

Spanish Far-Right and Dog-Whistle Politics: How To Throw a Stone and Hide Your Hand. A Case Study.

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Abstract

The present case study analyses the use of dog-whistle politics by the Spanish far-right. We aim to describe this practice in Spanish politics, as well as to understand how dog-whistle politics is used to attract fringe conspiracy groups. Finally, we also try to explore the social psychology mechanisms underlying the effectiveness of dog-whistle politics. To achieve this we analyzed a YouTube propaganda video from Spanish far-right party Vox as well as performed a qualitative analysis of the comment section. We discovered evidence of dog-whistles being used to attract fringe conspiracy groups based on several far-right talking points (feminism, immigration, climate change and gender ideology) and proposed different social psychology theories that could help explain why they seem to work.

Keywords

dog-whistle politics, far-right, persuasion, Spain, social psychology

Non-Technical Abstract

1. Background

We have seen a sudden right of the far-right in the Spanish political context, being the 3rd most voted political party (Vox) in the 2019 elections and entering an autonomic government in 2022. Meanwhile, we saw a sharp increase of conspiracy theories around Vox discourse online.

2. Why was this study done?

We investigated how Vox uses dog-whistles, that is to say coded and/or suggestive language and imagery, to attract fringe conspiracy groups while still able to maintain plausible deniability so as not to alienate more mainstream voters.

3. What did the researchers do and find?

We analyze a marketing video created and published by the far-right political party to identify possible instances of dog-whistle as well as the comment section to try to confirm their presence. We found evidence of several dog-whistle against feminism, trans people, immigrants as well as for climate change denial being used.

4. What do these findings mean?

Evidence suggest that the Spanish far-right is using dog-whistle as a way to expand a hateful populist narrative while still being able to deny any accusation since it is never explicitly said. What may be even more worrisome, there is evidence that most of the negative comments the video received were from conspiracy theory believers criticizing Vox for not being conspiratorial enough which could lead to a further radicalization of the party in the future.

Spanish Abstract

Este estudio de caso analiza el uso de políticas de silbato para perros por parte de la extrema derecha española. Nuestro objetivo es describir el uso de esta práctica en la política española así como entender su uso para atraer a grupos conspiranoicos marginales. Finalmente tratamos de explorar los mecanismos psicosociales que explican la efectividad de la política de silbato para perros. Para conseguirlo analizamos un video propagandístico de Vox así como la sección de comentarios del mismo. Descubrimos evidencia del uso de silbato para perros para atraer grupos marginales conspiranoicos basándose en diversos temas de conversación normales entre la extrema derecha (feminismo, inmigración, cambio climático e ideología de género) y propusimos diferentes teorías de psicología social que pueden ayudar a explicar su efectividad.

1 Background

1.1 ¿What is Dog-Whistle Politics?

At its basics is another form of populism, creating an us versus them paradigm, by activating a particular social identity of the receiver (Quillian, 1995; Robert, 2000; Penn, 2008; Wood, 2008). In this regard there is evidence that individuals are more likely to activate a particular identity when responding to an affective trigger, which is being used by politicians to maximize their political profits (Sears, Hensler and Speer, 1979; Sears et al., 1980).

Dog-Whistle Politics is the use of coded and/or suggestive languages and images to increase support from a particular group, usually outside of the mainstream, without alienating others (Haney-López 2014; Mendelberg 2001; Valentino, Hutchings, and White 2002). That is to say, that is used when trying to reach groups with fringe identities, such as racists or conspiracy believers, or propose narratives against the social norm, which normally would cause a backlash from society. A good example of this would be Ronald Reagan talking about “Chicago welfare queens” driving Cadillacs and cheating the welfare system or of “strapping young bucks ahead of you to buy T-bone steaks” (Carter, 1996). While Reagan couldn’t directly accuse the black population of cheating the white population out of their tax money, he can use specific words. such as buck or queens, and their associated meanings to conjure images of threatening or entitled black people, effectively pushing a racist narrative without ever needing to explicitly say it. This lead us to another feature of dog-whistles, which is plausible deniability when trying to engage with fringe groups or narratives (Mendelberg, 2001; Valentino, Hutchings and White, 2002; White, 2007) or to move Overton’s window in the desired direction (Haney-López, 2014).

