



Kaunas University of Technology
Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities

**Macro-level Factors Influencing Conspiracy Theory
Acceptance in the Baltic and Central European States during
2020–2022**

Master's Final Degree Project

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Supervisor

Kaunas, 2024



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Public Policy and Security (6211JX044)

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Paulauskytė, Laima. Macro-level Factors Influencing Conspiracy Theory Acceptance in the Baltic and Central European States During 2020–2022. Master's Final Degree Project / supervisor prof. dr. Vaidas Morkevičius; Faculty of Social Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Kaunas University of Technology.

Study field and area (study field group): 02S (J02).

Keywords: conspiracy theory, macro-level factor, acceptance, Baltic states, Central European states.

Kaunas, 2024. 53 p.

Summary

Acceptance of conspiracy theory poses challenges on national and global level, making it an important topic to be studied in recent years. Nevertheless, the broad attention on individual level factors that influence conspiracy theory acceptance, macro-level factors are less identified especially in the context of the Baltic and Central European states posing a need to research in-depth and contribute to this study field. Therefore, the question arises what macro-level factors motivates conspiracy theory acceptance in the nations since recent studies suggest different conspiracy theory endorsement across the countries. Keeping that in mind, this research aims to identify which macro-level factors are associated with willingness to accept conspiracy theories in the Baltic and Central European states. While applying critical literature review, objectives of the work are to describe concept of conspiracy theories and identify main macro-level factors that have influence in conspiracy theory acceptance. Then, using a secondary data analysis to evaluate macro-level factor influence in conspiracy theory acceptance in the Baltic and Central European states during 2020–2022 while applying correlation and regression methods. The main findings show that conspiracy theory is a complex social construct which is purposely intended to create oppositional attitudes in order to provoke, manipulate and achieve financial or political gains while presenting no evidence to ground the statement. Therefore, cultural values, context of historical circumstances, social identity, economy, political orientations, and corruption are main macro-level factors that influence willingness to accept conspiracy theories differently across the countries. Especially in the Baltic and Central European states influence is indicated by power distance, individualism-collectivism, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, exclusion by socio-economic factors, GDP per capita, unemployment rate and democracy index. These elements all together can highly predict conspiracy theory acceptance variation in the countries. Specifically, the unemployment rate has been analyzed to have a crucial impact in conspiracy theory acceptance. It must be noted that conspiracy theory acceptance during 2020 and 2022 has not been significantly different, suggesting that a supportive attitude on conspiracy theory is rooted in the society which makes the country more prone to conspiracy theories in general. The findings highly suggest paying attention to available tools and methods which would lower the motivation to accept conspiracy theories while increasing trust of institutions, lowering unemployment rate, educating on how to identify false stories in social media and other platforms, creating a well-informed society. The structure of the thesis consists of chapter dedicated to critically defining conspiracy theory concept, its characteristics, and reasons for conspiracy theory functioning. Second chapter analysis empirical research and literature that focuses on macro level factors that have been identified by scholars. Main part of the work is dedicated to presenting research methodology and results which are interpreted and discussed while applying

comparative analysis of statistical data. Suggestions for future research and limitations are identified to continue the study in a more complex way.

Paulauskytė, Laima. Šamokslo teorijų palankumą lemiantys makro lygio veiksniai Baltijos ir Vidurio Europos šalyse 2020–2022 m. Magistro studijų baigiamasis projektas / prof. dr. Vaidas Morkevčius; Kauno technologijos universitetas, Socialinių, humanitarinių mokslų ir menų fakultetas.

Studijų kryptis ir sritis (studijų krypčių grupė): 02S (J02).

Reikšminiai žodžiai: šamokslo teorijos, makro-lygio veiksniai, palankumas, Baltijos šalys, Vidurio Europos šalys.

Kaunas, 2024. 53 p.

Santrauka

Palankumas šamokslo teorijoms kelia iššūkius tiek nacionaliniame, tiek tarptautiniame lygmenyje, dėl to ši tema ypač pastaraisiais metais verta detalaus nagrinėjimo bei tyrimo. Nepaisant didelio susidomėjimo šamokslo teorijų palankumą lemiančiomis individualaus lygio priežastimis, makro lygio veiksniai, lemiantys šamokslo teorijų palankumą, ypač tarp Baltijos ir Vidurio Europos šalių, yra tirti minimaliai, dėl ko svarbu prisidėti prie šios mokslo srities plėtojimo. Tyrimai rodo, jog egzistuoja skirtingos tendencijos tarp šalių, kurios palankiau vertina šamokslo teorijas, todėl kyla klausimas, kokie makro lygio veiksniai motyvuoja skirtingą šamokslo teorijų vertinimą. Turint tai omenyje, šio darbo tikslas - nustatyti kokie makro lygio veiksniai lemia šamokslo teorijų palankumą tarp Baltijos ir Vidurio Europos šalių. Remiantis literatūros apžvalga, darbo užduotys - apibrėžti šamokslo teorijos konceptą ir identifikuoti pagrindinius makro lygio veiksnius, lemiančius šamokslo teorijų palankumo vertinimą. Taip pat taikant antrinių duomenų analizę, įvertinti makro lygio veiksmų ryšį šamokslo teorijų palankumui Baltijos ir Vidurio Europos šalyse 2020–2022 m., naudojant koreliacijos bei regresijos metodus. Tyrimo rezultatai rodo, jog šamokslo teorijos yra sudėtingas, kompleksiškas socialinis konstruktas, kuriuo šamoningai siekiama kurti prieštaringas pažiūras, norint pasiekti finansinių ar politinių laimėjimų, provokuojant bei manipuliuojant, be jokių įrodymų pagrindžiant teiginius. Pastebėta, jog pagrindiniai makro lygio veiksniai, lemiantys šamokslo teorijų palankumo skirtumus egzistuojančius tarp šalių, yra kultūrinės vertybės, istorinių aplinkybių kontekstas, socialinis identitetas, ekonomika, politinės pažiūros bei korupcijos lygmuo. Ypač galios dimensija, individualizmas-kolektyvizmas, politinis stabilumas bei žemas smurto ir terorizmo lygis, socialinė bei ekonominė atskirtis, bendrasis vidaus produktas vienam gyventojui, nedarbo lygis bei demokratijos indeksas yra lemiantys elementai Baltijos ir Vidurio Europos šalių tarpe, galintys nuspėti šamokslo teorijų palankumą. Būtent nedarbo lygis šiame tyrime atpažintas kaip ypatingą ryšį turintis veiksnys. Taip pat dėmesys turi būti atkreiptas, jog šamokslo teorijų palankumas 2020-ais ir 2022-ais metais nėra pakitęs, kas leidžia spekuliuoti, jog teigiamas požiūris į šamokslo teorijas yra išsisknijęs visuomenėje, dėl to tam tikros šalies gyventojai bendrai yra labiau linkę palankiai vertinti šamokslo teorijas. Remiantis šio tyrimo rezultatais siūloma atkreipti dėmesį į egzistuojančius metodus bei priemones, kurie mažintų šamokslo teorijų pripažinimą bei kartu didintų pasitikėjimą institucijomis, mažintų nedarbo lygį, šviestų visuomenę kaip atpažinti melagingas istorijas socialiniuose tinkluose bei kitose platformose, kuriant informuotą visuomenę. Magistro baigiamasis darbas susideda iš šamokslo teorijos sampratos apibrėžimo, ypatybių bei priežasčių dėl ko šamokslo teorijos egzistuoja, įvardinimo. Toliau analizuojama empirinių tyrimų bei literatūros apžvalga, orientuota į mokslininkų nustatytus makro lygio veiksnius, susijusius su šia tema. Galiausia, pagrindinė darbo dalis yra skirta pristatyti tyrimo metodiką bei rezultatus, kurie

interpretuojami bei aptariami, taikant lyginamąją statistinių duomenų analizę. Pabaigoje apžvelgiami darbo trūkumai bei pasiūlymai tolimesniam šio tyrimo plėtojimui.

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Introduction

Conspiracy theories are current social discourse that has been gaining attention during past years due to sudden social and political events such as COVID-19 pandemic, Russian declared war against Ukraine, emergence of QAnon movement, climate change, etc. The 2020 YouGov-Cambridge Globalism project has revealed that among 21 investigated countries common conspiracy theories (denial of climate change, COVID-19 virus creation, and idea of secret group controlling the world) have overwhelmingly high popularity in countries such as Nigeria (78%), Mexico (59%), Greece (56%), etc. (YouGov, 2020). These numbers are concerning on a national and global level since conspiracy theories have many consequences which create a threat to national security in several ways.

First, erosion of trust in scientific institutions and acceptance of scientific findings are a concern for national security especially in willingness to follow public guidelines and regulations. This leads to poor health choices which have been studied especially during COVID-19 pandemic period, showing strong negative effect for vaccination and social distancing, reluctance to accept precautionary behavior (Bierwiazzonek et al., 2022), refusal to accept psychological help to deal with mental health issues (Natoli & Marques, 2020). Second point that has been identified is a denial of climate change which creates unwillingness to act accordingly to regulations, support environmental policies and trust science claimed evidence (Biddlestone et al., 2022). Following that, the third threat is an erosion of trust in institutions, leading to severe consequences of damaging communities' well-being and increasing distrust towards all key institutions functioning (Mari et al., 2021), negatively shaping the environment of democracy, especially when sudden issues occur (Tam & Lee, 2023). It is worth to mention, that political engagement due to mistrust of government can either be activating, as examination of EU "Brexit" referendum voting affected citizens to vote has showed (Jolley et al., 2020) and positive voting engagement has been seen during American national elections (Kim, 2022), or discouraging to act at all. The main reason has been found to be a feeling of exclusion from decision making, especially in less democratic countries where citizens feel powerless of their choices which leads conspiracy theories to be accepted as a more common practice in society (Cardonier & Bronner, 2021). Most crucial threat concerning national security is violence and extremism which is fueled due to created tension and divisionism inside the country. Most often conspiracy theories are politically activating to express disagreement in the form of illegal acts such as protests, occupation of buildings, vandalism, fraudulent activities, etc. Considering the Global Peace index of 2021 which identified 5,000 pandemic-related incidents involving violent demonstrations, riots, and abuse of Asian descent (Vision of humanity, 2022), it can be concluded that these are main consequences of conspiracy theory acceptance in recent years. In addition, the Brenton Harrison Tarrant case of "Great replacement" conspiracy that is accusing liberal politicians of replacing White Westerners with mass immigration of non-whites caused violent extremism in New Zealand, has been a sign of the impact conspiracy can make and threat it can create (Obaidi et al., 2022). Furthermore, QAnon conspiracy theory has been seen by United States National security experts as a warning sign for possible terrorist threats, too (Jensen & Kane, 2021). All of this draws a clear need to study conspiracy theories to minimize and eliminate threats for national security that are already identified.

Conspiracy theories as a study object have been studied more actively in recent 20 years in the areas of political science, journalism, cultural studies, etc. Researchers are aiming to reveal causes, consequences, and transmission factors of conspiracy theory. Enormous attention has been paid by

social psychologists who are exploring individual level motives of conspiracy theories endorsement. For example, psychological motives which enforce believing in conspiracies have been studied by measuring association with personality traits (Goreis & Voracek, 2019), paranoia (Imhoff & Lamberty, 2018), lack of control (Stojanov & Halberstadt, 2020), mistrust (Wood & Douglas, 2018), and feeling of powerlessness (Imhoff & Bruder, 2014). In summary, Stasielowicz (2022) provides a portrait of a person who will likely believe in conspiracy theory if a person already believes in pseudoscience, has paranoia or schizotypy, has narcissistic characteristics or is religious/spiritual, and has low cognitive ability.

Nevertheless, it has been argued that not just individual characteristics play a key role in shaping people's view on conspiracy theories and their influence to accept them, meaning it does not always matter if a person is more religious, believes in pseudoscience or has some sort of medical disorder. Hence, for a broader picture Douglas et al. (2017) have proposed findings that believe in conspiracy theories happen when three types of psychological motives are not acquired. These are epistemic motive for knowledge and certainty achievement, existential motive including feeling of safety and being in control of events, and social motive – maintenance of positive self-image or group image (Douglas et al., 2017). All these motives are important for individuals to be met in order not to choose to accept malicious information of conspiracy theory. This would also suggest that environment, context, and social events are important attributes for psychological emotions to occur and motivate a person to endorse conspiracy theory and successfully transmit it to the society. For this reason, external factors shape the decision to accept conspiracy theory or interpret conspiracy theory in a way it will be approved by norms, social values, and cultural background shaped in the society. Questions such as what made people vulnerable for this information to be accepted or what is fueling the need for alternative truth conspiracy theory is creating, can be answered while analyzing external factors influencing conspiracy theory acceptance.

