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Article

## Conspiracy Beliefs, Misinformation, Social Media Platforms, and Protest Participation

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### Abstract

Protest has long been associated with left-wing actors and left-wing causes. However, right-wing actors also engage in protest. Are right-wing actors mobilized by the same factors as those actors on the left? This article uses cross-national survey data (i.e., US, UK, France, and Canada) gathered in February 2021 to assess the role of misinformation, conspiracy beliefs, and the use of different social media platforms in explaining participation in marches or demonstrations. We find that those who use Twitch or TikTok are twice as likely to participate in marches or demonstrations, compared to non-users, but the uses of these platforms are more highly related to participation in right-wing protests than left-wing protests. Exposure to misinformation on social media and beliefs in conspiracy theories also increase the likelihood of participating in protests. Our research makes several important contributions. First, we separate right-wing protest participation from left-wing protest participation, whereas existing scholarship tends to lump these together. Second, we offer new insights into the effects of conspiracy beliefs and misinformation on participation using cross-national data. Third, we examine the roles of emerging social media platforms such as Twitch and TikTok (as well as legacy platforms such as YouTube and Facebook) to better understand the differential roles that social media platforms play in protest participation.

### Keywords

conspiracy; cross-national; Facebook; misinformation; protest; social media; TikTok; Twitch; YouTube

### Issue

This article is part of the issue “Protesting While Polarized: Digital Activism in Contentious Times” edited by Homero Gil de Zúñiga (University of Salamanca / Pennsylvania State University / Diego Portales University), Isabel Inguanzo (University of Salamanca), and Alberto Ardèvol-Abreu (Universidad de La Laguna).

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### 1. Introduction

Protest has long been associated with left-wing actors (Boulianne et al., 2019). Studies tend to focus on left-wing causes and actors, including the climate strike, Black Lives Matter, and women’s rights (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, et al., 2020; Boulianne, Lalancette, et al., 2020; Fisher, 2018). However, right-wing protests are growing in number and size (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2016; Vüllers & Hellmeier, 2022). We do not know if right-wing actors are mobilized by the same factors as those on the left. On January 6, 2021, rioters stormed the Capitol Building in the US. This event led to a good deal of

speculation about the role of misinformation, conspiracy beliefs, and social media in protest participation. In addition, there is ample debate about whether such events are specific to the US context or whether misinformation, conspiracy theories, and social media have consistent roles in protest in other political contexts.

We test these theories using a representative sample of citizens in four Western democracies (US, UK, France, and Canada). The survey data were gathered in February 2021 to examine the roles of misinformation, conspiracy beliefs, and the use of different social media platforms in explaining protest participation. We find that using Twitch or TikTok doubles the

odds of participating in marches or demonstrations. For those engaged in right-wing protests, using these platforms triples the odds of participating in marches or demonstrations. Conspiracy beliefs are significantly correlated with protest participation, but slightly more for those on the right than the left. Misinformation on social media relates to those who protest and have left-wing views, but misinformation on social media does not influence right-wing protest once conspiracy beliefs are considered in the multivariate regression model. In terms of cross-national differences, we find few variations in the roles of these key variables in protest participation, suggesting our model is robust across a variety of Western democratic contexts.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Platforms and Protest Participation

Digital media have long been associated with protests and social movements (Earl & Kimport, 2011). Digital media reduce the costs of acquiring information and are also critical for their networking features which help individuals find and connect with like-minded groups. The newness of this technology can offer protesters a safe space to organize outside of state surveillance (Howard & Hussain, 2013; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012). However, this advantage is temporary as states (and sometimes corporations) can quickly adapt and then use a variety of overt and covert digital tactics to repress protest activities (Earl et al., 2022). Social media companies differ in their support or resistance to digital surveillance and repression on their sites (Earl et al., 2022). While the newness of the technology may intimidate older and less-skilled users, these new tools are easily picked up by a generation of youth who grew up using digital media. As such, digital media are particularly important for youth and youth mobilization (Boulianne & Theocharis, 2020).

After more than 25 years (Boulianne, 2020), the role of digital media in civic and political participation has increased and expanded beyond youth. Nonetheless, the theory of emerging technology continues to be relevant for understanding how technology is used for protest participation. For example, in newer studies, the use of social media, a type of digital media, is correlated with protest participation (see a review of 17 studies in Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, et al., 2020). We use this theory of emerging technology to understand the rise of new social media platforms and how they relate to protest participation. Our core argument is that the newness of a platform will make it an attractive tool for protest organizations; as a result, we expect to see a positive correlation between the use of newer platforms and protest participation. This effect is further enabled by the youthfulness of the platform user group. Protest participation is more popular among young people compared to older people (Boulianne et al., 2019). The combination

of youthful networks and youth-preferred forms of participation help explain correlations between social media use and protests.