Although still a relatively unknown term, it has been hypothesized to be the main way race is debated in contemporary American politics (Mendelberg 2001). It is not, however, limited to just racial issues, welfare (Peffley, Hurwitz, and Sniderman 1997; Mendelberg 1997, 2001), government spending (Valentino et al. 2002), food stamps (White 2007), crime (Gilliam and Iyengar 2000; Domke 2001; Hurwitz and Peffley 2005), and health care (Tesler 2012) issues have also suffer from this tactic. At the same time, it has also been used as a way to split the popular opposition when pursuing economic policies advantageous to the economic elites (Haney-López, 2014).

There are many reasons that could explain why it's so effective. People have a tendency to sort themselves into social groups and then favor their own group and judge it as better (Brewer, 1999; Kinder & Kam, 2010). At the same time, plausible deniability works both ways, it's not just for the author, but also for the receiver. This means that, for example, a listener of a racist dog-whistle does not need to categorize himself as a racist if agreeing with the message. And, in fact, can even target unconscious stereotypes (Mendelberg, 2001) so people who would never agree with a racist message could still be appealed by that narrative, since the strategies in place to consciously counteract the racist dog-whistle failed to take place. Conditioning and automatic association also plays a huge role; just by repeated association of concepts (e.g./ an overrepresentation of minorities as welfare recipients) one serves as a proxy target for the other. Finally, there is also a deep connection between language, thought and behavior which we will now briefly explain.

1.2 Language, Thought, and Behavior

As social creatures language is an extremely important tool for us humans. The ability to communicate with one another is one of our defining characteristics, and while it has granted us with incredible technological advancements through the exchange of knowledge it has also been used to enhance perceived prestige, sabotage rivals, or to intentionally misrepresent reality (DePaulo, Kashy, Kirkendol, Wyer, & Epstein, 1996; Robbins & Karan, 2020; Walker et al., 2021). However morally apprehensive this latter use is, it does seem to be an effective one, since strategic use of language can affect thought (Boroditsky, 2011), behavior (Druckman & Parkin, 2005; Chen, 2013), memory (Fausey & Boroditsky, 2011), opinions (Walker et al., 2021), and moral judgment (Fausey & Boroditsky, 2010) in any desired way. In some worrisome cases, it can even produce hate towards minority groups, which can then spill out to non targeted minorities (Bonikowski and Zhan, 2018). It is so effective, in fact, that some authors argued that this is the primary function of language (Scott-Phillips, 2006), although newer evidence seems to point towards this being a secondary function (Oesch, 2016).

1.3 Strategic Use of Language

The strategic use of language is what has been commonly known as doublespeak, which is the purposeful use of language to misrepresent, obscure, or otherwise distort reality (Lutz, 2000). Is a way to mislead the public without the use of falsehoods (Walker et al., 2021), just by implying something and letting stereotypical archetypes activate in the case of dog-whistles.

The wording (Levin & Gaeth, 1988) and framing (Arceneaux & Nickerson, 2010) of the message, another trademark of this style of language, also appears to be important when trying to either evoke or instill a particular bias in people or elicit a particular

emotional reaction (Nabi, Gustafson, & Jensen, 2018). Furthermore, strategic language can also be used as a way to find the correct demographic, for example, if a political party is targeting angry and disenfranchised people, framing the advert in a sad and angry way would be most effective for this cluster to be reached (DeSteno et al., 2004).

Whether implicit appeals, such as dog whistles, are more effective than explicit appeals is still up to debate (Huber and Lapinski 2006; Hutchings, Walton, and Benjamin 2010; Valentino, Neuner, and Vandebroek 2018) and it might be changing, as recent research suggests that some stereotypes are becoming more socially accepted (Valentino et al. 2018) thus decreasing the need for covert messages. The rise of resentment politics also seems to be a factor explaining the effectiveness of dog-whistle politics (Norton and Sommers, 2011).

1.4 Much More than Words

Communication is, however, much more than words and this is especially true in the XXI century where communications are a multi-sensory deal. Audiovisual language plays a huge role when trying to say without saying, either by over-representing targeted groups or by framing the message. In order to do the latter, there are plenty of techniques to help evoke a particular emotion. Different angle shots can be used in order to frame whatever is shown on the screen, either in positive or negative ways (Sevenants & d'Ydewalle, 2006; Baranowsky & Hecht, 2017). The editing of the video also plays a role via the Kuleshov effect, a mental phenomenon in which the emotional meaning of a shot with a facial expression is changed by a posterior shot (Barratt, Rédei, Innes-Ker, and van de Weijer, 2016). Color, and not just the hue, but the

brightness and saturation as well as the interaction between them, is yet another way to frame images within a particular emotion context (Wilms & Oberfeld, 2018)

Music also plays a function, being able to evoke particular emotions and even radically changing the perceived meaning of an audiovisual message (Cohen, 2010) by being an emotional primer (Tan, Spackman, and Bezdek, 2007; Eldar et al., 2007). This has been called by some authors as the auditory Kuleshov effect (Baranowsky & Hecht, 2018).