Transmission factors that cause conspiracy theory acceptance are well summarized by Hornsey et al. (2023). Scientists have divided conspiracy theory belief influence on individual, intergroup and national level which give an important emphasis not just understanding internal psychological factors of an individual, but as well critically look at national level factors that influence society to endorse and share conspiracy theories in their country differently than in others. Furthermore, it is evident, that sharing of these theories are mostly dominant within groups or communities that already agree on other conspiracy theories (Metaxas & Finn, 2017) and conspiracy beliefs are shaped by preconditions rooted in a nation or there are conditions that influence conspiracy theory adaptation rather than rejection (Uschinski et al., 2022). Following these claims, researching on macro-level factors influencing conspiracy theory acceptance in different countries can advise policymakers about triggers their country might be affected mostly in order to reduce possible consequences of conspiracy theory spread in the nation. Conspiracy theories can be understood as an early warning system even when the threat is not realized, making it a tool for future policy implementation.

Cross-national investigations on conspiracy theory believe have been made by Adam-Troian et al. (2021) and Imhoff et al. (2022). However, Central Europe and Baltic states has been analyzed little or just focused on individual countries of this region only. Ortmann & Heathershaw (2012) have analyzed conspiracy theories in post-Soviet countries and their significance, Slovakia and Hungary was observed by Plenta (2020). Panczova & Janecek (2015) have looked more closely at Slovakia and Czech Republic popular conspiracy theories. For Baltic countries Ramonaitė (2023) covered

post-Soviet nostalgia's issue in Central and Eastern Europe, Grišinas, Lašas & Kalpokas (2022) have analyzed socio-demographic context of conspiracy theory believers in Lithuanian society. Rezgale et al. (2022) have paid attention to characteristics of conspiracy believers and their mental health during pandemic in Latvia. Nevertheless, research of this specific region and countries is still limited. For this reason, the **object** of this project is macro-level acceptance of conspiracy theories in Central Europe and Baltic countries. The main research **question** is focused on what macro-level factors influence conspiracy theory acceptance in Baltic and Central European states?

The **aim** of the project is to identify which macro-level factors are associated with higher willingness to accept conspiracy theories in the Baltic and Central European states. The **objectives** of the project are the following:

1. To critically describe the concept of conspiracy theories.
2. To analyze and identify the main macro-level factors influencing acceptance of conspiracy theory across countries.
3. To evaluate the influence of country level factors on conspiracy theory acceptance in the Baltic and Central European states during 2020–2022.

Current work is relevant and has novelty for the conspiracy theory study field in several ways. Central Europe and Baltic states have not been examined in cross-national studies as a main object, making it a valuable start for future research. Moreover, the region has been analyzed mostly from psychological and socio-demographic point of view, minimally addressing macro-level factors of conspiracy theory acceptance.

Critical literature review was applied to establish concept of conspiracy theory and indicate macro level factors based on characteristics, especially paying attention to cross-national studies that had analyzed the phenomenon. Secondary data analysis was used to evaluate macro-level factors on conspiracy theory acceptance in Central Europe region and Baltic states during the period of 2020 and 2022 using GLOBSEC collected data. Correlation and regression analysis were performed to acquire findings of the research which were interpreted and summarized while applying comparative analysis of statistical data.

The structure of the work begins with systematic characterization of conspiracy theory, its characteristics, and reasons of functioning. Next chapter focuses on macro-level factor identification while emphasizing main theoretical groundings and research done on this topic. Following with that, practical part begins with description of methodology and results section where study is presented in detail. Lastly, summary of key findings is interpreted and discussed while indicating limitations and recommendations for future research.

The project consists of 57 pages, 14 tables, 4 appendices. Used 87 sources of scientific literature and 28 data sources.

1. Conceptual analysis of conspiracy theories

There is no universal definition for conspiracy theory as this study field is considerably new, making it a debate for researchers what exactly defines conspiracy theory, what is different from other beliefs, what functions and characteristics does it have. To clarify and establish concept of conspiracy theory, it is important to understand terms related to it such as conspiracy, conspiracy belief and conspiracy thinking and what stands for conspiracy theory acceptance that we analyze in this work.

1.1. The concepts of conspiracy, conspiracy theory and their characteristics

To distinguish differences between conspiracy and conspiracy theory, it is important to understand definition of conspiracy. Conspiracy is an act of conspiring with intention to harm or deceive unlawfully. The Conspiracy theory handbook (Lewandowsky & Cook, 2020) and UNESCO publication on conspiracy theories (UNESCO, 2022) emphasizes that conspiracies exist and are discovered through conventional thinking which consist of healthy skepticism, consideration of available evidence, and being coherent. For example, incident that happened in 1972, in which United States President Richard Nixon and his administration (Watergate scandal) was involved, is a conspiracy that was revealed for public leading President's resignation and 69 government officials being charged as guilty (Baltz, 2022). Most often conspiracies are clarified using verified facts and evidence proposed by government investigation, media, etc. In conclusion, conspiracies are real, generally less elaborative, having clear target like scandal or assassination, and emerging in smaller scale than conspiracy theories.

On a contrary, conspiracy theory is a thinking pattern that tracks reality with constant over-suspicion. People who agree with conspiracy theories have accusatory perception that may or may not be true, damaging society due its contradictory and persistent nature of negative intent to explain social and political event (Lewandowsky & Cook, 2020). Moreover, over-interpreted evidence or having no supported evidence at all are typical for conspiracy theory.

Most often researchers define conspiracy theory by identifying its specific characteristics. Political scientist such as Barkun (2013) outline conspiracy theory with main elements that (1) there is a narrative which tells everything is related and inter-connected, (2) nothing is accidental, and (3) there is constant uncertainty about events (nothing is as it seems, or something must be wrong). Most often a conspiracy theory spreader genuinely believes into conspiracy theory emphasizing their good intention to help reveal the truth. Another part of conspiracy acceptors does not fully disbelieve the theory due to the high level of skepticism and over-suspicion they have.

Therefore, victimization is one of important characteristics for conspiracy theories, too. Most often the narrative of conspiracy theorists is emphasizing a harm they get which is usually plotted (by secret organizations or elites) to make them miserable against others. Constant division between "us" and "they" is loudly presented to create a vision of a clear victim in the situation. Especially by this attribute European commission definition of conspiracy theory is understood as "the belief that certain events or situations are secretly manipulated behind the scenes by powerful forces with negative intent" (European Commission, n.d.).

Most recent work on constructing conspiracy theory definition is made by Douglas & Sutton (2023) where they argue that conspiracy theory consists with features of being oppositional, beyond public

knowledge, but at the same time a concern of public interest, describing malevolent or forbidden acts, ascribing agency to individuals and groups, epistemically risky, and lastly, they are social constructs that are coordinated by two or more actors in secret to achieve specific manipulative goal (Douglas & Sutton, 2023).

Having defined conspiracy theory, conspiracy belief and conspiracy thinking have to be presented since the term is used in much of research with conspiracy theory, too. Conspiracy belief and conspiracy thinking (in some cases used as conspiracy ideology) are interconnected with conspiracy theory in a way for scientists to identify if a specific predisposition determines greater probability of a person to believe in it (Ivančik & Andrassy, 2023).

Conspiracy belief is a belief in specific conspiracy theory (or more than one) while no ideological background is connected but rather individual traits are key factors for engaging into them (Brotherto et al., 2013). While on the other hand, conspiracy thinking is generally a political attitude which already predicts possible tendency into believing specific conspiracy theories (Sutton & Douglas, 2020). Conspiratorial thinking emphasizes suspicion over any information that contradicts or conflicts theory, evidence is interpreted in a way to fit or prefer theory more, story line is inconsistent. Moreover, it can be viewed as a political ideology more.

In conclusion, conspiracy theory is a belief that secret actors are coordinating a plot to achieve a specific outcome which is unknown to the public but is in public interest to be revealed in order to explain social or political events. Conspiracy acceptance in this work includes both conspiracy belief and conspiratorial thinking as one measure for identifying society as keen to believe or not fully disbelief in conspiracy theory. Acceptance is understood as still leaning towards conspiracy theory rather than rejecting it completely.

1.2. Reasons of conspiracy theory functioning

It is important not to forget that conspiracy theories have an impact on the public and conspirators can be a variety of individuals and actors including economic institutions, religious organizations, domestic government, etc. Thus, conspiracy theories can function for different reasons not only when psychological motives are not acquired, motivating to find a truth.

Most importantly, conspiracy theory can be constructed for strategic purposes (for example: to inform or warn others) in order to manipulate, provoke and target specific people or groups for financial or political reasons. Especially in less democratic countries, the purpose of conspiracy theory is to create a feeling that there is a gap between those citizens who feel excluded from decision making or feel powerless of their choices, while decreasing their intention to be included into the political process of voting. However, on the other hand, conspiracy theory can be used as a tactic for politicians, too. A great example is a Prime minister of Hungary Viktor Orban who is using the Great Replacement conspiracy theory against refugees and EU policies mobilizing Hungarians to achieve his political goals.

Recent study by Dow et al. (2023) have examined people's support for leaders who use conspiracy rhetoric showing evidence that reduced sense of control validates acceptance of leaders that explain events based on conspiracies. According to the study, using this control deprivation in certain contexts, leaders can effectively secure their position by spreading conspiratorial messages to inspire people to

support them. Although, study was conducted just in the U.S., it has a big impact in further research based on real-time incidents that occur in different nations. Moreover, conspiracy theory can be created as a rhetorical tool for escaping inconvenient conclusions as an example for response to Global warming (Lewandowsky & Cook, 2020).

Conspiracy theory can be used as well for higher social engagement especially considering social media rise in past decade. Although, Uscinski et. al. (2023) findings claim no evidence of conspiracy theory believe increasement during social media and Internet era suggesting that Internet may be less hospitable and influential for conspiracies as assumed, Ren, Dimant & Schweitzer (2023) find that high need for social engagement drives conspiracy theory spread in social media platforms even though people are aware of misleading information. Conspiracy theories are more entertaining than content of true news gaining more attention and social feedback which is increasing their social engagement. Findings also indicate that social motive is a critical element in making a person's decision to spread conspiracies (Ren, Dimant & Schweitzer, 2023).

To conclude, it is clear that conspiracy theory has different functions. Most often they are a strategic method used by different actors whose goal is to manipulate and acquire support for future upcoming events. Furthermore, due to attractiveness and easy transmission, conspiracy theory is a low-cost tool which can increase social engagement. Keeping this in mind, conspiracy theory acceptance should not be overlooked especially in understanding which factors affect different nations' tendency into willingness to believe conspiracy theory. The following chapter will identify main macro-level factors which have influence in diversified countries' tendency to accept conspiracy theory.

2. Macro-level factors of conspiracy theory acceptance

Macro-level factors are as important as micro-individual factors in studying conspiracy theory acceptance. Since interest on this topic has considerably risen in past years, identification of particular factors and structured literature review is minimal yet. For this reason, to increase knowledge and suggest future research directions it is crucial to look at the wide scope of studies made in the past decade. In addition, a bigger picture of macro-level factors influencing motivation to endorse and support conspiracy theories, will lead to a successful preparation and creation of risk management plans in order to avoid triggers and reduce engagement scale which will be helpful in the future.

In the following, indications of macro-level factors will be presented while analyzing literature and available research that has been done focused on specific study objects. Cultural values, context of historical circumstances, social identity, economic factor, political orientation, and corruption are identified as major factors influencing conspiracy theory acceptance across countries.

2.1. Cultural values

Scholars suggest that not just individual differences, but context variables as culture play a role in conspiracy theory belief shaping. Therefore, cognition theory is used to explain the connection between culture and conspiracy theory belief emphasizing that individual's motivation and cognition are dependent on cultural context which can activate different cultural values compared with other countries, leading to cross-cultural differences of populations' motivation and mindset to endorse conspiracy theories (Oyserman, 2016). For this reason, cultural values have been studied as one of the macro-level factors which is influencing conspiracy theory acceptance.

The most notable cultural value identification is based on a Hofstede's work which is used by the majority of researchers. The core dimension that has been mostly studied when analyzing conspiracy theories are individualism-collectivism (refers to a degree that individuals are attached to group), level of power distance (the extent of unequal power distribution acceptance), masculinity-femininity (differences between focus on performance, competition and ambition versus seeking consensus, cooperation, care for core values and solidarity), and lastly uncertainty avoidance (society's acceptance of ambiguous and uncertain situations) (Hofstede, 1983).