We examine two emerging social media platforms, Twitch and TikTok, to compare how the use of these specific platforms differs from older social media platforms (e.g., Facebook and YouTube) in terms of protest participation. Few studies have compared platform-specific effects. Valenzuela et al. (2014) compare Twitter and Facebook, finding that Facebook has stronger effects on protest participation than Twitter, using a sample of Chilean youth. They explain these differences in terms of Facebook's stronger network ties compared to Twitter's weaker ties. In another study of Chile, they find that Facebook has a stronger effect on collective efficacy compared to Twitter, affirming the distinctiveness of these platforms in their effects on collective action (Halpern et al., 2017). Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, et al. (2020) also compare Facebook and Twitter using an American sample. They find that Twitter is a more consistent predictor of participation in marches or demonstrations, as well as participation in specific events (Women's March and March for Science). They explain these findings in terms of Twitter being composed of ties among political elites, news media, and social movement organizations (also see Yarchi et al., 2021). As such, the effects of specific platforms may depend on the national context.

TikTok and Twitch use is not widespread among the public. Recent Pew Research suggests that 12% of Americans use TikTok and 6% use Twitch (Shearer & Mitchell, 2021). Both platforms are video-based platforms intended for entertainment—video game playing for Twitch and dancing on TikTok. In the 2020 US presidential election, young K-pop fans used TikTok to coordinate efforts to purchase tickets to a Trump rally, then pranked the organizers by not showing up to the event (Lorenz et al., 2020); but the youth had been using this platform to express their discontent with Trump even prior to this critical event (Literat & Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019). In 2020, activists used Twitch to document Black Lives Matter protests to counter the legacy media portrayals; the platform has also been used to fundraise in support of this cause (Browning, 2020). In Canada, the New Democratic Party (left-wing party) leader Jagmeet Singh and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (left-wing US congresswoman) squared off in a video game streamed on Twitch in November 2020. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez organized similar events on Twitch to connect with youth about politics in the lead-up to the 2020 US presidential election (Canadian Press, 2020). As such, these new platforms are being used by civic and political actors to mobilize citizens.

The video-based platforms are similar to YouTube, a legacy social media platform. As such, we might expect similarities in the roles of these platforms for protest participation. Early research suggests that the use of YouTube for campaign information did not influence offline participation in campaign activities in the 2012

US presidential election (Towner, 2013; Towner & Muñoz, 2018). However, this research was done when this platform was not new, and citizens' participation was measured in terms of campaign activities, rather than the youth-preferred protest participation.

Guinaudeau et al. (2021) compare TikTok and YouTube, pointing out their similarities in terms of algorithmic recommendations. Both platforms curate from what is popular on the site, as opposed to what is popular among one's network, and deliver curated content to users who do not have a registered account on the platform. Munger and Phillips (2022) claim that the algorithmic recommendations have favored right-wing content. They show that the posting and viewership of right-wing content have increased in the past few years. Their data suggest this is "the next step in a long line of attempts by both conservatives and the far-right to take advantage of emerging communications technologies" (Munger & Phillips, 2022, p. 190). Yet, academic research has focused on YouTube use for left-wing causes, including the Occupy Movement and the Kony 2012 campaign (Kligler-Vilenchik & Thorson, 2016; Thorson et al., 2013).

As such, we consider whether the role of these platforms may differ for right-wing versus left-wing participation in marches or demonstrations. Our examples about Twitch and TikTok relate to left-wing causes. The implications of these platforms on right-wing protests may be given less academic and media attention. Given the minimal research separating types of protest, we do not offer a hypothesis on this topic but propose a research question:

H1: The use of new social media platforms (TikTok or Twitch) increases the likelihood of participation in marches or demonstrations.

RQ1: To what extent does the use of new social media platforms differ with respect to their association with protest participation for those on the right versus the left?

## 2.2. Misinformation on Social Media and Protest Participation

Political knowledge scholarship suggests that, when it comes to knowledge about current events and affairs, people can be sorted into three categories: informed (holding factual information), uninformed (lacking factual information), and misinformed (holding factually inaccurate information without knowing so). Being informed has long been considered an antecedent of political participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Verba et al., 1995). When people know what is going on, they are more likely to get involved as they know they can get involved and, thus, contribute to political processes (Zaller, 1992). While some debates exist about how much knowledge one needs to participate in politics, scholars generally agree that people at least need to be some-

what informed to further engage in political processes (Verba et al., 1995).