1.5 Dog-Whistle Politics and Social Media

The advent of social media revitalizes the use of dog-whistles. In general, it meant a greater possibility than ever for claims to be widespread, regardless of their truthfulness (Lazer, et al., 2018), and in particular, with politicians increasingly favoring Twitter over other more conventional news outlets, it created a space for the expression of more radical and marginalized views (Barkun, 2017) while also forming an echo chamber that creates an inflated perception of the social acceptance of such views. This kind of rhetoric also normalizes other kinds of hate-speech against perceived out-groups and activates latent extremist audiences into following and reacting to political rhetoric (Chyzh, Nieman, and Webb, 2019). It seems particularly worrisome when we take into account that violent rhetoric is the best predictor for group-level violence (Asal and Vitek, 2018) and that there is a relationship between violent metaphorical language and support for political violence (Kalmoe, 2014). Social media seems to have such an effect that there is a positive correlation between broadband access and frequency of hate crime (Chan, Ghose and Seamans, 2015).

2 This Research

This research has three objectives. First we aim to explore for the first time how the far-right uses dog-whistle politics in Spain via a case study, in which we will analyze both the video itself and the comment section of the video to try to confirm the dog-whistles detected on the video analysis. Second, document how dog-whistle politics is used to attract fringe conspiracy theory groups. Finally, we would try to explore the social psychology mechanisms that could explain this phenomenon.

For the case study we settled on a publicity video published by Spanish far-right political party Vox. This video was created as a critique to a government update about the Sustainable Development Goals, a UN agreement signed by 193 countries that tries to promote equality between people and to protect the planet.

The video in question was uploaded by Vox in his official YouTube channel under the title *Lo que se oculta tras la Agenda 2030* (What hides behind the Sustainable Development Goals; VOX España, 2021).

3 Case Study

3.1 Video

The video can be divided into 6 different sections, which although targeting the same overall narrative, the destruction of western values and way of living, are targeting different scapegoats, namely feminism, immigration, climate change and gender ideology. This structure, which seems designed to maximize the target audiences, could also serve as a way of “cross-contamination” between different conspiracies.

3.1.1 Introduction

The title itself already frames the video by implying that there is some hidden interest behind the initiative. This is further emphasized by the use of ominous music and dark colors. At the beginning we see



Figure 1

the UN building from a low-angle shot (fig. 1) which makes it seem powerful (Sevenants & d'Ydewalle, 2006) and untrustworthy (Baranowsky & Hecht, 2017).

6 seconds into the video, we see a video of current Spanish president, Pedro Sánchez saying that the 2030 Agenda is their “plan”, which at this point is already heavily suggested to be a nefarious one. To further emphasize this we see the words appear on the screen. Following this (0:10) an image of Bill Gates nodding in the background with an unfocused Pedro Sánchez (Spanish president) in the front appears. This is a nod to the many conspiracy theories that Bill Gates is trying to control the world (Smallman, 2018), and in particular it seems to suggest that Bill Gates is behind the government's secret plans.

15 seconds in a wildly taken out of context statement from the World Economic Forum “In 2030 you will have nothing and be happy” appears on screen. While this statement was a prediction of a future where people own less and rent more, the complete phrase was “You’ll own nothing. And you’ll be happy. What you want you’ll rent, and it’ll be delivered by drone.” (World Economic Forum, 2016), here is implying that the government's plan is to control and impoverish the population. Following this (0:16 - 0:20) we observe a quick succession of political rivals photos ending with yet another photo of the president with Bill Gates, which remains longer than any other photo, yet again driving home the point that Bill Gates is in cahoots with the government and

Vox's opposition, and can also be linked to one of the many conspiracies linking Mr. Gates with the COVID pandemic (Andrews, 2021; Fuchs, 2021).

This section serves as a way to, first, if not create a problem at the very least make other people “realize” there is a problem. And, second, a way to frame the following sections, and to offer an overall narrative to explain some of the problems the Spanish society is currently facing.

