality depends upon one’s capacity for observation...The study of natural systems begins and ends with the specification of observables describing such a system and a characterization of the manner in which these observables are linked.” To paraphrase, realities are systems defined by their unique observable governing rules. Defining the governing rules of these alternate realities is the research gap this theoretical framework aims to address.

The theoretical framework defines alternate realities in terms of R1 and R2, each distinguished by different observable rules (R1-the Constitution is the sovereign and the government serves the people; R2-the citizens are sovereign and the government is their enemy). If this is true, then R1 is a legitimate organic reality and R2 is a fraudulent manufactured reality. All fraudulent systems involve a deceiver who propagates a corrupt perspective or worldview to achieve a gain at the expense of a victim who relies on the misrepresentation.

The psychology of victims of manipulation and coercive control is well-documented in the literature. Interpersonal deception theory suggests that a manipulation victim’s knowledge resistance to third party evidence increases if relational familiarity favors the deceiver and the communication by the third party is unexpected (Buller & Burgoon 1996) ^[8]. According to the criminology literature, manipulation victims often suffer from institutional betrayal and disenfranchised grief (Woodlock *et al.* 2023) ^[49]. This suffering can be exacerbated when the manipulation is long-term or technologically facilitated.

Most grief studies consider that all reactions to losses have common elements (Buck 1991) ^[7]. Grief reactions are fairly predictable but not always easy to recognize and tend to fall into three phases: shock, disorganization, and reorganization. For examining grief reactions in this study,

grief reactions are categorized in terms of denial, anger, depression, and bargaining.

Hypothesis

New Testament scholar Bart Ehrman (2014:78-81) ^[18] offers guidance on an academic approach to examining emotionally sensitive subjects in, "How Jesus Became God: The Exaltation of a Jewish Preacher from Galilee." Ehrman writes, "It is not appropriate for a historian to presuppose a perspective or worldview that is not generally held... Historical evidence has to be open to examination by everyone".

Since alternate realities adhering to different factual beliefs can hardly coexist, it stands that whichever reality applies a perspective or worldview that is not generally held by rule is illegitimate. If subjects representing alternate realities both claiming to be legitimate, legitimacy can be tested by presenting each party same evidence for examination and observing their ability to apply a generally held perspective in their response. If a party's inability to apply a generally held perspective is coupled with an adverse emotional response reflecting grief and cognitive dissonance, this suggests the subject is a victim of manipulation their reality is also fraudulent.

"The Freedom Grift" asks the reader to set aside their political biases and think like a strategist. They must put themselves in the shoes of a foreign agent with corrupt intent to manipulate the American people into political submission. The text represents the corrupt motivations of the agent and the associated hyperlinks represent the result the agent would want to see to realize their corrupt plan. This exercise asks the reader to decide if the results in the hyperlinks are in alignment with the corrupt motivations of the text.

- If "The Freedom Grift" presents a valid interpretation of information manipulation, then evidence of this interpretation will be observable in the discourse of people who are victims of this manipulation.

Prediction: When a subject is observed to apply a perspective or worldview that is not generally held in their political discourse, this perspective or worldview will follow the governing rules of R2 as outlined in this work (as opposed to a perspective or worldview that is random or unique to the individual).

- If political polarization is the result of latent factor R2, then people in R2 will believe the citizen is sovereign and the government is their enemy, but without realizing it themselves.

Prediction: The subject's perceived hostility to their beliefs (cognitive discrepancy) will lead them to seek out attitude-consistent information (Jean Tsang 2019). Their response will reflect manipulated information prepared for them by their deceiver. The subtext of their response will suggest they do believe the citizen is sovereign and the government is their enemy. This subtext will be recognizable to the eye of a careful observer.

- If political identification has a positive correlation to latent factor R2, then the control group will have a positive correlation to latent factor R1.

Prediction: Subjects who fit the profile for R2 will self-identify as Conservative, Republican, Libertarian, Trump supporter, etc. Subjects who fit the profile for R1 will self-identify as Liberal, Democrat, Harris

supporter, etc. Subjects declaring no political identification due to a professional conflict of interest will reveal their true hidden political identification by nature of their response.

Methodology

This author is not certified to conduct human subject research and thus is not able to report data collected from an unofficial investigation. Instead, this study aims to be a proof of concept in hopes this work will spark interest among academics qualified to improve upon the methodology and continue the research. The methodology reported here was conducted in an unofficial capacity.