Interestingly, the positive link established between political knowledge (being informed) and political participation also applies to misinformation (being misinformed) and political participation. Indeed, being misinformed is conceptually different from being uninformed (Kuklinski et al., 2000; White et al., 2006). While the latter means that people do not know what is going on (and thus may not be motivated to further engage in politics), misinformed individuals believe they are informed, but they confidently hold inaccurate information. Thus, logically speaking, the path of political knowledge to political participation can also apply to the path of misinformation to political participation (White et al., 2006), as one would still believe one knows enough (though it is often a false perception) to engage in political processes. In this context, recent studies report that one's self-perception of knowledge (subjective knowledge) is an important driver of political participation (Lee et al., 2022; Yamamoto & Yang, 2022). Furthermore, because misinformed individuals are likely to think that others are getting their facts wrong, they are likely to actively engage in politics to correct others and influence political processes (White et al., 2006). Scholars have indeed found that belief in false facts is associated with political participation (Lee, 2017; White et al., 2006), but other studies have not found misinformation and political participation to be significantly related (Valenzuela et al., 2019). We propose the following:

H2: Self-assessed exposure to misinformation increases the likelihood of participation in marches or demonstrations.

## 2.3. Conspiracy Belief and Protest Participation

In addition to misinformation, another newly emerging factor that contributes to right-wing protest is a belief in conspiracy theories. While the role of conspiracy beliefs in right-wing protests has been discussed in the press and other reports (e.g., McCarthy, 2021; Program on Extremism, 2021), the empirical research linking these two remains relatively scarce.

Conspiracy theory refers to "an explanation of historical, ongoing, or future events that cites as a main causal factor a group of powerful persons, the conspirators, acting in secret for their own benefit against the common good" (Uscinski, 2018, p. 235). The belief in conspiracy theories is harmful to democracy because it hampers rational political discussion and the decision-making process (McKay & Tenove, 2021). It also degrades trust in political institutions (Mari et al., 2022). Against this background, numerous studies focus on exploring the factors that predict conspiracy beliefs, such as right-wing ideology (e.g., Galliford & Furnham, 2017; Min, 2021; van Prooijen et al., 2015; Walter & Drochon, 2020) and right-wing authoritarianism (e.g., Hartman et al.,

2021; Swami, 2012). Despite a plethora of research on “antecedents” of conspiracy beliefs, less research exists on the “consequences” of such beliefs.

Many studies find that endorsing conspiracy beliefs is negatively associated with *conventional* political participation activities (e.g., Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020; Jolley & Douglas, 2014; Uscinski & Parent, 2014), as conspiracy theories tend to view the “political system and its institutions as part of a wider network of conspirators engaged in malevolent activities” (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020, p. 553). Studies also find that endorsing conspiracy beliefs positively correlates with support for or willingness to engage in illegal, violent, or non-institutional political behaviors such as protests (Imhoff et al., 2021; Uscinski & Parent, 2014; Vegetti & Littvay, 2022). While little empirical research exists on conspiracy beliefs and actual engagement in protest behavior (rather than “intention for engagement”; cf. Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020), we propose the following hypothesis:

H3: Holding conspiracy beliefs increases the likelihood of participation in marches or demonstrations.

While we expect misinformation and conspiracy beliefs to be associated with protest participation, such effects are likely to be more pronounced among those who identify as right-wing. That is because misinformation and/or conspiracy theories tend to be endorsed by right-wingers (Douglas et al., 2015; van Prooijen et al., 2015). Studies also find that exposure to or belief in misinformation and/or conspiracy theories tend to be positively correlated with support for right-wing populist parties (e.g., Hameleers, 2021; van Kessel et al., 2021). To be clear, we are neither arguing that all misinformation/conspiracy theories are right-wing oriented nor that left-wing people are immune to misinformation stories/conspiracy beliefs (van Prooijen et al., 2015). Rather, the link between misinformation or conspiracy beliefs and protest participation may differ for those on the right compared to those on the left. We propose a research question:

RQ2: To what extent do misinformation and conspiracy beliefs differ in their association with protest participation for those on the right versus the left?

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Sample

Our study draws on the results of a survey administered to an online panel by Lightspeed Kantar Group in February 2021. Our full sample includes 6,068 respondents from four countries: Canada ( $n = 1,568$ ), the UK ( $n = 1,500$ ), France ( $n = 1,500$ ), and the US ( $n = 1,500$ ). We employed quotas to ensure the composition of the online panel matched census data for each country (for a direct comparison of sample and official statistics, see Boulianne, 2022). The survey was administered

in both English and French in Canada, in English in the UK and US, and in French in France. The project was approved (File No. 101856) in accordance with Canada’s Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans.