3.1.2 Feminism

At 0:26 gender equality is presented as a “destruction of the family” (fig. 2). Images of riots and destruction are followed by images of Women's Right protestors singing



Figure 2

against the heteropatriarchy. In particular, they show a phrase of a well-known protest song which translates as “and you are the rapist”. In the original song it is referring to the heteropatriarchy, but here it is frame as if it is

trying to blame men. After this we see images of a woman and a man arguing whilst a child grabs her head in distress. Finally we see images of a fetus with an image of a heteronormative family with a strikethrough in the foreground. The implications here are quite obvious, the underlying message is that the feminist movement only brings the destruction of the family, as well as unwarranted hate towards males. The final image of a fetus appears to be a nod to the antiabortion (sometimes also referred as the pro-life) movement, and it seems to put forward the old talking point that feminists are trying to kill babies (Barnet, 2013).

3.1.3 Immigration

In this section (0:36), we see images of coming refugees in the background are framed as “Open Frontiers”, at the same time a pregnant woman in what appears to be a shayla is caressing her belly. This a nod to different, albeit similar,



Figure 3

islamophobic conspiracy theories. The main characteristics of these conspiracies is the destruction of Europe and European values via immigration from Islamic or Arab countries. Most notably we found:

- The Great Replacement Theory, a white-nationalist conspiracy theory originated in France (Michael, 2020). According to this conspiracy elitist groups in power are trying to eradicate the white European population in favor of non-white and non-European people, mainly from African and Arab countries (Bracke & Aguilar, 2020).
- The Coudenhove-Kalergi Conspiracy, commonly known as the Kalergi Plan. Which is not dissimilar to the great replacement theory. According to this conspiracy, white Europeans are being eradicated due to mixing with immigrants from other races (De Bruin, 2021).

It is also important to notice the link of these conspiracies with antifeminism. Since women are not fulfilling their role as mother due to feminism the European population is diminishing, allowing these “plans” to take place. Finally we can also see an allusion to the:

- Eurabia Theory. The term Eurabia is formed from the words Europe and Arabia, and refer to a conspiracy theory claiming that a European elite (political,

academic and otherwise) is cooperating with Arab countries to increase the level of Muslim immigration to Europe (Bergmann, 2021).

Two seconds later (0:38) the “Open Frontiers” logo gives way to a logo of a boat with the star and crescent symbol, usually associated with Islam, full of people wielding knives and machetes. Following this (0:39 - 0:42) the text on screen changes to “Migrant Invasion” (fig. 3). A voice is narrating an anecdotal event, which is being framed as the norm, over images of multitudes running, and violence in the streets (it is unclear whether these images are even truly from illegal immigrants or not). The association here is clear and much more explicit, Muslim immigrants are violent people who would try to harm the native population.

3.1.4 Climate change

From 0:47 to 0:58 climate change is represented as a “Climate Religion”, meaning that is not an actual science but something that people want to believe in without any real evidence. Meanwhile Greta Thunberg (a famous Swedish climate change activist) is moving her mouth like a puppet, implying that she's being controlled by the powerful elites. In this regard it is also important to notice that the coat she's wearing has an open society foundation logo since it's may be a nod to the many anti-Semitic conspiracy theories regarding George Soros (Langer, 2021). The key idea behind these theories is that Jewish businessman and philanthropist George Soros is secretly controlling the world's economics and politics. As to the reason how he's doing it, it varies according to the situation. It could be anything from feminism to welfare or to immigration.



Figure 4

In the background apocalyptic images of wastelands and violence interchange with those of climate change activists. As before with immigrants, the framing here is not subtle, climate change activists are violent people that could cause the downfall of society. Icons appear on screen suggesting that they want to forbid cars, meat and industrial activity (fig 4). The prohibition of meat could be referencing the “soy boy” conspiracy, according to which the elites are trying to feminize the population by prohibiting meat consumption and encouraging a soy-based diet. The reasoning behind it is that since soy is rich in phytoestrogens it would have a feminizing effect on the male body and mind (Gambert & Linné, 2018). The inclusion of the prohibition of cars and industrial activity might also try to reinforce the idea that they are trying to prohibit anything that is “traditionally masculine” in order to feminize the population, however they do not reference any specific conspiracy theory that we know of. They do, nonetheless, fit into the common far-right narrative that “the left” likes to prohibit things for no logical reason. It also serves to create a false dichotomy between fighting climate change and economic development.