Ten participants were asked to provide peer review of "The Freedom Grift" using the following methodology. Five reviewers self-identified as Republican, three self-identified as Liberal or Democrat, and two were defense and intelligence analysts with no political self-identification. Subject response data was substituted with political public figure statements where applying the same analysis yielded similar conclusions. This workaround provided a compliant pathway to report results observed in the unofficial experiment. The public figure analysis also serves to establish reproducibility. If a public figure and a private individual share the same reality, then the themes and language observed in public figure analysis will also be observed in the private individual because both class of subjects obey the same rules of their shared reality.

Limitations

The author found many subjects willing to provide informed consent with the understanding that they were participating in a deception study and that their responses would be analyzed for susceptibility to manipulation. It is impossible for a manipulation victim to provide informed consent because their perception of reality makes careful consideration of their own potential victimhood an impossibility. This work intentionally uses language that may be interpreted as insulting or unprofessional to avoid a bias toward fairness. This language is the author's interpretation of third-party messages, not a reflection of author bias or an attempt to influence or entertain.

Procedure

Any person of American voting age (18+) can participate in the experiment. The procedure calls for the recruitment of roughly even demographically diverse groups of self-identified Republicans, Democrats, and subject matter experts with no political self-identification. Each participant is asked to review "The Freedom Grift" and provide comment on the validity of evidence and the author's interpretation of information manipulation. Participants are asked to provide the following demographic information for purposes of categorization.

- **Demographic:** Ethnicity and gender.
- **Age:** Expressed as a range for purposes of anonymity. [Knowing the subject's generation will help in determining what types of political messaging they have been receiving, for how long, and by what channel type.]
- **Political Identification:** Expressed as Conservative, Republican, Libertarian, Trump supporter, etc. or Liberal, Democrat, Harris supporter, etc. for A political identification of "None" is acceptable only if you are a

defense or intelligence analyst where political identification is a conflict of interest, or if you have never voted and are completely divorced from politics and political news and current events.

- **Occupation:** Expressed vaguely for purposes of anonymity. [Knowing their occupation will help in determining their training or experience with critical thinking and their base of knowledge with the subject matter.]
- **Education:** Expressed in terms of high school, bachelors, masters, or Ph.D. or higher. This information is important to determine if being smart makes one less susceptible to manipulation. It does not (Buller & Burgoon 1996) ^[8].

Coding

While this author is restricted from sharing data from human subject interviews, the following themes were discovered in feedback received from volunteer peer reviewers and are expected to be reproducible.

- **Theme 1:** All people in R2 have a phantom enemy. This could be the government, the Deep State, the Liberals, the Democrats, the Socialists, etc. Ask open-ended questions to get the subject to identify their phantom enemy and their emotional state will change to fear, hatred, disgust, etc. When they have exhausted their capacity for fear, hatred, disgust, etc., their emotional state will change to depression, and they will reveal the sickness in their soul. Wait for their emotional state to change from depression to anger and they will reveal the association between the phantom enemy and the sickness in their soul.
- **Theme 2:** People in R1 will apply a generally accepted perspective or worldview in their political discourse. They will show no signs of knowledge resistance, grief, and cognitive dissonance to information challenging their beliefs. They can be persuaded by logic and evidence. They may show contempt or confusing when communicating with ORA bout R2 subjects, but this because they are unaware that the R2 subject is applying rules specific to their alternate reality.
- **Theme 3:** Almost all people in R2 are unwitting victims of psychological manipulation and coercive control. Their political discourse will reflect a perspective or worldview that is not generally accepted and intellectually corrupt. They will respond to information challenging their beliefs with knowledge resistance, grief, and cognitive dissonance. They cannot be persuaded by logic and evidence.

Results

The following subjects were selected as demographically representative of the Republican group in the author's unofficial investigation. Control groups are not included in the analysis but are represented by the media interviewer engaged in discourse with the Republican subject. Results show that people in R1 will apply a generally held perspective in their discourse as outlined in Theme 2. R2 subjects will believe the citizen is sovereign and the government is their enemy, but without realizing it themselves, and will apply a perspective or worldview that is not generally held in their discourse as outlined in Themes 1 & 3, as well as elsewhere in this work.