#### 3.2. Measures

Table 1 outlines the descriptive statistics for each variable as well as the question wording and response options. For platform use, misinformation exposure, and ideology, we recoded the original response options to create dummy variables. The approach matches theories and existing research as well as addresses skewed response distributions. In terms of cross-national differences, the largest differences relate to political interest, identifying as right-wing, holding conspiracy views, and participating in marches or demonstrations. US respondents report the highest averages for political interest and holding conspiracy views (cf. Walter & Drochon, 2020) compared to other countries. In this sample, there are more right-wing Americans than right-wing citizens in other countries. Canadian respondents were more trusting of their government compared to respondents in other countries (also see Edelman, 2021). Finally, respondents from France were the most likely to report having participated in a march or demonstration (also see Vassallo & Ding, 2016). For protests on the right versus left, we created this variable using a combination of political ideology and participation in marches or demonstrations. If participants identified as left-wing and reported protesting, they were coded as one on this variable (all others are zero). If the participants identified as right-wing and reported protesting, they were coded as one (others are coded as zero).

### 4. Findings

Table 2 presents the bivariate correlations among all variables. The bivariate correlations show that use of either Twitch ( $r = 0.274$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) or TikTok ( $r = 0.272$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) is significantly correlated with protest participation (Table 2). The uses of these two platforms are the strongest correlates of participation in marches or demonstrations. These variables matter more than conspiracy beliefs, exposure to misinformation, age, political interest, or political ideology.

The bivariate correlations also show that self-assessed exposure to misinformation on social media is correlated with the uses of these two platforms ( $r = 0.202$  and  $0.253$ , respectively;  $p < 0.001$ ). However, of the four social media platforms, Facebook use is the most strongly correlated with exposure to misinformation on social media ( $r = 0.414$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Conspiracy beliefs and misinformation on social media are weakly and positively correlated ( $r = 0.048$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Conspiracy beliefs are negatively correlated with trust in government ( $r = -0.076$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, the uses of these

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics by country.

	Min–Max	All	US	UK	France	Canada
Education ( <i>Bachelor’s degree or more</i> )	0 or 1	33%	39%	34%	26%	32%
Females	0 or 1	51%	51%	49%	51%	52%
Age	18–97	48.33 (17.37)	48.36 (18.69)	48.11 (17.03)	48.50 (16.30)	48.37 (17.40)
In politics, people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on this scale?						
<i>0 to 3 are left-wing</i>	0 or 1	18%	17%	16%	19%	21%.
<i>7 to 10 are right-wing</i>	0 or 1	26%	35%	25%	25%	19%
How interested would you say you are in politics? ( <i>not at all, not very, fairly, very</i> )	1–4	2.52 (0.96)	2.73 (0.99)	2.51 (0.94)	2.29 (0.97)	2.54 (0.91)
During the past 12 months, how often have you used the following sites, apps, or services?						
<i>Twitch</i>	0 or 1	18%	23%	15%	18%	17%
<i>TikTok</i>	0 or 1	25%	28%	24%	21%	26%
<i>YouTube</i>	0 or 1	86%	81%	87%	86%	90%
<i>Facebook</i>	0 or 1	80%	77%	77%	81%	85%
How much confidence, if any, do you have in each of the following to act in the best interests of the public? National/federal government ( <i>not at all, a little, a moderate amount, a lot, a great deal</i> )	1–5	2.19 (1.14)	2.30 (1.20)	2.04 (1.06)	2.05 (1.12)	2.36 (1.13)
Conspiracy beliefs*	1–4	3.01	3.13	2.94	3.06	2.94
(a) I think many very important things happen in the world, which the public is never informed about;		(0.66)	(0.66)	(0.64)	(0.65)	(0.65)
(b) I think that politicians usually do not tell us the true motives for their decisions;						
(c) I think that there are secret organizations that greatly influence political decisions. ( <i>Strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree</i> )						
The next questions will ask about misinformation on social media. By misinformation, we mean false or misleading information. In the past month, how often on social media have you seen someone share misinformation?	0 or 1	70%	73%	67%	66%	74%
During the past 12 months, have you done any of the following activities offline:						
(a) Participated in a march or street demonstration;	0 or 1	11%	12%	7%	16%	7%
(b) Left-wing protest created based on yes to both protest and left-wing ideology;	0 or 1	3%	3%	2%	5%	2%
(c) Right-wing protest created based on yes to both protest and right-wing ideology	0 or 1	4%	6%	3%	4%	2%

Notes: \* The source of conspiracy belief measures are Bruder et al. (2013) and Halpern et al. (2019); reliability is 0.768 for the full sample, 0.746 for the US, 0.772 for the UK, 0.756 for France, and 0.768 for Canada.