3.1.5 Gender ideology

Following this (1:02 to 1:19) we see, on the foreground, the 4th goal set up by the UN, quality education, which turns into “indoctrination” (fig. 5). In the background a trans teacher is explaining that the Spanish Ministry of Education has ruled in favor of using equality and tolerance values when teaching. Next, a recording from a public equality workshop taken out of context sounds over. The phrase in question “You, whose name is Manuel will now be named Veronica. Stand up and walk forward as a woman would do, feel free.” was part of an exercise to show the internalization of sexist stereotypical

behavior, and to let the children experience different realities. We then cut back to the trans teacher saying that no matter what they think she is going to educate their sons and daughters, which is framed in a way that changes the evident sarcastic nature of the phrase used (I'm going to indoctrinate your sons and daughters) into a threat. In the background, images of children and posters on biological sex are interchanged, suggesting that only biological sex is real. The narrative behind this is a very common far-right talking point (Corredor, 2016), the so



Figure 5

called “Gender Ideology” which is a rhetorical counter strategy to fight back against equality by delegitimizing feminist and queer theories whilst reinforcing heteronormative conceptions of sex, family and gender in order to prevent their mainstream diffusion. Although frequently used, it is an empty signifier, a banner to rally and group different interest groups (Mayer & Sauer, 2017).

3.1.5 “The solution”

Beginning at 1:26 we see a change in both music and visuals. Music becomes triumphant, whilst colors are less desaturated and the color palette more warm, and a stylized version of the Spanish flag is on the foreground. From this point to 1:42, we observe images of green fields, happy couples (fig. 6) and families and workers appear



Figure 6

in the background. Text in the foreground tells the people that “Now you can choose” while Vox’s leader, Santiago Abascal tells the viewer that “we come to represent a patriotic majority. The future belongs to us, not to the globalist or the separatists.” The text on the foreground changes to “Spain

already has its agenda.” The subtext here is clear to see, there is a conspiracy from separatists and globalists groups to impose their agenda in order to destroy Spain which has to be opposed by the “patriotic majority.” This phrase also serves as a way to create an us-versus-them mentality, and to create a false perception of social consensus.

3.2 Comment Section

Since by nature of its own design it is impossible to get explicit evidence of the dog-whistle itself we analyze the comment section to see if there is any evidence of people reacting to the messages and narrative implied by the dog-whistles we described.

At the time we analyzed the comment sections, there were 1267 comments posted. In order to differentiate the difference of the effect of the video to the effect of other comments in the comment section we decided to eliminate those comments that were replies to other comments, which left us with 788 comments, which were retrieved using YouTube’s official API along with its replies and like count.

For the qualitative analysis we looked for evidence of populism and conspiracy beliefs (either by explicitly naming a conspiracy theory or by implying some kind of conspiracy). Furthermore when evidence of conspiracy was found we classify it by the target of the conspiracy (i.e./feminism, immigrants, COVID, gender ideology, climate change, communism and globalism). We also analyzed what kind, if any, of negative comments was the video receiving.

3.2.1 Populism

We found evidence of populism in 30.62% of the comments. As we can see in the word cloud of the populist comments (fig. 7) the us versus them is clearly defined and goes along the narrative proposed in the video. The us in this case being the patriotic

Spaniards that vote to Vox, where the other globalist communist that are against the interest of Spain. At the same time we observed quite a fatalistic and manichean attitude where Vox is portrayed as if it was the last chance of the in-group to resist against the evils of the out-group.

When analyzing the difference of likes between populist ($M = 8.89$, $SD = 32.26$) and non-populist likes ($M = 8.60$, $SD = 33.57$) we found no statistical difference $t(787) = 0.112$, $p = .91$, and no significant effect on replies either $t(787) = -0.96$, $p = .33$ ($M_{pop} = 0.42$, $SD_{pop} = 1.88$; $M_{nonPop} = 0.65$, $SD_{nonPop} = 3.42$).



Figure 7

3.2.2 Conspiracy theories

We found evidence of conspiracy in 34.56% of the comments. Of those comments that were related to conspiracy we found that 4.04% mention were anti-feminist, 5.51% anti-immigrants, 17.27% COVID deniers, 5.14% against gender ideology, 2.20% climate change deniers, 8.08% were anti-communist and 24.26% were against globalist. The spike in globalist conspiracies is to be expected as Santiago Abascal explicitly mentions Globalists in the video and a lot of anti-communist comments also

identified communists as globalists but not necessarily the other way round, which may help to explain why anti-communists comments (which were also explicitly mentioned) didn't have such a big spike. We would also like to point out that were many references to specific conspiracy theories, for example "Hay calergi calergi que engañado tienes al mundo" (sic.; "Oh calergi calergi how you fooled the entire world") or "Hay que tumbar en las urnas al lacayo de Soros-Gates-Zuckerberg que tenemos incrustado en Moncloa" ("We need to beat on the voting polls Soros-Gates-Zuckerberg lackey's we have in Moncloa"; Moncloa is where the Spanish president live).