Based on a Hofstede's dimensions and Douglas et al. (2017) proposed motivations for conspiracy theory engagement, Adam-Trojan et al. (2021) combined and divided them into: 1) social motives - power distance, individualism-collectivism; 2) epistemic motives - uncertainty avoidance, 3) existential motives – long-term orientation, indulgence dimensions. However, after analyzing 25 countries in cross-national research, results have showed, that conspiracy theory belief acceptance has positive association with dimensions of masculinity and collectivism mostly than with other dimensions (Adam-Trojan et al., 2021). The reason behind collectivism effect in engagement of conspiracy theories was studied by comparing China and U.S. nationality respondents where it was noticed that collectivism increases beliefs and spread of empty claims in order to prioritize "fit with others" model, which leads to ambiguous claims prejudice (Lin et al., 2022). Results suggest that collective reasoning for conspiracy theory acceptance is a natural outcome of society's value system that is rooted in a country's perception of strong bond between each member.

Following these insights, another study by van Prooijen and Song (2021) was focused on Chinese and U.S. belief on intergroup conspiracy theories. Results has shown that Chinese belief in U.S. institutions to allegedly conspire against China were stronger than Americans view on China to

conspire against U.S. institutions and companies due to vertical collectivism and especially power distance characteristic which suggests that cultural dimensions promoting hierarchy in the society increase conspiracy theory acceptance more (van Prooijen & Song, 2021). The evidence of cross-national differences has also shown that collectivism supporting nations are keener to believe in conspiracy theories (Hornsey & Pearson, 2022).

However, on the other hand, hierarchy acceptance prioritizes group goals over individuals which would suggest better cooperation during a crisis. This was analyzed looking at different intentions to engage in COVID-19 spread reduction activities compared with individualism and collectivism dimension. Biddlestone et al. (2020) study supported that level of collectivism positively predicts social distancing and hygiene-related intentions more than individualism once conspiracy theories about COVID-19 were considered, meaning that collectivistic societies appear to respond more adaptively during the time of crisis. Furthermore, differences in these dimensions are influenced by feelings of personal power which might in the context of conspiracy theory be focused on individual empowerment causing individualists to disregard group collected behavior (Biddlestone et al., 2020). Cooperation morality during pandemics was also analyzed studying 67 countries, which suggests that collectively adopted health related behavior as an action form proposed by government during COVID-19 pandemics was less followed if people supported conspiracy theories related to pandemics (Gkinopoulos et al., 2022).

On the contrary, Liu et al. (2019) found that good intentions of group-oriented society can make increased ingroup vigilance in collectivistic cultures more than individualistic compared against China and U.S., showing competition within-group and possible unethical behavior towards ingroup which leads to rising tensions. Emphasis on psychological involvement into ingroup conflicts are associated with collective narcissism and outgroup threat which is related to power distance and collectivism that has an impact into conspiracy theory acceptance (van Prooijen & Song, 2021).

Masculinity which stresses competitiveness over cooperation has association with intergroup conflicts that are related to conspiracy theory endorsement, too. According to Jolley, Meleady & Douglas (2020) findings, conspiracy theories make an impact on intergroup perception. Several studies made by researchers of Britain's view on immigrants from European Union countries, has provided evidence that conspiracy theories about immigrants increased negative attitude and prejudice towards them, following with the same context for Jewish people and most interestingly increased prejudice as well towards secondary outgroups (Asian, Arabs, Irish, etc.) (Jolley, Meleady & Douglas, 2020). Therefore, cultural mistrust is another characteristic that is related to intergroup perception and has been studied from a collective society point of view. According to Biddlestone et al. (2021) cultural mistrust is regarded as a collective-self motive to defend a group by blaming another one in a superior victim role creating mistrust of specific culture. This is rooted in so-called "white societies" and examples such as continuous tendencies to assign terror attacks on Muslims or blame pandemics on Asian descendants are evidence for preconditioned cultural mistrust.

Theoretically uncertainty avoidance dimension should suggest a possible link between conspiracy theory acceptance. Nevertheless, there has been found that uncertainty avoidance has effect just on individual level (Alper et al., 2021; Larsen et al., 2021), but not as much on group level while analyzing countries (Hornsey & Pearson, 2022). However, uncertainty avoidance effects on conspiracy theory endorsement were found to have a negative impact on institutional trust analysis of 11 democracies demonstrated, especially in Latin-American countries (Mari et al., 2022).

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize culture importance while describing factors influencing conspiracy theory acceptance in different countries. Although, due to rapid globalization we can encounter a quicker assimilation process in countries, there are still much more differences between countries than we expect. As it was discussed, collectivism-individualism can play an important role in intentions of cooperation and on the other hand can signal a level of hierarchical system acceptance which is connected to trust and feeling of suspicion of society members and institutions while concentrating on power distance index. Moreover, masculinity's stress on competition and rivalry can be concentrated due to cultural mistrust leading to conflicts. These core differences are crucial elements that can make country policymakers focus on their country specific target areas in order to successfully implement what is best for their territory.

2.2. Context of historical circumstances

History is another attribute which has been studied from security perception in looking for the impact of conspiracy theory acceptance during incidents such as war, colonization, and other types of catastrophes or threats since context plays a crucial element in analyzing differences of countries.

It is evident that conspiracism during a crisis is a tool to reduce stress and anxiety which uncertain situations are producing. This has been indicated by Moncosu et al. (2021) research on institution/interpersonal trust and conspiracism association during pandemics where high pandemic stress correlates larger with interpersonal trust and conspiracy acceptance, than institutional trust. Findings also suggest that low interpersonal trust of individuals follows conspiracy theories due to simple explanations of the complex world in order to reduce negative emotions.

In addition, van Prooijen and Douglas (2017) suggest that stimulus to believe in conspiracy theories occur during a crisis when there is a rapid societal change, new power structure is established, sudden change of norms of conduct appear, and specific people or groups gain leading roles. Sudden changes create a fear, high level of uncertainty and feeling of being controlled by someone. Following these explanations, scholars conclude that conspiracy theory formation is a historical narrative which spread through cultural transmission and especially is remembered and represented in the culture during crisis situations. This corresponds with Ramonaitė (2023) findings of communist nostalgia and conspiracy theory association in East Europe that reinforce such belief adaptation rather than rejection. The historically traumatized incidents affect the country to still attract population in believing conspiracy theories during peace and prosperous times (Bilewich, 2022). The results once again draw the conclusion that history cannot be overlooked in analyzing conspiracy theory acceptance issues across countries.

Furthermore, recent findings of 66 country multilevel analysis suggest that higher conflict intensity societies tend to be more susceptible to COVID-19 conspiracy theories (Hebel-Sela et al., 2022). This empirical evidence shows that conflicts impact psychological effects to accept conspiracy theories. This would add up to DiGrazia (2017) conclusions that populations which feel social threat are keener to believe in conspiracies than others.

Lastly, the context where specific conspiracy theory had happened or with whom it is related is important since Schlipphak et al. (2021) study has found that historical events across countries have a direct effect on generic conspiracy belief meaning that effect is bigger in countries where conspiracy have happened in the past.

It is evident that historical context and circumstances during some periods in history are crucial factors that must be included while understanding why conspiracy acceptance numbers are increasing in one country more than in another. Focus must be made on historical experiences of past trauma the country had, either it is an event that had happened in the territory or if it is experience of war or colonization, and incidents that cause sudden changes in system and power creating a fear. Nevertheless, it should be noted that even during peace and prosperous times motives to be involved in conspiracy theory acceptance can be historically transmitted.

2.3. Social identity

Another macro-level factor which is identified in literature as making influence on conspiracy theory acceptance is a social identity that can be studied from collective narcissism, inclusion, and exclusion perspective. Social identity perception in the current global world is an important attribute which impacts adaptation processes focusing on an individual's emotional state and well-being that can be experienced differently in one country or another depending on the living environment and context. Therefore, social identity is one of the factors that affect conspiracy theory acceptance across countries.

Social identity whether it is racial, political, or religious, has been studied as an element of motivation behind conspiracy theory belief narrative since it emphasizes strong group-based belonging and a need to secure group status due to possible harm and threat. Social identity is an important driver for conspiracy theories since epistemic (sense of reality) and existential goals (the feeling of control and security) are met (Douglas et al., 2017).

The role of social identity in acceptance of conspiracy theories is explored in relation to collective narcissism. Collective narcissism refers to an ingroup belief of being extraordinary. There is a consistent feeling of being underappreciated by others, motivating to engage in any meaning-making activity (Zavala et al., 2022). Generally, collective narcissism and conspiracy theories fit with each other due to applied intergroup hostility, commitment to the group and their superior role in the event, and belief of a threat that ingroup has, which is unrecognized by other groups and institutions. Due to these links between collective narcissism and conspiracy theory, they are actively promoted by leaders and keenly endorsed by the followers. Most often they are advanced by dictatorial regimes favoring politicians and illiberal leaders, who are justifying coercion and violence as an ingroup's goal (Zavala et al., 2022).

It is important to note, that most often criticism of national image is taken overly sensitive as a defense mechanism which is exposed by conspiracy theory believers making collective delusions that violence is a logical conclusion to achieve their goal or power. The case of Donald Trump, defining American national identity through national narcissism promotion leading to attacks in the Capitol in January of 2021, is a great example of excessive push of collective narcissism and its consequences. Another form of it has been studied focusing on Catholic collective narcissism and gender conspiracy believe endorsement where it was identified that collective narcissism is used as religious ingroup form of defense rather than propagation of religion, making Catholics more susceptible to accept gender related conspiracy theories when nontraditional gender roles are undermined (Marchlewska et al., 2019). This once again corresponds with national-collective narcissism sensitivity and attitude that there is a threat for intergroup and other groups are conspiring against them.

It is notable already, that collective narcissism and conspiracy theory provide the same function to reach political gains and interpret events for desired goals as an example of climate change perception shows (Bertin et al., 2021). Furthermore, national narcissism, which is one of the ways of collective narcissism, was tested by Sternisko et al. (2021) in 56 countries whether acceptance of COVID-19 related conspiracy theories will predict public health choices. Positive relationship was found between national narcissism and increasing tendency of conspiracy theory belief propagation leading to bare engagement in health protection behavior and reduced support for public-health related policies (Sternisko et al., 2021), and medical support for vaccination (Cislak et al., 2021).

Moving further, social inclusion and exclusion have been observed by conspiracy theory field researchers, too. In research on inclusion and conspiracy theory belief van Prooijen (2016) found that conspiracy theories among marginalized minority groups are particularly significant due to their strong sense of inclusion within the community which impacts suspicion and belief of being excluded from whole society. In addition, personal feelings of being deceived and threatened by powerful groups are experienced and passed in group context increasing perception that the system has to be blamed. Most often African American communities endorse conspiracy theory of White genocide that focus on supremacy of white people creating a negative perception of whole social environment causing instability and undesired social connections in the country leading to exclusion.

Another important emphasis has been put on social change as a threat which has been studied by Federico et al. (2018) focusing on the role of identity. The study has shown that when society's fundamental values are under challenge due to social change, it leads to engagement in ideological and non-ideological conspiracy theories (Federico et al., 2018). Therefore, it was found that even more active willingness to endorse conspiracy theories and adaptation to this mindset is also when the meaning of being a part of society has been changed. It would suggest that exclusion from society has crucial consequences for individuals' social identity, giving evidence that people who support and defend conspiracy theory are expected to have a fear of social exclusion (Lantian et al., 2018).

In addition, support for association of social exclusion and conspiratorial beliefs was found by Graeupner & Coman (2016) where it was revealed that social exclusion further leads to a cycle of conspiracy thinking endorsement since individuals who experience exclusion search for like-minded individuals who further accept these beliefs. Therefore, social exclusion triggers society in creating a vicious circle that cannot be changed. Environments that influence exclusion are social and economic inequalities where conspiracy theories flourish in order to affect and alienate vulnerable populations. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that according to Poon et al. (2020) finding people after social exclusion are more likely to endorse conspiracy theories.

In conclusion, several key points have to be emphasized. Having strong social identity and being part of a closed society can endorse a feeling of paranoid belief that others are conspiring against. Due to that, there is a need to defend ingroup thoughts which are created by conspiracy theory acceptance. This unhealthy characteristic of collective narcissism can lead to severe damage since violence is a way of expressing their opinions. On the other hand, exclusion of an ingroup from the whole society or unexpected change of its structure can lead to major consequences, too. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the stability of social structures, so there would be no severe exclusion and people would have a healthy attitude towards their country and social groups living in it.