**Table 2.** Correlation matrix.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
Protest (1)	<i>r</i> <i>p</i>															
Twitch (2)	0.274 <0.001															
TikTok (3)	0.272 <0.001	0.522 <0.001														
YouTube (4)	0.097 <0.001	0.156 <0.001	0.206 <0.001													
Facebook (5)	0.083 <0.001	0.126 <0.001	0.179 <0.001	0.251 <0.001												
Trust in government (6)	0.209 <0.001	0.269 <0.001	0.245 <0.001	0.125 <0.001	0.099 <0.001											
Conspiracy beliefs (7)	0.060 <0.001	-0.032 0.012	-0.009 0.482	0.041 0.002	0.041 0.001	-0.076 <0.001										
Misinformation (8)	0.125 <0.001	0.202 <0.001	0.253 <0.001	0.230 <0.001	0.414 <0.001	0.129 <0.001	0.048 <0.001									
Bachelor's degree (9)	0.063 <0.001	0.076 <0.001	0.038 0.003	0.037 0.004	-0.011 0.382	0.146 <0.001	-0.072 <0.001	0.040 0.002								
Females (10)	-0.056 <0.001	-0.118 <0.001	0.021 0.098	-0.008 0.531	0.066 <0.001	-0.071 <0.001	0.014 0.262	0.038 0.003	-0.004 0.731							
Age (11)	-0.187 <0.001	-0.416 <0.001	-0.468 <0.001	-0.227 <0.001	-0.153 <0.001	-0.131 <0.001	0.086 <0.001	-0.231 <0.001	-0.029 0.023	-0.104 <0.001						
France (12)	0.093 <0.001	-0.004 0.734	-0.048 <0.001	-0.001 0.957	0.013 0.293	-0.069 <0.001	0.039 0.003	-0.057 <0.001	-0.082 <0.001	0.001 0.916	0.005 0.676					
UK (13)	-0.060 <0.001	-0.043 0.001	-0.010 0.457	0.022 0.080	-0.048 <0.001	-0.076 <0.001	-0.067 <0.001	-0.035 0.007	0.016 0.221	-0.020 0.125	-0.007 0.563	-0.328 <0.001				
Canada (14)	-0.061 <0.001	-0.020 0.114	0.010 0.440	0.065 <0.001	0.075 <0.001	0.089 <0.001	-0.070 <0.001	0.054 <0.001	-0.007 0.573	0.014 0.262	0.001 0.918	-0.338 <0.001	-0.338 <0.001			
Political interest (15)	0.164 <0.001	0.123 <0.001	0.097 <0.001	0.078 <0.001	0.004 0.733	0.325 <0.001	0.038 0.003	0.110 <0.001	0.189 <0.001	-0.177 <0.001	0.121 <0.001	-0.134 <0.001	-0.004 0.773	0.012 0.361		
Right-wing (16)	0.083 <0.001	0.139 <0.001	0.085 <0.001	-0.011 0.400	0.025 0.048	0.108 <0.001	0.116 <0.001	0.026 0.046	0.069 <0.001	-0.087 <0.001	0.033 0.009	-0.011 0.390	-0.010 0.458	-0.092 <0.001	0.204 <0.001	
Left-wing (17)	0.086 <0.001	-0.037 0.004	-0.012 0.353	0.062 <0.001	0.010 0.419	0.045 <0.001	-0.044 0.001	0.062 <0.001	0.074 <0.001	0.018 0.163	-0.011 0.375	0.010 0.453	-0.038 0.003	0.044 0.001	0.156 <0.001	-0.281 <0.001

platforms are highly correlated with age. Older people are far less likely to use these two platforms compared to young people ( $r = -0.416$  and  $-0.468$ , respectively;  $p < 0.001$ ). Older people are far less likely to report being exposed to misinformation on social media compared to young people ( $r = -0.231$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Moving on to the multivariate models (Table 3), we find that using Twitch (ExpB = 1.91,  $p < 0.001$ ) and TikTok (ExpB = 2.31,  $p < 0.001$ ) doubles the odds of participating in a march or demonstration (H1). In contrast, the use of legacy social media (YouTube or Facebook) does not relate to the likelihood of protest participation. Being exposed to misinformation on social media (ExpB = 1.41,  $p = 0.014$ ) and holding conspiracy beliefs (ExpB = 1.42,  $p < 0.001$ ) increase the odds of protest participation (H2, H3).