Of course, as it expected, pretty much every conspiracy theory was presented as some kind of destruction of the in-group values or way of life. But in some comments this was even stated as the principal fear of the commenter and the main reason to vote for Vox in 6.98% of the cases where conspiracy thinking was detected as shown in the comment " España está perdida, nuestra cultura y costumbres, no a la Agenda 2030. Luchemos" (original comment was all in capital letters; "Spain is lost, our culture and way of life, no the 2030 Agenda. Lets fight").

For conspiracy theories we found no significant difference $t(787) = -1.45$, $p = .14$ between the replies to conspiracy comments ($M = 0.36$, $SD = 1.41$) and to non-conspiracy comments ($M = 0.69$, $SD = 3.60$). For the likes, however, we did find a significant difference $t(787) = -2.88$, $p = .004$, $d = 0.21$, with conspiracy comments having almost 3 times less likes ($M = 4.02$, $SD = 19.81$) than non-conspiracy comments ($M = 11.15$, $SD = 38.16$). This results seems to confirm our hypothesis as we would expect people attracted by dog-whistles to have more fringe opinions and thus resonate less with the overall group. That being said, the effect size is small, which could mean that although the majority of the group disagree with those fringe opinions they are not far from the majority's view on the subject.

An ANOVA analysis of the different types of conspiracies show no statistical difference for likes $F(6, 781) = 0.59, p = .74$ or for comments $F(6, 781) = 0.36, p = .90$.

3.2.3 Negative comments

Of the total sample, 12.45% of comments were against Vox. However it is quite surprising, and very telling, that the majority of these comments (56.12%) were not due to the hateful messages but instead were criticizing Vox of not being conspiranoic enough, mainly due to A)Vox changing posture on vaccine and COVID mandates, as evidence in this comment “Por eso los de vix os matáis en Andalucía y Madrid paraq la gente vaya al matadero a vacunarse.HIPOCRITAS” (sic.; “That’s why people from Vox in Andalusia and Madrid try so hard to make people go to the slaughterhouse to get vaccinated. HYPOCRITES”), B)Vox support of the monarchy, who some believed to be part of the 2030 Agenda conspiracy due to Spanish King, Felipe VI wearing a pin with its logo, e.g./ “pero si vos apoyais al rey... y el lleva su respectivo pin 2030 tambien al igual que pedrito” (sic.; “But you guys support the king... and he wears his 2030 Agenda like pedrito does”, pedrito here is in reference of Pedro Sánchez), and C)Being a conspiracy put in place by elites to attract conspiracy believers and thus control dissidence e.g./ “Vox rascan la superficie pq no sé atreven a indagar a la iglesia católica al rey, etc, con respecto a la agenda 2030....no se atreven....me huele a disidencia controlada” (sic.; “Vox only scratches the surfice because they don’t dare to look into the catholic church, the king, etc. In regards of the 2030 Agenda... I don’t know... It seems like controlled dissidence”).

As is expected there was a significant difference in the likes received by pro and anti Vox messages $t(787) = -2.5, p = .01, d = 0.26$ with pro-Vox messages having more likes ($M = 9.8, SD = 35.3$) than anti-Vox messages ($M = 0.87, SD = 1.13$) but no difference in replies $t(787) = -0.28, p = .77$. When analyzing anti-Vox messages we

found that those criticizing the political party for its hateful speech have significantly $t(787) = 2.34, p = .02, d = 0.46$ less likes ($M = 0.58, SD = 0.73$) than those criticizing them for not being conspiranoic enough ($M = 1.10, SD = 1.32$). This results suggest, again, that there is indeed a dog-whistle being sound and that it is being heard quite clearly by conspiracy believers, as well as that this kind of criticism is better accepted than other kind of criticism.

4 Conclusions

We have found all the tell-tale signs of whistle-dogs politics. It is clear to see how this video uses encoded imagery and messages with two distinctive ends. One is to either suggest a message or to change the meaning of it. An example of this would be when the video shows a biology poster of biological sex while putting forward the narrative that teaching gender theory is an act of “indoctrination.” The other one is to sing siren songs to fringe groups, as when we see a Muslim woman caressing her pregnant belly. Although they may appear to commit similar functions, they are, however, not identical. The first example uses truisms, in this case that there are only two sexes, to make the recipient of the message arrive, hopefully, at a desired conclusion, which in this example would be that therefore gender theory is just an ideological doctrine and not a scientific theory. It’s, at its heart, still a persuasion technique. On the other hand, the second use makes no attempt to persuade the receiver, on the contrary, it tries to stay hidden from those unaware of its existence. Its real function is more akin to an identifier, an audiovisual secret handshake of recognition. In the example above it is just signaling that they “know”, or understand, of the danger of Muslims replacing white conservatives.