Subject No 1

- **Demographic:** Latin male
- **Age:** Mid-20s
- **Political identification:** Republican
- **Occupation:** Convicted Jan. 6 insurrectionist and former porn star
- **Education:** Unknown
- **Marquez:** I went on the 6th to D.C. to protest against communism and prostitution... This is like a Rosa Parks, like Martin Luther King moment for me.
- **Reporter:** Documents show him [Marquez] also called Capitol police traitors, and he kept asking about the location of House Speaker Nancy Pelosi... Marquez still doesn't immediately accept the outcome of the election.
- **Source:** CBS Miami, South Florida Man Sees Capitol Riot Arrest As 'A Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King Moment For Me', 2021)
- **Marquez:** I was confused why I was there, and I want people to have happy families, not break the law.
- **Reporter:** Marques says false information about human trafficking and other fake stories about family structure led him to the Capitol that day.
- **Source:** (WPLG Local, Broward man sentenced for role in Jan. 6 insurrection at US Capitol. YouTube, 2021)

Conclusion

Subject believes the government is our enemy and that the sickness in his soul would be cured without the government. He associates communism with evil and applies it to the United States. His motivation to sedition by fake news appealing to his soul sickness indicates susceptibility to manipulation. His response shows the denial and depression stages of grief. His inability to reconcile his perception of reality and the reporter's presentation of facts is evidence of cognitive dissonance. Subject fits the profile for R2.

Subject No 2

- **Demographic:** White female
- **Age:** Early-50s
- **Political identification:** Republican
- **Occupation:** Politician
- **Education:** Bachelors
- **Greene:** Gabe, I do not consider you an expert on this issue. As a matter of fact, I consider you a major problem. For you to say there were no dead voters in Georgia.
- **Sterling:** There were four.
- **Greene:** That is... there was... thousands of dead voters in Georgia.
- **Sterling:** That's simply not [inaudible].
- **Greene:** And then the other thing is you have constantly chilled for this election and I'm going to tell you there was blatant outright fraud in the 2020 election.
- **Source:** (CNN, See Marjorie Taylor Greene's reaction when a GOP election official corrects her lies. YouTube, 2023)
- **Interviewer:** Marjorie Taylor Greene spoke today on what she thinks the US should do about Ukraine as it's

being invaded by Russia and it's really funny how everything she talks about in this next clip sounds like it was written by Vladimir Putin and the Kremlin.

- **Greene:** Amendment No. 6 directs the president to withdraw the US from NATO... They are not a reliable partner whose defense spending should be paid for by American citizens.
- **Source:** (Reflect Politics, Marjorie Taylor Greene spews Russian propaganda during Ukraine hearing, YouTube, 2023)

Conclusion

Subject believes each individual citizen has the right to declare their own truth. She believes the government official (Sterling) is a chill because his contradictory response is a truth of his own choosing rather than a reflection of reality. She certainly does not associate evil with Russia. She believes the citizen is sovereign and the government is their enemy. Her response shows the denial and anger stages of grief. Her inability to apply a generally held perspective in her discourse is evidence of cognitive dissonance. Subject fits the profile for R2.

Subject No 3

- **Demographic:** White male
- **Age:** Mid-50s
- **Political identification:** Republican
- **Occupation:** Politician and elections official
- **Education:** Bachelors
- **Sterling:** The problem is for people who are very hardcore in their beliefs on Trump, they can't understand why anybody who would be a Republican would ever vote against them. A large part of that comes from years of the left, and in some cases, the media beating them down. My entire life Republicans were the responsible party and didn't do ends justify the means... People like Ms. Green reason the ends justify the means. The other side does crazy stuff... I'm going to do even crazier stuff.
- **Source:** (CNN, See Marjorie Taylor Greene's reaction when a GOP election official corrects her lies, YouTube, 2023)

Conclusion

Subject believes those on the other side of the partisan divide are the enemy. He associates "the left" with evil and applies it to everyone who is not a Republican. His response shows the denial and bargaining stages of grief. His inability to reconcile his perception of the Republican Party with his own presentation of facts is evidence of cognitive dissonance. Subject fits the profile for R2.

Subject No 4

- **Demographic:** White male
- **Age:** Mid-70s
- **Political identification:** Republican
- **Occupation:** Former US Attorney General
- **Education:** JD
- **Reporter:** I have to ask you about something Trump posted this week because he responded in response to you saying you'd vote for the Republican ticket, "Wow!

Former A.G. Bill Barr, who let a lot of great people down by not investigating Voter Fraud in our Country, as just Endorsed me for President despite the fact that I called him 'Weak, Slow Moving, Lethargic, Gutless and Lazy' (New York Post!) Based on the fact that I greatly appreciate his wholehearted Endorsement, I am removing the word 'Lethargic' from my statement. Thank you Bill. MAGA 2024".