2.4. Economic factors

It is important to indicate economy as one of the factors influencing conspiracy theory acceptance because differences of financial state across countries might create a picture of unfair treatment and reinforce motivation to endorse them due to increased fear of instability, distress of sudden social events, uncertainty in national governance, which could impact intergroup conflicts. Therefore, economic conditions defined by GDP per capita and economic inequality are factors that have been identified having relation with conspiracy theory acceptance the most.

Most often political science literature is studying GDP per capita as one of the variables that controls functioning of economic vitality. Link between economic vitality and indication of government's trustworthiness is addressed by economic conditions which shapes conspiracy theory acceptance. Therefore, perception on economic performance and the reality of it was studied as a country-level factor of 36 countries across five continents in willingness to believe conspiracy theories (Hornsey et al., 2022). Results have shown that conspiracy beliefs are associated with poor economic performance of a country either in subjective perception or objective reality meaning that economic circumstances shapes conspiracy theory acceptance. Overall, it was seen that lower GDP per capita countries were more prone to conspiracy theory beliefs and perceived their economic performance as poor without any future hope for positive changes. In addition, it was seen that people reported higher conspiracy theory beliefs when the past economic situation was regarded in a positive way, but current and future outlook was described negatively. Results imply that the difficult economic period affects engagement into conspiracy theories making it one of the factors across the countries and historical narrative might be rooted into nations perception of the situation in willingness to accept conspiracy theory, too.

Another important attribute related to economic process is economic inequality which has been found to have correlation with conspiracy theories. Economic inequality, according to Casara et al. (2022) observation, is the cause and factor why conspiracy theory beliefs increase and are triggers that reinforce belief acceptance on an individual level. When faced with inequality, people tend to search for a sense of order and control to regain stability leading them into conspiracy theory acceptance. Intention to reduce economic inequality is also a reason for greater endorsement of conspiracy theories which was revealed in a study (Casara et al., 2022). In addition, it was found that conspiracy beliefs are motivators for engagement in collective action aimed at addressing economic inequality which is often resulting in possible negative societal outcomes. Meta-analysis revealed that a higher level of economic inequality endorses greater acceptance of conspiracy theories across countries. This follows with social classes' engagement into conspiracy theories since most often economic circumstances are defining measures. According to Mao et al. (2020) findings, lower social class individuals have higher tendency in belief of conspiracy theories than individuals from higher social class due to perceived sense of a control that plays a mediation role between social class and conspiracy theory belief.

As it was mentioned before, political and economic conditions are interconnected when analyzing factors of conspiracy theory acceptance. Evidence of Drochon (2018) examination of GDP, the Democracy index, Transparency International and the Gini coefficient of six European countries (Sweden, Germany, Portugal, Poland, Italy and Great Britain) concluded that countries score higher on conspiracy thinking if inequality is higher and citizens feel doubtful whether democracy functions well in their country making it clear that political and economic exclusions predict greater conspiracy

theorizing among people (Drochon, 2018). Results suggest that political functioning has a crucial role as an external factor among countries' acceptance of conspiracy theories since it is interrelated with trust of governance, too. Conclusions are drawn that economic vitality portrays trust which is valued by government competences. For this reason, it is crucial to include political factor influences, too.

In conclusion, economic growth is crucial when identifying economic stability of countries and its relationship with conspiracy theories. Low GDP per capita and inequality in the country can signal conspiracy theory acceptance rate increase since it is evident that there is a relationship between economic wealth and conspiracy theory endorsement. This once again would suggest that intentions to increase economic rate and lower the gap between inequality facing societies would protect from unnecessary indulgence into conspiracy theories.

2.5. Political orientations

Large amount of research is addressing politics as a factor which contributes to conspiracy theory acceptance arguing that political factors can better explain conspiracy theory predisposition than sociodemographic factors (Strömbäck et al., 2022). With this statement, several research directions are explaining this phenomenon.

Political orientation has been studied as one of potential attributes of conspiracy theory engagement motive. There are conflicting answers and mixed discussion which orientation is keener to believe in conspiracy theories. The root of discussion began with Hofstadter's (1964) claim in his book "Paranoid style" that Republicans and conservatives tend to accept conspiracy theories more than Democrats and liberals. After this proposal attention was drawn to examine whether partisanship matters when it comes to conspiracy theory acceptance and is it favoring their political party.

Enders & Smallpage (2019) results have shown that both Democrats and Republicans tend to believe in them, but on a contrary Republicans appear to be more susceptible than Democrats in engaging in partisan-motivated reasoning in relation to information about conspiracy theory whether it is to bolster or discredit (Enders & Smallpage, 2019). The results correspond with what political scientists have found that people are more likely to believe in conspiracy theory when their political opponents are involved into conspiracy theory narrative as Usinscki and Parent (2014) argue that "conspiracy theories are for losers" (Usinscki & Parent, 2014, p.130) meaning conspiratorial views are accepted when political camp loses election more often than winning side endorse them. According to them, conservative or right-wing actors are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories in which liberal or left-winger opponents are involved.

Following these claims, Enders et al. (2022) surveyed partisanship and ideology relation with 52 conspiracy theories in the U.S. and after that examined 20 more countries on 11 conspiracy theories. It was evident that for both cases socio-political context was a dependent measure between relationship of political orientation and conspiracism, suggesting that context in which conspiracy theories are polled are important between left-right ideology relationship. Nevertheless, researchers found that Democrats/liberals and Republicans/conservatives rate for engagement into motivated conspiracy theories are similar following with occasionally stronger motivations with Democrats/liberals.

On the contrary, van der Linden et al. (2021) correlation between ideology and conspiracy thinking showed that conservatives compared with U.S. liberals in general endorse more likely specific and

general conspiracies mediating with strong distrust of officials and paranoid style in American politics. This suggests that differences might be rising depending on political circumstances meaning that context is an important attribute when indicating political parties or ideologies as a factor of conspiracy theory acceptance. For example, it was observed during COVID-19 pandemic period that pandemic related conspiracy theories and uncertainty among Republicans were occurring more than for Democrats (Miller, 2022). In addition, Calvillo et al. (2020) results showed that conservatives perceived less personal vulnerability to the virus and its severity following with less accurate distinction between real and fake information including conspiracy theories about pandemics circulating in the media.

Other important research for cross-cultural analysis was made by Imhoff et al. (2022), where they studied the relationship between conspiracy theory and political orientation comparing 26 countries in which researchers concluded that extreme left- and right-wing believers are associated with consistent support for conspiracy theories due to deprivation of political control. Conspiracy mentality is particularly strong on political right, especially among traditional, nationalistic, and authoritarian parties' voters (Imhoff et al., 2022). In addition, observation has shown that conspiracy rhetoric remains intact focusing on anti-elite conspiracy theories. Nevertheless, cross-national prediction was overall modest, showing just self-reported leftists in Spain are more conspiratorial, while in France, Poland, and Sweden it is for political right. Nevertheless, it was not explored in depth national sample differences showing the need for future research on this topic.

Despite of that, findings indicate that individuals with extreme ideology believe in conspiracy theories more. In general, this part of the community tends to be a more pessimistic and distrustful fraction of society and political extremists are likely to be conspiracy theory believers as researchers propose (Krouwel et al., 2017). According to Europol (2020) right-wing extremists' propaganda, has reached a significant number of terror attacks in recent years providing message of encouragement and opportunity to follow like-minded individuals for recruitment, emphasizing division between "good" and "evil", offering sense of a higher mission which leads to similarity with faith devotion when spreading theories about historical events or other socio-political facts such as Anti-immigrant, antisemitic, gender conspiracy theories, etc.

It is important to remind, that most often conspiracy theory is associated with having a political purpose – to express and promote ideology, as it was discussed before. Therefore, it is studied in the division of democracy vs authoritarianism. Results show that Countries which score higher on Democracy Index, according to Hornsey et al. (2022), have lower tendency in conspiracy theory belief than those who are more on the authoritarian side of the spectrum. Nonetheless, according to Uscinski (2018), conspiracy theories are necessary in democratic regimes for healthy society's functioning. Therefore, a link between conspiracy theory belief and support for direct democracy was analyzed showing that belief in conspiracy theories is related to desire for a larger transparency and accountability in the political arena, to grant people more power and greater voice in political decision-making (Pantazi et al., 2022). This would suggest that conspiracy theory existence is not necessarily a threat but also a sign that there should be more dialogue between both sides and changes for better democratic governance in the country.

Despite of that, there has to be paid attention between populism and conspiracy theory belief since there is a common core of distrust, skepticism and worldview for threat which is coming from particular groups and elites in both of these strategies (Thielmann, 2023). Sutton and Douglas (2020)

agree that conspiracy theories are associated with ideological extremism, distrust of rival camps of ideology, distrust of mainstream politics of populist. However, they argue that there is a risk of mischaracterizing conspiracy beliefs and their ideological implications. Study across Greece, the United Kingdom and USA revealed that in order to reduce conspiracy theory belief among the public, populist party have to be elected in power since there is a link between populist attitudes and conspiracy thinking (Papaiaonnou et al., 2023). In addition, if there is such a link, the potential reason for conspiracy theory popularity and political trust decline can be explained due to populism's existence (Christener, 2022).

This idea has been researched showing that higher level of political distrust has resulted into association with higher degree of generic conspiracy theory belief (Schlippak et al., 2022) across countries (Germany, Poland, Jordan, Sweden, and France) where it was seen that distrust in government was less where governmental actors communicated by themselves about conspiracy theories. This finding contributes to effect of populism support which was studied in regards with Hungarian president V. Orban and Slovakia's leader R. Fico rhetoric in developing a conspiracy theory narrative which influenced political support and was used as a tool for crisis management in concentrating their power (Plenta, 2020).

Nevertheless, political orientation has a significant impact in conspiracy theory acceptance due to its function of ideology promotion that can be expressed in different countries either in democratic political system or in authoritarianism. In both ways political ideology together with conspiracy theory can be used depending on intention to influence and rise to power as in populism and authoritarian countries or inform politicians about the need for transparency and dialogue to conquer problems country face in democratic countries. Nonetheless, extreme political orientation will always be a sign of a dangerous position which will lead to negative outcomes.

2.6. Corruption

Last macro-level factor that will be analyzed in this chapter is corruption which has been supported by researchers in having strong relation with conspiracy theory acceptance.

As already mentioned in the previous section, corruption goes hand in hand with the economy and political circumstances of the country leading to trust perception. Hornsey et al. (2021) suggest that according to national-level and individual-level data, when people feel that social bonds of trust are deteriorating, conspiracy theory beliefs are increasing. High perception of public sector corruption meaning untrust for institutions and authorities appears to be the motive of more commonly endorsed conspiracy theories in international study of 22 Western and non-Western countries following with other socio factors such as high unemployment rate, low level of democracy (Cordonier et al., 2021).

In addition, based on the Transparency International corruption index across countries, there is a correlation with conspiracy theory belief endorsement (Hornsey et al., 2023). More corrupt countries have higher levels of conspiracy theory believers. Moreover, analysis of 25 countries showed that regardless of conspiracy theory topic if it's related with COVID-19 or if it is generic conspiracy theory, higher level of country-level corruption predicts higher conspiracy belief (Alper, 2022). Moreover, findings support that country-level corruption levels influence conspiracy beliefs and association between individuals' gullibility to conspiracy theories is moderated (Alper, 2022). Countries that experience corruption constantly are more plausible to reinforce them. It would add up to already explained historical narrative motive, which explains that already experienced events

transmit our view on current realities influencing to believe in conspiracy theories due to the corrupt national image that was in the past without hope for positive outcomes.

As it was mentioned in the beginning, corruption has been studied together with different factors as with political orientation, too. This time corruption level in 23 countries was used to show that it moderates how political orientation predicts conspiracy beliefs (Alper & Imhoff, 2023). According to Alper & Imhoff (2023), country-level corruption provides a significant factor which moderates the relationship between political orientation and corruption. The results showed that in a high corruption context country there are differences between left and right wingers conspiracy mindset adaptation leading to left-wingers' intention to believe more likely left-wing conspiracy theories, and right-wingers more right-wing conspiracy theories (Alper & Imhoff, 2023). Due to increased personal doubt, mistrust on individual and institutional level, and uncertainty, corruption increases people's reasoning to believe in conspiracies even if that person has higher education showing that education cannot always be considered as a condition for lower conspiracy theory acceptance rate. In addition, due to feeling of having no control, people are willingly accepting conspiracy theories because of the consistent injustice they face and the sensitive environment they live in.