At the same time we observe how the most fringe opinions, such as the one that islamists are trying to replace white Europeans or that Bill Gates is trying to control the

world, are always implied but never explicitly said or put forward. This is the key element that makes dog-whistle thrive, possible deniability. It would be akin to political suicide expressing this opinion in an open explicit way since the majority of the population would oppose it. However the need to reach fringe, niche demographics, especially for small extremist parties makes it a necessity, thus the use of dog-whistles.

On the topic of reaching specific demographics, it's also important to point out that not everyone targeted believes or is even aware of all of the conspiracies present in the video. At the same time, not everyone is on the same step of the radicalization staircase. Dog-whistles, however, allow for the sending of a message with multiple narratives that can either work independently or in tandem to form a complete narrative. For example, when watching this video, a particular receiver may oppose feminism, but have no concerns with Islamic migrants. In this case, the user will hear loud and clear the dog-whistle related to feminism, and possibly agree that that feminism is in opposition of "traditional family values". Another receiver, who also believes that in the great replacement theory would hear both dog-whistles and form a conjunct narrative. In this case, that feminism are in opposition to "traditional family values" due to them being part of the conspiracy to replace white Europeans. This could help satiate the need for cognitive closure, which is associated with right-wing political orientations (Chirumbolo, 2002).

This being said, it would be important to notice that even though the receiver may not yet be able to hear the dog-whistle, he/she is still watching the video and perceiving the stimuli, therefore associations between concepts begin to form and thus they start to become normalized. This can be clearly seen, for example, inside the incel community with the journey between being blue-pilled to red-pilled to black-pilled (Rouda & Siegel, 2020). This coded language makes reference to how incels usually

start by having quite mainstream opinions, which would be referred by the community to being blue-pilled, but by spending time with other incels they start to normalize extreme behaviors and narratives where society is to blame for their problems (red-pilled) after which they end up believing that women are genetically programmed to like a specific type of man and that they have no way to change that, since no matter what they do they can never augment their attractiveness which is solely determined by genetics as well (black-pilled).

The final defining characteristic of dog-whistles, which is the creation of an us-versus-them paradigm, is also present in both the intra-narratives and the overall narrative. The overall “us” always stays the same, people who support traditional, conservative European values, although the particular “us” can adopt a myriad of forms such as parents, patriots or workers. This is mainly done to try to reach the biggest possible audience. The “them” is ever changing for two reasons. First, because societies are evolving entities and therefore perceived threats will evolve and change, and secondly because they are casting a wide net that includes as many prejudices as possible. This wouldn't normally be possible with traditional persuasion techniques due to both the backlash generated, however dog-whistles makes it feasible.

From a social psychology perspective there seems to be multiple ways to explain the efficacy of this tactic, and we hypothesized that some of the following may be taking place. Holt and Silverstein (1989) argued that a clear enemy is necessary to solidify a clear political group identity. Based on the social identity hypothesis (Tajfel, 2010a), he argues that in order to create a clear in-group identity, a clear out-group identity needs to be created. In fact, Carl Schmitt (2007) argues that a friend-enemy relationship is at the essence of politics. In this case study we see how they try to reach a large group of identities for both the in-group (e.g./parents, whites, conservatives) and the out-

group (e.g./feminists, climate change activists, the LGBTQ+ community) which are always portrayed as clear enemies in direct opposition to the in-group and its goals. At the same time we found evidence of a clear us-versus-them populist mentality in the comments.

At the same time, what this narrative generates is a comparative about the status and well-being with other groups, which leads to mistrust and suspicion about the other party motives (Fiske, 2011). Other authors (Van Prooijen & Van Lange, 2014) argue that what they truly generate is out-group paranoia due to a hierarchical trust dilemma, which is an asymmetrical power or status relationship. In any case, the objective is clear: to create political and social anxiety (e.g./a multitude of muslim immigrants are illegally crossing the border coming for you) in order to justify or make more palatable their extremist agenda (e.g./we need to prohibit muslim immigration; Rossi, 2017; Barreto et al., 2011). How this work can be explained in multiple ways. The terror management theory (Pyszczynski, Greenberg, and Solomon, 2003), according to which, when people are faced with impending death they are compelled to the construction and defense of cultural ideologies that guarantees a sort of immortality. Even though the narrative here doesn't directly propose the death of the receiver, it does put forward the idea that white conservative Spaniards are under threat, which may be enough to activate the defenses of the receiver as evidence in the following comment "(...) NOS LLEVAN A LA DESTRUCCION DE LA CIVILIZACION OCCIDENTAL, VOX ES EL UNICO QUE NOS PUEDE SALVAR" (they [referring to progressive politicians] are leading us to the destruction of western civilization, Vox is the only one who can save us). Another way could be that by generating distrust there is a demand for institutional safeguards (Lewis & Weigert, 1985) which can then be used to either further pursue the targeting of marginalized groups or, at the very least, gain more political power and