Do these variables matter more for protesting on the right versus protesting on the left? We find that Twitch (ExpB = 3.30,  $p < 0.001$ ) and TikTok (ExpB = 3.26,  $p < 0.001$ ) uses are more highly related to protest among right-wing citizens (RQ1). For those engaged in right-wing protests, using Twitch or TikTok triples the odds of participating in a march or demonstration. The use of YouTube is more strongly related to protest on the left compared to the right (ExpB = 2.34,  $p = 0.024$ ); in contrast, the use of Facebook is more strongly related to protest on the right compared to the left (ExpB = 2.10,  $p = 0.026$ ). Importantly, when we aggregate right- and left-wing protests (Table 3, first model), we find no relationship between legacy

social media platforms and protest. These significant relationships are observed when the data are disaggregated into left- versus right-wing protests.

Conspiracy beliefs are significantly correlated with right-wing citizens' participation in marches or demonstrations (ExpB = 1.59,  $p < 0.001$ ), but these beliefs do not have a significant role with left-wing protesters. Self-assessed exposure to misinformation on social media relates to left-wing protesters (ExpB = 1.69,  $p = 0.021$ ), but misinformation on social media does not influence right-wing protest once conspiracy beliefs are considered in the multivariate regression model (RQ2).

Cross-national differences are apparent with respect to participation in marches or demonstrations. Respondents from France are more likely to participate in marches or demonstrations compared to respondents from the US (ExpB = 2.58,  $p < 0.001$ ). Respondents from the UK and Canada do not differ from respondents from the US in terms of the likelihood of participating in protests. For left- versus right-wing protests, France respondents are more likely to participate in left-wing protests compared to US respondents (ExpB = 3.37,  $p < 0.001$ ). Canadian respondents are far less likely to participate in right-wing marches compared to US respondents (ExpB = 0.51,  $p = 0.003$ ).

We borrow a narrative from the US context and test this narrative about conspiracy beliefs, misinformation, and protest using a cross-national sample. Table 4 presents our models for each of the countries. We find

**Table 3.** Logistic regression of participation in marches or demonstrations.

	Participate in any marches or demonstrations in the past 12 months (pooled)				Right-wing and participate in marches				Left-wing and participate in marches			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	ExpB	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	ExpB	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	ExpB	<i>p</i> -value
Twitch	0.65	0.12	1.91	< 0.001	1.19	0.20	3.30	< 0.001	-0.48	0.22	0.62	0.033
TikTok	0.84	0.12	2.31	< 0.001	1.18	0.22	3.26	< 0.001	0.51	0.20	1.67	0.013
YouTube	0.35	0.22	1.43	0.101	-0.15	0.37	0.86	0.697	0.85	0.38	2.34	0.024
Facebook	0.12	0.15	1.12	0.442	0.74	0.33	2.10	0.026	-0.23	0.23	0.80	0.322
Trust in government	0.25	0.04	1.28	< 0.001	0.47	0.07	1.60	< 0.001	-0.05	0.07	0.95	0.513
Conspiracy beliefs	0.35	0.08	1.42	< 0.001	0.47	0.13	1.59	< 0.001	0.15	0.12	1.16	0.230
Misinformation	0.34	0.14	1.41	0.014	-0.05	0.24	0.95	0.826	0.52	0.23	1.69	0.021
Bachelor's degree	0.13	0.10	1.14	0.170	0.11	0.15	1.12	0.473	0.26	0.16	1.29	0.110
Females	-0.23	0.10	0.79	0.017	-0.25	0.16	0.78	0.108	0.04	0.16	1.05	0.783
Age	-0.02	0.00	0.98	< 0.001	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.511	-0.01	0.01	0.99	0.014
France	0.95	0.13	2.58	< 0.001	0.28	0.20	1.32	0.161	1.21	0.21	3.37	< 0.001
UK	-0.13	0.14	0.88	0.366	-0.09	0.21	0.91	0.669	-0.09	0.26	0.92	0.739
Canada	-0.26	0.14	0.77	0.063	-0.68	0.23	0.51	0.003	-0.02	0.25	0.98	0.938
Political interest	0.40	0.06	1.49	< 0.001	0.44	0.10	1.55	< 0.001	0.67	0.10	1.96	< 0.001
Right-wing	0.28	0.12	1.32	0.016								
Left-wing	0.84	0.12	2.33	< 0.001								
Model information	n = 6,034				n = 6,035				n = 6,035			
	Cox & Snell R-square = 0.133				Cox & Snell R-square = 0.092				Cox & Snell R-square = 0.025			

Note: Reference group are males, no post-secondary education, moderate or center, and from the US.