To conclude, corruption is strongly associated with conspiracy theory acceptance rate showing that influence can be lowered if interpersonal and institutional trust would increase. Moreover, more corrupt countries will have a larger number of conspiracy theory believers if the unemployment rate is high following a low democracy level. Therefore, keeping in mind that cultural values, historical circumstances, social identity, economy, political orientation, and corruption have impact in conspiracy theory acceptance, next chapter will present research on macro-level factor influence indication in Baltic and Central European states.

3. Methodology of the study

3.1. Research design

Quantitative research involving secondary data analysis and describing relationships between macro-level factors was employed in this research project. The design was chosen according to the study aim and objectives proposed, paying close attention to data validity and representativeness of each country to achieve reliable findings.

Since research focuses on ten European countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) it was decided to follow OECD's proposed grouping while identifying targeted population. However, instead of the term Central and Eastern European countries (UNESCWA, n.d.), the term of the Baltic and Central European states was adopted in order to be more specific and focused on these countries in the study only since Eastern European classification might mislead main research object.

Moving further, research strategy consists of analysis of indexes which are employed to measure macro-level factor influence. The indexes, which are used in the study, are chosen based on the theoretical part of the work. Quantitative analysis of secondary data is implemented using SPSS as the main software. The validity and reliability of this research is ensured by using approved data and representative samples for each country.

The following sections of this chapter will introduce data used in the research and socio-demographic characteristics, paying attention on descriptive data analysis. Next, a method of analysis will be presented while indicating dependent and independent variables in this research, making it a key element of the study.

3.2. Data

Data used in the research is collected by GLOBSEC which had published report on "Voices of Central and Eastern Europe: perceptions of democracy & governance in 10 EU countries" (GLOBSEC, 2020) and "GLOBSEC trends 2022: Central and Eastern Europe amid the War in Ukraine" (GLOBSEC, 2022). Request to acquire collected data and permission to use it in this work was given after directly contacting the organization. Total of 19 datasets of raw data were sent to begin the study (GLOBSEC, 2020a; 2020b).

Data consists of public opinion poll surveys carried out in March 2020 and 2022. Representative sample of Baltic and Central European states is used as a target population. The survey was conducted using stratified multistage random sampling in ten observed countries (Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) in 2020 and nine countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) in 2022. Computer-assisted telephone interviewing and computer assisted personal interviewing was used to collect the data.

Country sample varied from 1,000 to 1,047 in 2020 poll (Austria – N=1,000; Bulgaria – N=1,001; Czech – N=1,047; Estonia – N=1,000; Hungary – N=1,000; Latvia – N=1,002; Lithuania – N=1,000; Poland – N=1,000; Romania – N=1,005; Slovakia – N=1,013), making all country respondents representative by gender, age, education, place of residence. The total number of respondents in the dataset of 2020 is 10,068. Country sample in 2022 poll was 1,000 for every country (Bulgaria –

N=1,00; Czech – N=1,000; Estonia – N=1,000; Hungary – N=1,000; Latvia – N=1,000; Lithuania – N=1,000; Poland – N=1,000; Romania – N=1,000; Slovakia – N=1,000). In total 9,000 respondents participated in the research.

Table 1 shows specific information on the demographic differences in each of the years. Distribution by gender in both surveys followed by a slightly larger number of female participants than men. Respondents' age varied from 18- to 95-year-old where mean in 2020 was 48.71 and in 2022 – 49.16. In general, each age category had an almost equal distribution following with 65+ y.o. age group being largest in both years.

Majority of respondents (42% in 2020 and 42.8% in 2022) had secondary education with obligatory graduation examinations, followed by respondents (26,2% in 2020 and 27.6% in 2022) with university (bachelor, master, doctoral) degree in second place. Number of respondents who live in urban areas rather than rural areas was bigger by 18.4% in the 2020 survey and by 29% in 2022.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of participants. Source: Author

	2020		2022	
<i>Gender</i>	N	%	N	%
Male	4800	47.7%	4336	48.2%
Female	5268	52.3%	4664	51.8%
<i>Age categorization</i>				
18-24 y.o.	851	8.5%	710	7.9%
25-34 y.o.	1635	16.2%	1405	15.6%
35-44 y.o.	1795	17.8%	1640	18.2%
45-54 y.o.	1826	18.1%	1621	18.0%
55-64 y.o.	1723	17.1%	1499	16.7%
65+ y.o.	2238	22.2%	2125	23.6%
<i>Education</i>				
Elementary/without formal education	918	9.1%	875	9.7%
Secondary or apprenticeship without school leaving exam	2285	22.7%	1792	19.9%
Secondary with school leaving exam (A level)	4229	42.0%	3850	42.8%
University (bachelor, master, doctoral degree)	2636	26.2%	2483	27.6%
<i>Are of living</i>				

Rural	4109	40.8%	3197	35.5%
Urban	5959	59.2%	5803	64.5%

3.3. Measures

To ensure reliability and validity of measures which will analyze conspiracy theory acceptance scope and macro-level influence on it, dependent and independent variables are constructed. In the following each of them will be described.

3.3.1. Dependent variable

Questionnaires of 2020 and 2022 covered a range of topics which aimed to identify respondent's view on national and global political issues, media, trust on government, support on foreign policies, etc. It was not directly tailored to measure conspiracy theory acceptance. Therefore, for the construction of the dependent variable, an item which is capable to evaluate conspiracy theory acceptance was identified in order to begin the analysis.

In the poll of 2020, three universal conspiracy statements and additional 2 to 4 conspiracies constructed specifically based on the country's context were included for respondents to answer ("strongly agree", "rather agree", "rather disagree", "strongly disagree"). The universal conspiracy theories were the following: 1. The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 was planned and conducted by the American government, not Al-Qaeda; 2. Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world; 3. World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.

In the 2022 questionnaire a total of two statements were measuring conspiracy theory acceptance which were asked in all observed countries without exception: 1. Democracy does not exist, because in reality, hidden elites rule the world.; 2. World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.

To select suitable statement as a dependent variable, conspiracy theory acceptance scope across countries were evaluated (see Appendix 1 & 2). Values of "strongly agree" and "rather agree" were calculated together since it indicates a positive attitude on conspiracy theory. Data of 2020 shows that in all of the observed countries 41% supports the idea that world affairs are decided by secret groups which aim to establish a totalitarian world order and 33,7% of all respondents have prejudice towards Jews believing they have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world. Lower acceptance (23,7%) was seen for statements related to the terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 believing it to be planned and conducted by the American government, not Al-Qaeda.

On the other hand, data of 2022 indicates 45,3% agreement on conspiracy theory that democracy does not exist because in reality hidden elites rule the world. The little increase over years on conspiracy theory about secret groups aiming to establish totalitarian world order has been seen in the region scoring 41,3%. Nevertheless, it should be noted that Austria did not participate in the 2022 survey which might explain why the percentage is different. It has been seen that Austria among other countries are less conspiracy prone scoring lowest percentage of conspiracy theory acceptance.

The statement “World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order” was chosen to be a dependent variable since both surveys have asked respondents to express their opinion on it in 2020 and 2022. In addition, this conspiracy theory can be indicated as universal for all the countries since a recent YouGov (2021) survey shows that conspiracy theory of secret groups controlling the world is believed mostly while comparing with other 12 popular conspiracy theories across 24 countries. Moreover, out of all conspiracy theories provided this statement does not include additional needed knowledge, it is very related to the national context and general understanding which can be applied to every country without choosing the “do not know (do not read)” answer.

The dependent variable was coded as follows: “strongly agree” = 1, “rather agree” = 2, “rather disagree” = 3, “strongly disagree” = 4, “do not know (do not read)” = 9. Value 9 was transferred to a missing value since it does not indicate an answer and can be chosen due to lack of time to fill the survey. Therefore, values of 1, 2, 3, and 4 were left for further analysis. Dependent variable was constructed by calculating the mean of responses of each country in 2020 and 2022. Total of 19 values were constructed for the dependent variable. The higher the value of dependent variable was, it meant less acceptance of conspiracy theory while on the contrary, lower value indicated higher acceptance of conspiracy theory in the country.

3.3.2. Independent variables

According to the theoretical part of this research, macro-level factors influencing conspiracy theory are cultural values, historical circumstances, social identities, economy, political orientation, and corruption. Therefore, all of them are identified as independent variable where different indexes were collected to identify each of the macro-level factor (Appendix 3). These variables are operationalized as follows:

Cultural values are measured using G. Hofstede’s dimensions score which are generated by recent advanced research methods and technology to update country results to latest scores (Minkov et al., 2017; Country Comparison Tool, n.d.). Considering studies and theories, power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance dimensions were taken as being mostly correlating with conspiracy theory acceptance in cross-national context. The score ranges from 0 to 100 meaning that 50 is a mid-level score. However, it has to be taken into account that a score under 50 is valued as relatively low on that scale, and if it is over 50, culture score is high on that dimension considering the rule of thumb. For example, a score in individualism being under 50 is considered to be identified as “collectivistic” society. Furthermore, it has to be noted that the masculinity dimension has been renamed to “motivation towards achievement and success” in the webpage where data was taken. However, in this work masculinity term was used since it does not change the interpretation of this specific dimension. Values for 2020 and 2022 are applied the same.

Context of historical circumstances are identified and measured by several indicators. First, Global peace index (GPI) highlights the level of security and societal safety, extent of international and domestic conflict, militarization level (Vision of Humanity, 2023) which is highly related to this specific variable. The scale runs from 1 to 5 where the lower the number the more peaceful the country is. Second indicator which suits the macro-level factor is political stability and absence of violence/terrorism indicated by Worldwide Governance indicators (Kaufmann & Kraay, 2023). It measures likelihood of political instability, motivated violence including terrorism. Scale ranges from

-2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong) estimation of governance performance. Different scores were available for 2020 and 2022.

Social identities are identified by the extent of collective narcissism and exclusion in the country. Collective narcissism perception will be analyzed through patriotic indoctrination level in education and media content which is measured by V-dem (Neundorf et al., 2023). Main value was taken while constructing a score of 5 years since tendency of patriotism indoctrination might be seen as a longer process. The score ranged from 0 to 1 meaning that lower number indicates less influence. Other V-dem indexes were used for measuring exclusion. Exclusion by socio-economic group index measures whether individuals have limited or denied access to services, or participation in governed spaces based on their social identity or belonging to a particular group (Pemstein et al., 2023). Similar exclusion by political groups and by social groups were included into measuring the broader exclusion situation in the country. Scale measurement ranges from 0 (low) to 1 (high) where lower score is equal to a better situation. Values of exclusion were provided for 2020 and 2022.

Economic factor is measured by GDP per capita, Gini index and unemployment rate following that these measures define the best situation of economic capacities in the country. GDP per capita value (U.S. dollars) was taken from OECD and World bank data of 2020 and 2022 (World Bank Open Data, n.d.-a). GINI coefficient has been included since it measures inequality based on comparison of cumulative proportions of population and cumulative proportions of income the population receive. Latest data of 2020 was included (except for Poland and Slovakia there was just 2019 data available) for both years (World Bank Open Data, n.d.-b). Score ranges from 0 (complete equality) to 100 (complete inequality). Lastly, unemployment rate which provides percentage (%) of labor force in 2020 and 2022 are included into the measurements, too (OECD, n.d.).

Political orientation is identified by democracy index, political polarization, support for populist parties elected and left-right wing orientation score. Democracy index defines functioning of government, political participation, electoral process, civil liberties, and political culture in the country which is an important measure for this macro-level factor (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2023). Score ranges from 0 to 10 (most democratic). Values are taken for 2020 and 2022. Another index is taken to measure political polarization. V-dem measures it by questioning whether society is polarized into antagonistic, political camps meaning society is polarized and reluctant to engage in friendly interaction of opposing political camps (Pemstein et al., 2023). Response is identified with a measure from -5 to 5 score. Next measurement is taken to identify support for populist party. Data provided by the Global party survey of 2020 was used (Norris, 2020). Global party survey was published in April of 2020 and no other recent data was available yet to be found. However, since it provides a response to the election that had happened from 2015 to 2018, it was used considering that it will provide a better view on the party's position. Also, responses of dependent variables were collected before most countries' reelection had happened (2020 spring or fall) making data applicable to the test. Values are presented in the percentage (%) showing a support for political parties which value populist attitudes and are either on left or right conservative political orientation. In addition, a score of leaning towards left or right wing was added from the same dataset of Global party survey of 2020. The score was valued from 0 to 10 meaning that 0 - extreme left, 5 - center, 10 - extreme right. Left parties defined by score below 4,5 and right parties defined by number which is above 5,5 while center rates in between 4,5 and 5,5.