credit as well as legitimizing those fringe views. A good example of this can be seen in the comment that states "(...) inmigración ilegal, menas, delincuentes, extranjeros (...) Endurecer código Penal para todo tipo de delincuencia (...) primero los españoles" (sic; ilegal immigration, menas [non accompanied underage foreigners], criminals, foreigners (...)) make the penal code stricter for all delinquency (...) first the spaniards)

According to the uncertainty-identity theory (Hogg, 2000) people are highly motivated to reduce self-uncertainty. Group identity is a way to reduce uncertainty, and it is especially a good strategy when groups have a high perceived entitativity (Hogg, Meehan & Farquharson, 2010) which may entice the creation of prototypical, prescriptive group identities which could be exemplified in the following comment "(...) a nosotros que nos dejen (..) la caza, los toros la Semana Santa, nuestra religión, nuestras tradiciones (...)" which translates as "(...) leave us hunting, bullfighting easter, our religion (...)".

Another interesting point to notice is that this kind of norm-violation narrative can induce perception of power (Hinkin and Schriesheim, 1989; Van Kleef et al., 2011). And, not only that, since it is framed as having a prosocial goal (i.e./ to protect the wellbeing and survival of western European culture) it also fuels power affordance (Van Kleef et al., 2012). There is also suggestive evidence (Van Prooijen & Van Lange, 2014) that individuals who have a disadvantaged position (one of the main targets of the far-right) are more likely to afford power to norm violators. We observe evidence of this empowerment in comments such as "VOLERA ESPAÑA A SER UN SITIO MARAVILLOSO (...)" (sic.; "Spain will be a wonderful place again")

At the same time System Justification Theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994) argues that there is an ideological motive to justify existing social order, which seems to be particularly strong in those in lower hierarchical positions (Jost, Banaji & Nosek, 2004). If a

cognitive dissonance arises when examining his/her self-perceived value and that which he/she currently has, the narrative here proposed is able to offer various scapegoats (e.g./feminism, muslims, Bill Gates, ...) that doesn't challenge the existing social order. At the same time, for those in risk of social exclusion, expressions of ethno-centrism can become a means of boosting their social identity (Greitemeyer, 2012) while satisfying the need to belong to a group of like-minded people (Tajfel, 2010b). A good example is the following comment which alludes to the generalized problem that Spain has with political corruption and unemployment "(...) tendremos MÁS RUINA, MAS CORRUPCIÓN, MENOS VALORES Y TRADICIONES, MÁS PARO Y MISERIA (...) NO LO VAMOS A CONSENTIR LOS ESPAÑOLES (...)" which translates as "(...) we will have more ruin, more corruption, less values and traditions, more unemployment and misery (...) we Spaniards wont consent to it (...)".

The constant use of fear and anxiety inducing narratives of intergroup contexts and relationships throughout the video may also help to frame the images shown since it will help process uncertain or ambiguous social information about an out-group in a way that is consistent with previous stereotypes (Wilder & Simon, 2001). In fact some authors (Mummendey, Klink & Brown, 2001) go beyond that and argue that the narrative doesn't even have to be fear or anxiety inducing, every comparison between groups will automatically produce enemy-oriented cognition. The following comment explicitly mention that fear, "Si no paramos a los globalistas estamos perdidos, pues nos esperaba hambre y pobreza (...)" ("If we don't stop the globalists there is no hope, for only hunger and poverty await us").

From a cultural standpoint individualistic cultures, even those which may not be extremely individualistic, such as the Spanish one, encourages distinctiveness and tolerates deviance, which may lead to a perception of uniqueness and autonomy (Kim

& Markus, 1999; Kim & Sherman, 2008) as shown in the comment that states “ Por fin alguien que dices las putas cosas claras (...)” (At last someone who says things as they fucking are”)

Finally, we would like to point out that due to the nature of dog-whistles it is impossible to say for certain when one is in place. After all, plausible deniability is the key thing of this tactic. What we can, however, see a general pattern of behavior from all the parts implicated that does seem to suggest this political strategy is being played.

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