**Table 4.** Logistic regression of participation in marches or demonstrations for each country.

	US				UK			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	ExpB	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	ExpB	<i>p</i> -value
Twitch	0.81	0.25	2.24	0.001	0.62	0.30	1.86	0.038
TikTok	0.98	0.26	2.65	< 0.001	0.99	0.29	2.68	0.001
YouTube	-0.06	0.43	0.94	0.895	0.09	0.56	1.10	0.871
Facebook	0.19	0.32	1.21	0.561	0.40	0.40	1.49	0.317
Trust in government	0.34	0.08	1.40	< 0.001	0.47	0.11	1.61	< 0.001
Conspiracy beliefs	0.17	0.16	1.18	0.288	0.21	0.20	1.23	0.307
Misinformation	0.20	0.33	1.22	0.555	1.10	0.43	2.99	0.012
Bachelor's degree	0.37	0.20	1.45	0.065	0.31	0.23	1.36	0.189
Females	-0.15	0.21	0.86	0.470	-0.26	0.24	0.77	0.292
Age	-0.03	0.01	0.97	< 0.001	-0.02	0.01	0.98	0.055
Political interest	0.66	0.13	1.94	< 0.001	0.40	0.15	1.49	0.008
Right-wing	0.29	0.23	1.33	0.215	0.46	0.28	1.58	0.104
Left-wing	0.49	0.27	1.64	0.065	1.18	0.30	3.25	< 0.001
Model information	n = 1,490; Cox & Snell R-square = 0.212				n = 1,490; Cox & Snell R-square = 0.139			
	France				Canada			
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	ExpB	<i>p</i> -value	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	ExpB	<i>p</i> -value
Twitch	0.55	0.22	1.73	0.013	0.48	0.25	1.62	0.052
TikTok	0.80	0.21	2.23	< 0.001	0.65	0.25	1.92	0.008
YouTube	0.73	0.34	2.08	0.030	0.21	0.55	1.23	0.700
Facebook	-0.07	0.23	0.93	0.754	0.05	0.39	1.05	0.903
Trust in government	0.17	0.07	1.18	0.025	0.17	0.10	1.19	0.067
Conspiracy beliefs	0.46	0.13	1.58	< 0.001	0.21	0.17	1.24	0.202
Misinformation	0.23	0.19	1.26	0.224	0.59	0.37	1.81	0.106
Bachelor's degree	-0.07	0.18	0.93	0.703	0.17	0.22	1.18	0.445
Females	-0.27	0.16	0.77	0.098	-0.31	0.21	0.74	0.152
Age	0.00	0.01	1.00	0.697	-0.03	0.01	0.97	< 0.001
Political interest	0.34	0.09	1.40	< 0.001	0.26	0.13	1.29	0.054
Right-wing	0.06	0.20	1.06	0.773	0.18	0.27	1.19	0.512
Left-wing	1.18	0.19	3.24	< 0.001	0.20	0.25	1.22	0.421
Model information	n = 1,494; Cox & Snell R-square = 0.115				n = 1,560; Cox & Snell R-square = 0.078			

few variations in the roles of these key variables in protest participation. In all country-specific models, Twitch or TikTok use double the odds of protest participation (H1). Aside from YouTube use in France (ExpB = 2.08,  $p = 0.030$ ), none of the tests of legacy platforms is statistically significant. Self-assessed exposure to misinformation is a significant predictor of protest in the UK (ExpB = 2.99,  $p = 0.012$ ) but not in other countries (H2). Finally, conspiracy beliefs are a significant predictor of protest in France (ExpB = 1.58,  $p < 0.001$ ) but not in other countries (H3).

## 5. Discussion

Digital media have long been associated with protest and social movements because of the lower costs

of acquiring information as well as networking features that enable like-minded people to connect and then organize into collective action. Newer technologies have benefits for collective action in that their newness may help reduce digital surveillance and repression. While prior studies have established that social media and protest participation are correlated, this study builds on knowledge about platform-specific effects (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, et al., 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2014). Twitch and TikTok are newer platforms compared to Facebook and YouTube. This newness, as well as the youthful user groups who are predisposed towards alternative forms of civic participation, make these platforms ideal for coordinating collective action outside state surveillance. Academic literature (Literat

& Kligler-Vilenchik, 2019) and news media coverage (Browning, 2020; Lorenz et al., 2020) discuss the potential of these platforms for left-wing causes. We examine whether these platforms also have implications for right-wing causes. Indeed, we find that the use of these platforms triples the odds of participation in protest for those on the right. These greater effects support Munger and Phillips's (2022) claim that conservatives are taking advantage of new communication technologies to mobilize their supporters. Scholarship tends to be biased towards studying social media and left-wing causes (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, et al., 2020; Boulianne, Lalancette, et al., 2020; Kligler-Vilenchik & Thorson, 2016; Thorson et al., 2013; Valenzuela et al., 2014), but the potential of social media to inform and connect extends beyond these causes. In the case of TikTok and Twitch, those who identify as right-wing may be mobilized more so than those on the left. This finding is replicated in a representative online panel in four different Western democracies.