Corruption is measured by corruption perception index (CPI) which shows perception of public sector corruption by businesspeople and country experts. Score ranges from 0 to 100 meaning that lower number shows a more corrupted country (Transparency International, 2023). In addition, the political corruption index, executive corruption index, and public sector corruption index was taken from V-dem (McMann et al., 2016) in order to have more specific corruption indexes available to analyze. Scale ranged from 0 (low) to 1 (high) meaning how often and to what extent corruption is in the observed country. All the values are taken from 2020 and 2022 presented data.

3.4. Method of analysis

Using SPSS as a main software for the analysis, standardization of dependent and independent variables was performed since original values had different variations. In total 19 values of transformed z-scores were included in the dataset as a dependent variable for conspiracy theory acceptance. As it was mentioned, 10 cases for 2020 and 9 cases for 2022 since the observed country number was smaller in the last survey. Next, a total of 21 independent variables with transformed z-scores were added together to start the analysis.

First, a nonparametric test of difference was chosen to explore possible differences in 2020 and 2022 response change to see if the time of two years has influence in conspiracy theory acceptance.

Second, in order to find strength in the relationship between dependent variable of conspiracy theory and independent variables, correlation was performed for the analysis. Spearman's correlation was used since the sample size of total 19 cases is considerably small, and it does not rely on normality of data distribution. Each macro-level factor was examined by the topic (cultural values, context of historical circumstances, social identity, economic factor, political orientation, and corruption) in searching if it has a relationship with conspiracy theory.

Lastly, a linear regression model, structured by independent variables that have correlation with dependent variable, will allow us to investigate relationships and predict the influencing value of one variable from another. The following chapter will introduce results in a detail.

4. Results of the study of macro-level factors influencing conspiracy theory acceptance in the Baltic and Central European States during 2020–2022

A nonparametric test of difference was conducted to explore whether 2020 and 2022 data responses to the dependent variable have significant difference between paired observations. The median of response (Table 2) for both years was “rather disagree” which was coded for value – 3 but mean of answers in 2020 were 2.56 while in 2022 a slightly bigger - 2.59. The result might suggest that the tendency to disagree on conspiracy theory is a bigger than it was a few years ago. Due to this reason, it would be possible to assume that people’s view has changed which would lead us in analyzing what factor might have influenced the change in different years separately.

Table 2. Comparison of responses for dependent variable in 2020 and 2022. Source: Author

		2020	2022
N	Valid	8496	7708
	Missing	1572	1292
Mean		2.56	2.59
Median		3.00	3.00
Range		3	3

After completing Wilcoxon signed ranks test, value of $z = -1.8363$ indicates the median of differences to be below zero (Table 3). This suggests a lower acceptance score of responses for conspiracy theory to be in the 2022 compared to the 2020, keeping in mind the 2022 sample is smaller. In addition, the asymptotic significance (2-tailed) is reported to be a $p = 0.066$ which is slightly above the $p > 0.05$ indicating that result does not provide statistical support to conclude that there is a significant change in conspiracy theory acceptance during 2020 to 2022. This suggests that two-year period is a short term to see a change and conspiracy theory mindset is constructed in a longer period of time. Therefore, the following tests are applied to 2020 and 2022 samples combined to find correlations between macro-level factors.

Table 3. Wilcoxon signed ranks test. Source: Author

<i>Test Statistics^a</i>	
	Conspiracy theory
Z	-1.836 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.066

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

Findings of Spearman's correlation show evidence that macro-level factors have influence in conspiracy theory acceptance. There is a relationship between conspiracy theory acceptance and *cultural values* (Table 4). A moderate strong negative correlation ($r_s = -0.611$) is with power distance which is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p = 0.005$, two-tailed). It indicates that if a power distance score increases, it has influence on higher conspiracy theory acceptance. The statistically strong positive correlation has been seen with individualism-collectivism dimension at the 0.01 level ($p = 0.002$, two-tailed) where $r_s = 0.675$. The result indicates that this dimension has correlation with conspiracy theory acceptance, indicating that more individualistic countries score lower on conspiracy theory acceptance than collectivistic, which corroborates findings from previous studies.

On the other hand, analysis suggests that correlation coefficient of masculinity ($r_s = 0.096$) is weak and not statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p = 0.696$, two-tailed) with conspiracy theory acceptance. No meaningful relationship was found with uncertainty avoidance, too. The correlation coefficient suggests a very weak negative relationship and no statistical significance. These findings provide evidence that examined samples potentially have association with just power distance and individualism-collectivism while analyzing cultural value dimensions.

Table 4. Correlation with cultural values. Source: Author

		Conspiracy theory	
Spearman's rho	Power distance	Correlation Coefficient	-.611**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
		N	19
	Individualism	Correlation Coefficient	.675**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.002
		N	19
	Masculinity	Correlation Coefficient	.096
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.696
		N	19
	Uncertainty avoidance	Correlation Coefficient	-.051
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.835
		N	19

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The next macro-level factor that Spearman's correlation analysis was undertaken is *context of historical circumstances* where Global Peace index and Political stability, absence of violence/terrorism indicators explored relationship with conspiracy theory (Table 5). The results show a nuanced relationship between indexes. While the overall Global Peace index have $p = 0.096$ suggesting a trend towards significance and negative correlation of $r_s = -0.393$, Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism indicates strong positive relationship ($r_s = 0.582$) and statistical significance ($p = 0.009$) at the level 0.01 (two-tailed). The result contributes to the importance of peace and stable dynamics in the society which have an impact in conspiracy theory endorsement.

Table 5. Correlations with context of historical circumstances. Source: Author

		Conspiracy theory	
Spearman's rho	Global Peace index	Correlation Coefficient	-.393
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.096
		N	19
	Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism	Correlation Coefficient	.582**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.009
		N	19

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Social identity is the next analyzed macro-level factor in which there has been found a correlation with conspiracy theory acceptance (Table 6). Statistically significant association at the 0.05 level (two-tailed) is identified with the degree of exclusion by socio-economic factors where moderate negative relationship of $r_s = -0.499$ suggest the tendency for higher conspiracy belief if exclusion by socio-economic factor increases. On the contrary, weak, or very weak negative correlation has been

found with exclusion by political groups and social groups. Moreover, both p values are not statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

No clear evidence of meaningful relationship has been found while analyzing patriotic indoctrination content in education and the media. In addition, the results suggest a very weak negative relationship ($r_s = -0.051$) between conspiracy theory and exposure to this factor.

Table 6. Correlations with social identity. Source: Author

		Conspiracy theory	
Spearman's rho	Patriotic indoctrination content in education and the media	Correlation Coefficient	-.051
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.834
		N	19
		<hr/>	
	Exclusion by socio-economic factors	Correlation Coefficient	-.499*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.030
		N	19
		<hr/>	
	Exclusion by political group	Correlation Coefficient	-.055
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.822
		N	19
		<hr/>	
	Exclusion by social group	Correlation Coefficient	-.277
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.252
		N	19
		<hr/>	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Another correlation has been identified while analyzing *economic factor* associations (Table 7). The outcome shows robust positive correlation of $r_s = 0.644$ meaning a significant positive relationship with conspiracy theory acceptance and GDP per capita. In addition, this association is statistically significant at the 0.01 level ($p = 0.003$) which suggests that GDP per capita increase corresponds with a tendency to agree with conspiracy theories less. Unemployment rate has also a correlation which indicates a moderate negative association ($r_s = -0.517$) between conspiracy theory acceptance followed by statistically significant association at the 0.05 level signaling that as the unemployment rate increases, acceptance of conspiracy theory belief rises. These findings confirm already proposed research that economic indicators are noteworthy for conspiracy theory endorsement. However, the GINI index which measures income inequality does not have statistical significance at the 0.05 level where correlation of $r_s = -0.367$ suggests a moderate negative relationship.

Table 7. Correlations with economic factor. Source: Author

		Conspiracy theory	
Spearman's rho	GDP per capita	Correlation Coefficient	.644**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.003
		N	19
<hr/>			
	GINI index	Correlation Coefficient	-.367
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.123
		N	19
<hr/>			
	Unemployment rate	Correlation Coefficient	-.517*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.048
		N	15
<hr/>			

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Next, *political orientation* has been investigated (Table 8). Democracy index has a highly significant positive correlation ($r_s = 0.612$) indicating a robust relationship between conspiracy theory

acceptance. This relationship is statistically significant at the 0.01 level suggesting that strong democratic characteristics in the country is associated with lower conspiracy theory beliefs. On the other hand, no statistical significance is found with other political indicator such as political polarization, support for political election and left-right wing score of the party. In addition, negative weak correlation ($r_s = -0.080$) of political polarization, extremely weak positive correlation ($r_s = 0.016$) of political party support by voting was found.

Table 8. Correlations with political orientation. Source: Author

		Conspiracy theory	
Spearman's rho	Democracy index	Correlation Coefficient	.612**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.005
		N	19
	Political polarization	Correlation Coefficient	-.080
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.745
		N	19
	Support for political party by voting in election	Correlation Coefficient	.016
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.951
		N	17
	Left-right wing score of party	Correlation Coefficient	.316
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.272
		N	14

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Lastly, Spearman's correlation was employed to assess association between conspiracy theory acceptance and level of *corruption* identified in examined countries (Table 9). The analysis showed that there are no statistically significant associations at the 0.05 level while CPI, index of political corruption and index of public corruption suggest a trend towards significance ($p = 0.052$ – CPI; $p = 0.070$ – political corruption; $p = 0.068$ - public corruption). However, general results suggest that further investigation with larger sample size might provide more conclusive evidence, but currently the evidence is still lacking to conclude otherwise.

Table 9. Correlations with corruption. Source: Author

		Conspiracy theory	
Spearman's rho	CPI	Correlation Coefficient	.451
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.052
		N	19
	Index of political corruption	Correlation Coefficient	-.425
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.070
		N	19
	Index of executive corruption	Correlation Coefficient	.064
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.794
		N	19
	Index of public corruption	Correlation Coefficient	-.428
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.068
		N	19

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Finally, to investigate and predict the value of dependent variables from independent variables which had statistical correlation linear regression was used. Considering sample size of 19 as being a small

sample, higher significance level of $p < 0.1$ is used to identify significant relationships between independent and dependent variables.

Therefore, independent variables – power distance ($p = 0.005$), individualism ($p = 0.002$), Global Peace index ($p = 0.096$) political orientation and absence of violence/terrorism ($p = 0.009$), exclusion by socio-economic factors ($p = 0.03$), GDP per capita ($p = 0.003$), unemployment rate ($p = 0.048$), democracy index ($p = 0.005$), CPI ($p = 0.052$), index of political corruption ($p = 0.07$), and index of public corruption ($p = 0.068$) were used as a predictors in the model.

The model summary (Table 10) indicates a very strong positive linear relationship where R value is 0.973. R square value shows that the majority (94.7%) of the variance in the dependent variable can be explained by the identified eleven predictors.

Table 10. Regression Model Summary for eleven predictors. Source: Author

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.973 ^a	.947	.751	.43531290

a. Predictors

However, overall model has shown (Table 11) that p-value (0.110) is not less than 0.1, indicating a caution to interpret the model and the need to carefully evaluate the predictors' significance values since collectively model does not provide strong evidence when predicting conspiracy theory variation. Therefore, coefficients of each predictor were carefully looked to see a potential individual significance. It was found that unemployment rate has a value of $p = 0.067$ which is accepted for value $p < 0.1$ (Appendix 4). The result indicates that there is association between this predictor and dependent variable value change.

Table 11. ANOVA test for the first model. Source: Author

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.094	11	.918	4.842	.110
	Residual	.568	3	.189		
	Total	10.662	14			

Nevertheless, to enhance robustness of findings and improve model performance, independent variables which had no correlation with conspiracy theory at 0.01 and 0.05 level were excluded minimizing predictor number to seven independent variables (power distance, individualism-collectivism, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, exclusion by socio-economic factors, GDP per capita, unemployment rate and democracy index). The result (Table 12) has shown lower R square rate (91,2%) than comparing with previous regression.

Table 12. Regression Model Summary for seven predictors. Source: Author

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
.955 ^a	.912	.824	.36646741

a. Predictors

However, overall model's p-value scoring low ($p = 0.003$) suggest evidence that regression model is statistically significant and capable to collectively influence dependent variable (Table 13).