- **Barr:** [Laughter] Yeah. It's classic Trump. What's the question?

Reporter: What's your response?

- **Barr:** My Response? Well, I mean obviously what I said was that I'm very disappointed that this country is stuck with this choice between two people. I don't think either of them should be President of the United States. But given that binary choice I feel I have to choose Trump... I think Trump would do less damage than Biden, and I think all this stuff about a threat to democracy I think the real threat to democracy is the progressive movement and the Biden administration."
- **Reporter:** Just to be clear, you're voting for someone who you believe tried to subvert the peaceful transfer of power, that can't even achieve his own policies, that lied about the election even after his attorney general told him that the election wasn't stolen. ... You're going to vote for someone who is facing 88 criminal counts?
- **Barr:** The answer to the question is yes, I'm supporting the Republican ticket.
- **Source:** (Blackburn & Mallonee, Barr, who said Trump shouldn't be near Oval Office, says he will vote for him in 2024, CNN, 2024)

Conclusion: Subject believes those on the other side of the partisan divide are the enemy. His enemy image allows him to justify political affiliation with a criminal enterprise hostile to the United States against his oath in his country. His response shows the depression and bargaining stages of grief. His psychological embarrassment is evidence of cognitive dissonance. Subject fits the profile for R2.

Subject No 5

- **Demographic:** White male
- **Age:** Mid-40s
- **Political identification:** Republican
- **Occupation:** US Secretary of Defense
- **Education:** Masters
- **Hegseth:** The new compass heading is clear. Out with the Chiarellis, the McKenzies and the Milleys, and in with the Stockdales, the Schwarzkopfs and the Pattons. More leadership changes will be made, of that I'm certain, not because we want to but because we must... But I look out at this group and I see great Americans, leaders who have given decades to our great republic at great sacrifice to yourselves and to your families. But if the words I'm speaking today are making your heart sink, then you should do the honorable thing and resign. We would thank you for your service. But I suspect, I know, the overwhelming majority of you feel the opposite.
- **Source:** Department of War, Secretary of War Pete

Hegseth addresses general and flag officers at Quantico, Virginia, 2025

Conclusion

Subject believes military officers loyal to the Constitution and not susceptible to manipulation are unfit for service. He knows he is speaking to an alternate reality audience. He knows a significant ratio of his audience understands him to be an oath breaker and a traitor. He is not a manipulation victim. He is a deceiver.

Discussion

Rekker (2022:223) ^[41] writes, “facts are the currency of citizenship.” We as Americans must find a pathway to merge our alternate realities if our union is to survive. I first noticed something was amiss years ago from my father, a brilliant surgeon of some renown and a steadfast Reagan Republican. While I generally disagreed with his politics, his position on global warming was of particular interest to me. It wasn't just that he didn't believe it. It was that he cared so much about it. He needed it not to be true.

Dozens of reviewers have now offered their feedback on “The Freedom Grift”. A consistent pattern shows that conservatives will call the hypothesis “unhinged” while everyone else calls it “interesting.” Understanding the distance between these two constructs of reality compels me to continue this work, despite lack of resources and social science research experience. Perhaps the methodology is flawed or the literature review insufficient to motivate such a fantastic hypothesis. But an extraordinary phenomenon justifies a fantastic hypothesis. Among those who call this work interesting, there may be one interested enough to progress this work from hypothesis to confirmation.

Confirmation of the Freedom Grift Hypothesis would represent a significant multidisciplinary advancement for Cold War and constitutional historians, manipulation victim studies in criminology, and security and intelligence research in the Psychological Domain of War.

What can be concluded with certainty is that the invalidation of the left-right political spectrum (Lewis & Lewis 2022) ^[28] demands a new framework for understanding and measuring political polarization. The Freedom Grift Hypothesis is an empirically testable theory to fill this void, replacing the left-right concept with R1-R2.

Confirmation would not only provide a more accurate tool for measuring polarization, it would inform political scientists who study polarization to consult fields like dark psychology for potential intervention strategies like cognitive-behavioral therapy (Pelz 2025) ^[36].

If ignored, the consequences could be devastating. While historical figures like Genghis Khan and the fictional Odysseus are known to have leveraged psychological warfare to their advantage (Matherly *et al.* 2020) ^[30], the United States may be the first civilization in history to be conquered by psychological warfare without the use or threat of coercive force. Such a fate would be equivalent to the United States not just losing World War II, but voluntarily surrendering to the Nazis in the spring of 1945.

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