We also find that use of these platforms is a stronger predictor of protest participation than (self-assessed) exposure to misinformation on social media or holding conspiracy beliefs. While these factors increase the odds of protest participation, their roles are relatively small. We find that conspiracy beliefs are slightly more important for those on the right compared to those on the left, whereas exposure to misinformation is slightly more important for those on the left compared to those on the right. We show that the roles of conspiracy beliefs and exposure to misinformation on protest participation are quite consistent across the four countries studied.

While scholars have long argued that political knowledge increases political participation (Delli Carpini & Keeter, 1996; Verba et al., 1995), we find that self-assessed exposure to misinformation also increases participation. Believing false information could increase political participation (Lee, 2017; White et al., 2006), but this participation is motivated by flawed information. This pattern has serious implications for citizens and democracy. In particular, citizens may advocate for policies and support candidates who are, in fact, contrary to their best interests. While there is concern about this occurring on the right (e.g., Trump supporters), the survey findings suggest that this could also be an issue on the left (Imhoff et al., 2022).

Our study also considered the role of conspiracy beliefs and how these beliefs relate to protest participation. Conspiracy beliefs play a larger role for those who are right-wing and engage in protest. Our findings offer support for media narratives and descriptive research about the role of conspiracy beliefs in right-wing protests, e.g., the January 6th insurrection. As mentioned, holding conspiracy beliefs is harmful to democracy because it hampers rational political discussion and the decision-making process (McKay & Tenove, 2021) and degrades trust in political institutions (Mari et al., 2022). As illustrated by other research (e.g.,

Galliford & Furnham, 2017; Walter & Drochon, 2020), this issue is greater for those with right-wing ideologies. We have addressed a clear research gap in understanding how conspiracy beliefs correlate with protest participation (cf. Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020). Our research also addresses important gaps in the roles of different platforms, conspiracy beliefs, and exposure to misinformation on social media in the protest mobilization process in four countries.

We suggest several topics for further research. First, while scholarship on protest has treated social media as a predictor of protest (see literature review in Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, et al., 2020), we consider the relationship to be reciprocal in that social media can mobilize, but its use can also be an outcome. Protesters can use social media to document their participation in protest events (Boulianne, Lalancette, et al., 2020). In the case of police brutality in managing protests, protesters can use social media to document these events. Further research could employ a multi-wave panel to consider the reciprocal relationship using structural equation modeling. In addition, considering TikTok and Twitch, new research could consider what types of recruitment messages are effective in mobilizing platform users. Additional research could also examine the types of social ties cultivated on TikTok and Twitch and how these network features impact protest participation, as social media platforms' effects have been theorized in terms of network structures (Boulianne, Koc-Michalska, et al., 2020; Valenzuela et al., 2014). Yarchi et al. (2021) offer a useful framework for comparing platforms in terms of their network features, use of algorithms, and ability to construct group identities. While they compare Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp groups, this framework would be useful for understanding TikTok and Twitch. While we found similarities in TikTok and Twitch's effects, which supports our theory of newness, the differences between YouTube and Facebook compared to TikTok and Twitch may be explained by platform-specific affordances.

In addition, we propose new lines of research about misinformation and conspiracy beliefs. Specifically for misinformation, additional research should examine what types of fake news stories circulate on the different platforms (similar to Halpern et al., 2019; Valenzuela et al., 2019) and which types of fake news stories mobilize people to participate in unconventional political activities. In this article, we rely on self-reported exposure to misinformation, which is a limitation. We do not know for certain if the respondents viewed misinformation on social media. However, assessing the accuracy of exposure is tangential; if respondents believe they were exposed to misinformation and act accordingly, then misinformation becomes real in its outcomes (protest participation). For conspiracy beliefs, a line of questioning could explore some nuances about the agencies and actors involved in cover-ups and deception. Are these entities local, national, or international? Do these entities include government, multi-national corporations, or

media? We suspect that the choice of political activities may depend on who is implicated in these conspiracy theories.

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### Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

### Supplementary Material

Replication and data files are available at: <https://doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.20632605.v1>

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