Table 13. ANOVA test for the second model. Source: Author

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
2	Regression	9.722	7	1.389	10.342	.003
	Residual	.940	7	.134		
	Total	10.662	14			

In addition, analysis suggest that once again unemployment rate among seven independent variables, has statistical significance ($p = 0.002$) in contributing to the model and has the strongest association with conspiracy theory acceptance (Table 14).

Table 14. Coefficients predicting conspiracy theory acceptance level. Source: Author

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
2	(Constant)	.003	.158		.019	.985
	Power distance	-.267	.265	-.299	-1.007	.347
	Individualism	.240	.147	.249	1.635	.146
	Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism	-.133	.147	-.137	-.908	.394
	Exclusion by socio-economic factors	-.461	.582	-.297	-.792	.454
	GDP per capita	.585	.288	.658	2.035	.081
	Unemployment rate	-.504	.105	-.577	-4.781	.002
	Democracy index	-.328	.418	-.338	-.785	.458

The result presented in both of regression models indicates that unemployment is more influential independent variable than others, which has effect in predicting conspiracy theory acceptance in Baltic and Central European states. Nevertheless, it is important to note that independent variables that have correlated with conspiracy theory variable are as much important in motivating conspiracy theory acceptance increase across countries as unemployment rate.

In conclusion, the data analysis has identified main independent variables that have significant relationship in understanding macro-level factor influence in conspiracy theory acceptance. Therefore, the following chapter will be dedicated in discussing these findings in practical settings.

5. Interpretation and discussion

This study explored macro-level factors which influence willingness to accept conspiracy theories. By implementing this research, it was aimed to extend previous knowledge of external transmission factors causing conspiracy theory acceptance (Hornsey et al., 2023; Ushchinski et al., 2022) while analyzing cross-national differences (Adam-Troian et al., 2021; Imhoff et al. 2022; Walter & Drochon, 2022) of Baltic and Central European states since limited research has covered these countries in general. There are several noteworthy findings which can contribute to the study field.

First of all, statistical data identifies differences in conspiracy theory acceptance across the region and more widely indicates tendencies of conspiracy theory belief in each country. Although data used in this study was collected not by researcher but by the organization, it brought challenges and new possibilities to study the material in different perspectives. The description of data presented in the study showed broader insights which were not reported by GLOBSEC before. Moreover, it does support that Central Europe and Baltic countries have higher acceptance rates of conspiracy theories in the region and country level differences in conspiracy theory acceptance exists. Bigger number of people accepting conspiracies are in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia (see Appendix 1 & 2). Also, it is worth addressing that a comparatively low number of statistical data are available on this topic showing the difficulty to measure attitude on conspiracies. Nevertheless, the study contributes to YouGov findings (2020) which shows that across 24 examined countries perception on conspiracy theories differ. Hungary and Poland take overall 13th and 16th places while Denmark, Great Britain, Sweden are at the bottom showing regional differences. In addition, Eurobarometer findings conclude that out of 27 EU member states 56% consider themselves to be able detect false beliefs (Eurobarometer, 2021), while on the other hand, lower confidence is seen among Central Europe and Baltic countries. The results presented in this study once again support previous statistical data that this region is more prone to conspiracy theories than other European regions.

Another attention has to be paid for no significant change in results during the period of 2020 and 2022. This suggests several things. First, support for conspiracy theories is rooted in people's perception and the view on them does not change immediately. Second, context does not make visible differences considering that data was collected during the pandemic period and at the beginning of invasion of Ukraine which would be seen as a stressor to increase stimulus to engage in conspiracies more than before (van Prooijen and Douglas, 2017). In this case our findings support Uscinski et. al (2022) study results that conspiracy beliefs are generally not increasing but rather reinforcing already existing views that are deeply rooted in the country. Skepticism and acceptance of conspiracies in the country, according to Bilewich (2022) during a prosperous time is due to historical trauma the nation had experienced. Knowing the history, it would be possible to apply post-Soviet trauma as an indicator why the region has the tendency to endorse conspiracy theories, following with Ramonaitė (2023) study on post-Soviet nostalgia in Central and Eastern Europe as evidence. Cultural transmission of past events is applicable in this case, too.

Secondly, dynamics of Baltic and Central European states' acceptance of conspiracy theories are related to macro-level factors as research shows. The influence has been identified with power distance, individualism-collectivism, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, exclusion by socio-economic factor, GDP per capita, unemployment rate and democracy index. The regression model has shown the surprisingly high variance (91,2%) by these factors are able to predict

conspiracy theory acceptance. Seeking to understand each of the relationships and interpret the result in a broader context, it is worth discussing each of the macro-level factors individually.

Our research supports previous findings that higher scores in power distance (van Prooijen & Song, 2021) and collectivism (Hornsey & Peterson, 2020) are related to conspiracy theory acceptance due to promotion of hierarchical systems in the country which influence people to believe in conspiracies more. Evidence contributes to cultural psychology that individual beliefs have a relationship with cultural values which corresponds to society. Despite the fact that the observed countries scored comparably similar on individualism dimension, Romania, Poland, and Bulgaria were leaning towards collectivism slightly more (Appendix 3) which would support the effect of individualism-collectivism in the region.

Power distance and conspiracy theory correlation signals important relationship between variables, especially analyzing the data. High power distance score recorded for Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and percentage of respondents who agree with conspiracy, indicates that countries accept unequal power distribution more which could be seen as an indication for conspiracy theory existence. According to Pantazi et al. (2022) conspiracy theory acceptance can be seen as a desire to have a greater transparency and accountability in politics even in democratic countries, suggesting that it could be a signal for value change in the region as well.

Another important point is related to political stability and security which was identified as having correlation with conspiracy theory acceptance. Low number of violence and terrorism provides a stable environment in which the population feels safe. In other words, there is less social threat felt which would motivate them to accept conspiracy theory. Therefore, keeping a well-balanced atmosphere on individual and on the country level, can improve the resilience of conspiracy theories.

Moving further, surprisingly no strong relationship was seen with political ideology while on the other hand, democracy index has a correlation with conspiracy theory supporting Hornsey et al. (2022) findings that countries scoring higher on democracy index have lower tendency to accept conspiracy theories. However, in this case since democracy scale values are comparably similar in the region, it demonstrates democracy's satisfaction which can influence populations' decision to rely on conspiracy theories or not. Considering that political orientation is a macro-level factor which can determine acceptance tendency, close observation of people's attitude on this has to be considered. According to European Social Survey (ESS ERIC, 2023), which was conducted during 2020-2022, extremely dissatisfied how democracy works in country are Bulgaria (18,5%) scoring the highest among 31 countries, Slovakia (12,1%), Hungary (7,9%) and Lithuania (8,2%) out of Baltic countries. Similar results were reported for satisfaction of each country's national government performance while Hungary leaned towards a more positive attitude. In addition, mistrust in the country's parliament was especially high in Bulgaria (33,1%), Slovakia (21,4%), Lithuania (14,9%) (ESS ERIC, 2023). It is already evident that political mistrust is associated with higher conspiracy theory acceptance (Schlippak et al., 2022) emphasizing that acceptance level can be influenced by this macro-level factor in the Baltic and Central European countries, too.

Even though populism was not identified statistically significant in the study of 2020–2022 as having correlation, evaluating current elected parties and their political orientation, it would be possible to speculate an interesting shift towards possible attitude change which might be seen in the near future. Especially considering the fact that the Central European countries (Slovakia, Hungary) are leaning

towards leaders with populist attitudes and well-known conspiracy theory rhetoric. It is a question of time when conspiracy theory narrative will be a new normal way to secure political position in Central Europe and Baltic countries.

Nevertheless, the most dominant result of this study is the importance of economic effect in conspiracy theory acceptance. The study draws attention to the economical state of the country as being a major macro-level factor in the Baltic and Central European states during 2020–2022 period. Study suggests that GDP per capita and unemployment rate are highly associated and have influence on tendencies to believe conspiratorial statements. In addition, exclusion of socio-economic factor can be identified as highly relating to economic conditions, too. The findings have shown that it has a relationship with conspiracy theory acceptance in observed countries. The result supports Cordonier et al. (2021) findings that high unemployment rate is one of the socio factors which influence conspiracy theory acceptance in Western and non-Western countries. Moreover, this research has shown that unemployment is a measure which can highly contribute to conspiracy theory acceptance increase if the rate increases, suggesting that stable workforce creation might be a stimulus to mitigate engagement into conspiracy theories.

On the other hand, perception of economic performance and reality has to be taken into consideration, meaning that difficult economic conditions that had happened in the past affects the attitude to perceive current and future situations negatively although it is not true, leading to conspiracy theory acceptance without realizing the reality (Hornsey et al., 2022). Recent European Social survey (ESS ERIC, 2023) findings show that Bulgaria (19,1%) and Slovakia (13,6%) identify their economic condition as extremely bad. In addition, countries which evaluate their life satisfaction with lowest scores are Bulgaria, Slovakia, Lithuania, and Hungary where out of our analyzed countries just Estonia is in the top 10 countries showing higher satisfaction. Study made by Grišinas, Lašas and Kalpokas (2022) has shown that subjective perception of the financial state of individuals is an important point in evaluating why conspiracy theory is accepted among people in Lithuania. All these insights could be seen as a valuable interpretation that economic conditions are an important aspect influencing conspiracy theory acceptance.

Moving further, research findings can be applied in practical and real-world settings in several ways. Maintaining a stable employment rate can mitigate people's motivation to accept conspiracy theory. Sudden increase of unemployment brings uncertainty and dissatisfaction of current situation which endorse public to willingly engage into conspiracy theories. Identifying this as a possible risk for conspiracy theory acceptance increase, policymakers should consider ways to prepare labor markets for possible sudden shocks. Support for adaptation and transition options to other fields if needed should be planned in advance. Social policies to tackle challenges after unemployment is another key in creating overall support for well-being which is facing issues of housing, healthcare, childcare, etc. Creation of supportive governance for citizens can bring a positive outcome which will lower willingness to accept conspiracy theories.

Nevertheless, keeping in mind that conspiracy theory perception is already formed in the society, more attention has to be paid on how to improve the country's functioning in order to minimize and eliminate possible threats conspiracy theories pose. Therefore, following this interpretation policymakers should focus on minimizing conspiracy theory impact on people who believe in them already since it is evident that conspiracy theory sharing is dominant with the communities that already had agreed on conspiracy in the past (Metaxas & Finn, 2017). By this it would mean to

educate people in the ability to debunk conspiracy theories, encourage them to rationally evaluate information and look for grounded evidence to be able to disagree with them. In addition, more attention has to be paid in creating trustworthy media platforms where unbiased and confirmed information is presented to the public. In addition, social media usage to access news among all age groups has been increased from 46% in 2022 to 57% in 2023 (Eurobarometer, 2023), indicating that it can be used as a positive tool to increase people's knowledge on misleading information on which conspiracy theories are focused.

Nevertheless, the trust of official institutions has to be increased since recent data presented in the section emphasizes current negative perception which influences people to rely on conspiracy theories. It is important to understand that transparency and communication is a key in resolving the issues focusing on inclusive decision-making as a primary step to establish fair and just policies for the entire community. Special attention has to be paid for accountability in order to construct mechanisms which would detect unethical and irresponsible behavior of individuals and institutions. By pursuing these elements, trust can be rebuilt and strengthened over time with consistent effort and genuine commitment.

In conclusion, our research is a step forward in understanding macro-level factors which influence conspiracy theory acceptance in the Baltic and Central European countries. Since there are cross-cultural differences in conspiracy theory acceptance, these nations are influenced by cultural values (power distance and collectivism-individualism dimension), context (political stability and absence of violence/terrorism), fear of exclusion (especially by socio-economic factor), economic circumstances (GDP per capita and unemployment rate) and political orientation (level of democracy) mostly. Research suggests that it is crucial to identify macro-level factors in order to choose tools and methods to decrease conspiracy theory acceptance rate since it is evident that believers are highly rooted in the society.

Conclusions

1. Conspiracy theory is a complex social construct where belief of specific political or social event is narrated as interconnected, secret or plotted creating an implausible scenario which is informed to be beyond public knowledge purposely intending to make oppositional attitudes in order to provoke, manipulate, and achieve strategic support for financial or political power gains without providing necessary evidence to ground the truth of stated information.
2. Cultural values, context of historical circumstances, social identity, economic factors, political orientations, and corruption are main macro-level factors that influence willingness to engage in conspiracy theories differently in cross-national context.
3. Macro-level factors that are related to higher conspiracy theory acceptance in the Baltic and Central European states are power distance, individualism-collectivism, political stability and absence of violence/terrorism, exclusion by socio-economic factor, GDP per capita, unemployment rate and democracy index. These elements can overall predict conspiracy theory acceptance rate by 91,2 %. In particular, economic factors, especially unemployment rate has the most significant impact on the tendency to accept conspiracy theories in the Baltic and Central European states.
4. Conspiracy theory acceptance in Baltic and Central European states during the 2020 and 2022 period has not changed, showing Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia being mostly keen in conspiracy theory endorsement which suggests a tendency for conspiracy theory to be rooted in the country. The result suggests that it is important to pay attention to conspiracy theory supporters that are already exposed to them and mitigate conspiracy theory acceptance by lowering unemployment rate, increasing trust of institutions, providing tools and methods to debunk and identify conspiracy theories in social media or other platforms, creating a well-informed society how to tackle this phenomenon.

