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Conspiracism and Political Conflict, edited by Manuela Caiani, Marco Solinas and Hans-Jörg Trenz, Palgrave Macmillan, 2026, 338 pp., ISBN 978-3-032-13932-0 (hardback), ISBN 978-3-032-13933-7 (eBook), DOI: 10.1007/978-3-032-13933-7

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Conspiracism and Political Conflict, edited by Manuela Caiani, Marco Solinas and Hans-Jörg Trenz, is a remarkably generative contribution to the study of contemporary political antagonism. Its central achievement lies not only in reframing conspiracism as a political resource embedded in processes of mobilisation, conflict, communication and collective action, but also in offering a conceptual vocabulary capable of structuring future research across multiple domains of political sociology. The editors' decision to shift the analytical focus from the psychological motivations behind conspiracy beliefs to the political uses of conspiracism is both timely and theoretically productive. It opens a space for scholars to examine conspiracism as a repertoire of collective action, and to explore how conspiratorial frames become embedded in political agendas, mobilisation strategies and struggles over legitimacy.

This reframing allows conspiracism to be understood as a dynamic and adaptable set of discursive tools that political actors mobilise strategically. The conceptual chapters demonstrate how conspiratorial frames shape relations of power, legitimacy and participation, and how they challenge institutional authority by introducing a form of epistemic conflict centred on the struggle over who has the authority to establish what counts as knowledge and truth. This insight is particularly promising for future empirical work. It suggests the need for research capable of tracing how epistemic claims circulate across media ecosystems, how they are amplified algorithmically, and how they are appropriated by actors with divergent ideological backgrounds. The book thus provides a theoretical foundation for studying conspiracism not as a static belief system but as a dynamic field of epistemic contestation.

The empirical breadth of the volume reinforces its theoretical ambitions. By covering journalism, democratic institutions, electoral campaigns, political elites, social media and far-right mobilisation, the editors assemble a framework that travels across political arenas and national contexts. This breadth is not merely

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descriptive; it points towards a research agenda attentive to the circulation, adaptation and transformation of conspiratorial repertoires across scales. For scholars interested in transnational political dynamics, the volume offers a compelling basis for multi-sited research capable of examining how conspiratorial narratives migrate, mutate and acquire new political functions in different environments.

The section on the far right is particularly rich in future research potential. It shows how conspiratorial narratives enable far-right actors to connect issues that might otherwise appear unrelated, incorporating climate change, gender, public health, globalisation and supranational governance into broader narratives about hidden elites and corrupted institutions. These claims may be articulated at national or local levels, but they also assume supranational forms, including Eurasianism, pan-European or ethnocentric conceptions of Europe, and civilisational projects centred on transnational solidarity. This flexibility suggests several empirical pathways: comparative studies of issue expansion, analyses of cross-platform discursive adaptation, and investigations into how far-right actors translate global narratives into domestic political idioms.

Within this section, the chapter by Manuela Caiani and Nicolò Pennucci on far-right climate scepticism stands out as an exemplary illustration of how conspiratorial repertoires operate across issue fields. Their analysis of social-media communication across seven European countries demonstrates how environmental issues are selectively reframed through nationalist, economic, anti-globalist and anti-elite narratives. This chapter alone opens several promising avenues for future research, including longitudinal studies of environmental conspiracism, cross-country comparisons of far-right ecological discourse, and analyses of how environmental narratives intersect with broader anti-liberal repertoires.

The concluding chapter by Hans-Jörg Trenz introduces the concept of the master frame, arguing that conspiracy narratives can connect actors who remain socially and ideologically divided. This capacity to provide a substitute for ideological cohesion is analytically powerful and offers a conceptual tool for studying coalition formation in fragmented political environments. The related notion of conspiracy coalitions is equally promising, capturing how diverse political preferences and organisational structures can be temporarily aligned through shared conspiratorial narratives. These concepts invite empirical work on the organisational durability of such coalitions, the conditions under which episodic convergence becomes sustained cooperation, and the role of digital infrastructures in facilitating cross-ideological alignment.

This conceptual apparatus is particularly relevant for analysing Red-Brownism, even though the volume does not treat it as a central category. The theoretical contributions offer a robust basis for understanding how Red-Brown convergence occurs. Actors traditionally located on the radical left and radical right may remain profoundly divided on many issues while converging around selected antagonisms such as hostility towards liberal institutions, globalisation, supranational governance, established elites, mainstream media or expert authority. Conspiracism facilitates precisely this form of selective convergence because it does not require actors to overcome all ideological differences. Shared constructions of hidden power and common enemies provide sufficient connective tissue for cooperation, mobilisation or mutual legitimation.

At the same time, the conceptual tools developed in the volume are equally valuable for analysing other forms of anti-liberal convergence that increasingly shape contemporary political ecologies. Neoeurasianism, for instance, offers a transnational ideological space in which anti-liberal, anti-globalist and civilisational narratives circulate across actors who would otherwise remain ideologically distant. Deep ecology, when radicalised and detached from its philosophical foundations, can similarly become a site of convergence between anti-modernist left-wing currents and far-right critiques of liberal cosmopolitanism. Moreover, the growing prominence of elite-critique narratives — often originating in investigative journalism or whistleblowing, but subsequently expanded into conspiratorial interpretations — provides fertile ground for cross-ideological alignment. Cases such as the Epstein network, the controversies surrounding pharmaceutical governance including the so-called Pfizergate, and other scandals that begin as empirical inquiries but evolve into expansive

narratives of systemic corruption illustrate how epistemic antagonism can become a shared political resource across otherwise incompatible ideological milieus.

From a research perspective, these dynamics suggest the value of studying anti-liberal convergence not as a set of ideological hybrids but as coalitional formations structured by epistemic antagonism. They invite empirical work capable of tracing how these formations emerge, dissolve and reappear across different political contexts, how they travel transnationally, and how they are sustained by digital infrastructures that facilitate cross-ideological circulation of grievances. The volume thus provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical research on anti-liberal convergence, cross-ideological cooperation and the dynamics of political realignment, offering scholars a framework that can be extended to multiple emerging configurations beyond Red-Brownism.

The democratic implications of these dynamics are significant, and the volume's treatment of them is both measured and generative. While conspiracism contributes to polarisation, distrust in institutions, hostility towards journalism and expertise, hate speech and political violence, the editors avoid deterministic conclusions. They note that resistance to extremist mobilisation can generate new coalitions, reinforce social cohesion and strengthen demands for evidence-based journalism and public debate. This opens an important empirical agenda: studying counter-mobilisation, examining how democratic actors respond to conspiratorial narratives, and analysing the conditions under which epistemic resilience can be fostered.

Overall, *Conspiracism and Political Conflict* succeeds not only in repositioning conspiracism as a significant component of political action and conflict, but in offering a conceptual vocabulary capable of structuring future research. Its most important contribution lies in demonstrating that conspiracism has become part of the infrastructure of political conflict, capable of constructing enemies, challenging epistemic authority, bridging disconnected grievances and facilitating temporary coalitions. For scholars of political sociology, the volume provides a theoretically rich and empirically suggestive foundation for investigating the increasingly porous boundaries of anti-liberal politics, including Red-Brown configurations, and for developing new analytical tools to understand the transformation of political antagonism in contemporary democracies.