Recommendations for future studies and limitations

The study on macro-level factors influencing conspiracy theory acceptance in the Baltic and Central European states have a potential to be continued in a more complex analysis in order to achieve different views on the issue. With intention to research on this topic forward, several suggestions for future research will be made.

To acquire an objective attitude on conspiracy theory acceptance, there should be a bigger number of conspiracy theories measured in the survey in order to create a more diverse dependent variable. The list of conspiracy theories that are dominant in the region could provide important insights in analyzing tendencies, main objects, narratives that are commonly applied in conspiracy theory communities. This would lead to more in-depth interpretation of not just statistical data, but also critical analysis on the context.

While conducting longitudinal research, deeper understanding of regional dynamics could be identified, and possible patterns of change and stability could be revealed. Considering the fact that other moderating variables might be influential to conspiracy theory acceptance, future research could explore variations on factors such media exposure, individual socio-economic differences, etc. The study could be replicated in different cultural or geographical contexts to get a wider scope of possible differences.

Since conspiracy theory is a considerably new area of study, qualitative methods could be incorporated to analyze in-depth insights on conspiracy theory narrative which might be interpreted differently based on country using macro-levels which were identified in this research. Special attention could be paid to interview conspiracy believers in order to acquire their understanding of the key components which influence their decision to accept the malicious belief.

This study is not without limitations. Characterization of dependent variables by one statement might be lacking in this research. Future research should identify more conspiracy theories as it was suggested at the beginning. However, it should be remembered that the questionnaire and method of coding was chosen not by researcher, making it more challenging to work with the data. Nevertheless, given the accuracy of question construction and availability of the same question in the dataset of 2020 and 2022, it was possible to conduct the study. It should be included that potential sources of measurement error can be identified since indexes are constructed by different measures.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Attitude on conspiracy theories in Baltic and Central European states in 2020

		Country										Total
		Slovakia	Czech Republic	Poland	Hungary	Austria	Romania	Bulgaria	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	
The terrorist attack on the World Trade Center in New York in 2001 was planned and conducted by the American government, not Al-Qaeda.	Strongly agree	15.3%	20%	5.1%	6.9%	2.8%	15%	14.7%	10.1%	4.1%	3.8%	9.8%
	Rather agree	28.7%	8.3%	8.4%	16.2%	10.4%	14.2%	17.2%	16.7%	12.7%	6.7%	13.9%
	Rather disagree	23.5%	16.8%	25.2%	37.9%	22.2%	17.9%	16.4%	17.7%	23%	15.8%	21.6%
	Strongly disagree	13.3%	24.0%	46.1%	27.8%	56.7%	30%	20.5%	22.9%	25.6%	30.9%	29.7%
	Do not know (do not read)	19.2%	30.9%	15.2%	11.2%	7.9%	22.8%	31.3%	32.6%	34.6%	42.8%	24.9%
Jews have too much power and secretly control governments and institutions around the world.	Strongly agree	17.6%	19.9%	16.3%	21.1%	5.2%	16.3%	18.3%	5.4%	6.8%	8.8%	13.6%
	Rather agree	34.3%	5.2%	22.1%	27.9%	14.4%	16.2%	22.5%	11.3%	21.5%	26.5%	20.1%
	Rather disagree	26.4%	14.9%	26.6%	25.5%	23.7%	21.3%	18.7%	29.2%	25.6%	17.2%	22.9%
	Strongly disagree	10.5%	30%	22.4%	17.5%	52.6%	25.6%	15.4%	28.3%	25%	12.6%	24%
	Do not know (do not read)	11.4%	30.1%	12.6%	8%	4.1%	20.6%	25.2%	25.8%	21.1%	34.9%	19.4%
World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.	Strongly agree	19%	18.7%	11.9%	12.9%	5.9%	28.9%	24.1%	12.1%	10.5%	10%	15.4%
	Rather agree	42.3%	10.6%	29.1%	15.8%	16.8%	22%	28.8%	27.5%	31.9%	31.9%	25.6%
	Rather disagree	21.4%	31.3%	27.9%	38%	26%	17.6%	15.7%	23.3%	22.4%	16%	24%
	Strongly disagree	7.7%	24.8%	19.5%	25%	47%	15.7%	11.9%	17.4%	14.2%	10.3%	19.4%
	Do not know (do not read)	9.6%	14.5%	11.6%	8.3%	4.3%	15.8%	19.6%	19.7%	21.1%	31.8%	15.6%

Appendix 2. Attitude on conspiracy theories in Baltic and Central European states in 2022

		Country									Total
		Slovakia	Czech Republic	Poland	Hungary	Romania	Bulgaria	Estonia	Latvia	Lithuania	
Democracy does not exist, because in reality hidden elites rules the world.	Strongly agree	21.8%	13.7%	19%	27.6%	18%	23.8%	12.7%	11.9%	16.9%	18.4%
	Rather agree	36.9%	22.6%	22.6%	17.4%	31.5%	38.2%	23.1%	22.9%	26.5%	26.9%
	Rather disagree	26.2%	31%	23.8%	15.3%	27.4%	16.7%	25.8%	24.9%	25.9%	24.1%
	Strongly disagree	11.4%	30.1%	22%	29.7%	13.6%	9.1%	23.8%	29.8%	11%	20.1%
	Do not know (do not read)	3.7%	2.6%	12.6%	10%	9.5%	12.2%	14.6%	10.5%	19.7%	10.6%
World affairs are not decided by elected leaders but by secret groups aiming to establish a totalitarian world order.	Strongly agree	21.3%	7.9%	13.7%	20.6%	15.6%	23.7%	10.2%	11.4%	13.9%	15.4%
	Rather agree	31.8%	23.1%	24.1%	16.4%	31.5%	37.4%	21.2%	23.2%	24.8%	25.9%
	Rather disagree	27.7%	33.4%	23.9%	13.8%	27.4%	15.4%	23.7%	22.9%	20.3%	23.2%
	Strongly disagree	14.4%	31.1%	23.6%	30.8%	14.4%	8.1%	26.6%	27.6%	13.9%	21.2%
	Do not know (do not read)	4.8%	4.5%	14.7%	18.4%	11.1%	15.4%	18.3%	14.9%	27.1%	14.4%

Appendix 3. Value table of independent variables

Country	Year	Cultural values				Context of historical circumstances		Social identity				Economic factor			Political orientation				Corruption			
		Power distance	Individualism-collectivism	Masculinity	Uncertainty avoidance	Global Peace index	Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism	Patriotic indoctrination content in education and the media	Exclusion by socio-economic factors	Exclusion by political group	Exclusion by social group	GDP per capita	GINI index	Unemployment rate	Democracy index	Political polarization	Support for populist party by voting in election	Left-right wing score of party	CPI	Corruption (political index)	Corruption (executive index)	Corruption (public index)
Austria	2020	11	77	79	70	1,265	0,89	0,014	0,045	0,041	0,075	48809.22688	29,8	6	8,16	-0.062	31,2	6,47	76	0,07	0,039	0,085
Bulgaria	2020	70	50	40	85	1,596	0,40	0,416	0,142	0,067	0,122	10153.4766	40,5	NA	6,71	0.554	32,7	7,4	43	0,552	0,447	0,548
Czech Republic	2020	57	70	57	74	1,346	0,91	0,145	0,039	0,05	0,039	22992.87938	26,2	2,5	7,67	-0.595	29,6	6	54	0,23	0,393	0,239
Estonia	2020	40	62	30	60	1,568	0,71	0,331	0,02	0,029	0,118	23595.24368	30,7	6,9	7,84	-0.26	8,1	NA	75	0,04	0,041	0,03
Hungary	2020	46	71	88	82	1,548	0,84	0,6452	0,135	0,246	0,219	16125.60941	29,7	4,1	6,56	2.518	49,3	8,3	44	0,503	0,75	0,23
Latvia	2020	44	70	9	63	1,625	0,46	0,749	0,023	0,024	0,044	18207.13964	35,7	8,1	7,24	-2.448	NA	7,4	57	0,116	0,37	0,114
Lithuania	2020	42	55	19	65	1,652	0,92	0,352	0,056	0,022	0,02	20363.92441	36	8,5	7,13	-2.397	35,4	3,26	60	0,12	0,022	0,119
Poland	2020	68	47	64	93	1,595	0,49	0,6586	0,086	0,173	0,089	15816.8204	28,8	3,2	6,85	3.083	61	7,69	56	0,117	0,103	0,137
Romania	2020	90	46	42	90	1,554	0,51	0,1428	0,215	0,109	0,124	13047.45768	34,6	NA	6,40	0.395	45,4	3,23	44	0,386	0,227	0,355
Slovakia	2020	100	57	100	21	1,539	0,63	0,2964	0,164	0,052	0,098	19551.62116	23,2	6,7	6,97	-0.229	28,3	NA	49	0,248	0,215	0,202
Austria	2022	11	77	79	70	1.31	0.64	0,014	0,07	0,111	0,105	52131.44666	29,8	4,8	8,2	0.248	31,2	6,47	71	0,143	0,206	0,154
Bulgaria	2022	70	50	40	85	1,557	0.25	0,416	0,141	0,065	0,228	13772.47679	40,5	NA	6,53	0.967	32,7	7,4	44	0,3	0,182	0,328
Czech Republic	2022	57	70	57	74	1,317	0.82	0,145	0,058	0,037	0,043	27638.37328	26,2	2,4	7,97	-0.496	29,6	6	56	0,174	0,291	0,234
Estonia	2022	40	62	30	60	1,565	0.72	0,331	0,025	0,069	0,113	28332.62909	30,7	5,6	7,96	-0.264	8,1	NA	74	0,041	0,045	0,03
Hungary	2022	46	71	88	82	1,433	0.64	0,6634	0,158	0,266	0,271	18463.20852	29,7	3,6	6,64	2.637	49,3	8,3	42	0,537	0,742	0,23
Latvia	2022	44	70	9	63	1,624	0.48	0,74	0,024	0,023	0,051	21851.1052	35,7	6,8	7,37	-1.222	NA	7,4	59	0,104	0,37	0,114
Lithuania	2022	42	55	19	65	1,658	0.65	0,3416	0,043	0,014	0,024	24826.79104	36	5,9	7,31	-0.792	35,4	3,26	62	0,103	0,022	0,105
Poland	2022	68	47	64	93	1.54	0.5	0,68	0,084	0,26	0,11	18321.28089	28,8	2,9	7,04	3.485	61	7,69	55	0,132	0,14	0,137
Romania	2022	90	46	42	90	1,666	0.49	0,678	0,412	0,156	0,212	15892.11853	34,6	NA	6,45	1.202	45,4	3,23	46	0,362	0,188	0,238
Slovakia	2022	100	57	100	21	1,508	0.44	0,2966	0,157	0,059	0,096	21258.11414	23,2	6,2	7,07	0.226	28,3	NA	53	0,241	0,187	0,202

Appendix 4. Coefficients with eleven independent variables

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Coefficients			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.065	.518		-.126	.908		
	Power distance	-.158	.671	-.177	-.236	.828	.032	31.744
	Individualism	.858	.651	.890	1.318	.279	.039	25.696
	Global Peace index	.421	.472	.517	.892	.438	.053	18.883
	Political stability and absence of violence/terrorism	.079	.308	.081	.256	.814	.179	5.583
	Exclusion by socio-economic factors	.386	1.916	.249	.202	.853	.012	85.617
	GDP per capita	.589	.797	.663	.739	.513	.022	45.194
	Unemployment rate	-.900	.320	-1.031	-2.809	.067	.132	7.582
	Democracy index	-.551	.733	-.568	-.752	.507	.031	32.131
	CPI	.139	1.028	.152	.135	.901	.014	70.969
	Index of political corruption	-.664	1.284	-.689	-.517	.641	.010	99.992
	Index of public corruption	-.110	1.413	-.073	-.078	.943	.020	49.474

Dependent Variable: conspiracy theory