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# CONSPIRACY STEREOTYPES IN TIMES OF WAR: THE IMPACT OF PARTY IDENTIFICATION ON BELIEF IN ANTI-UKRAINIAN CONSPIRACIES IN POLAND

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85

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*In February 2022, the Russian army launched an attack on Ukraine. This conflict has had a profound impact on Poland due to geographic proximity, historical background, and the large influx of migrants. Initially, the war strengthened Polish-Ukrainian relations, but over time, competition for valuable resources reinforced an 'us vs. them' mentality, fostering conspiracy stereotypes. Some political actors have begun to exploit anti-Ukrainian sentiments to gain electoral support. Our study (N = 1,040) examines whether party identification influences belief in conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians (the Job Theft and Romantic Rivalry narratives). The results confirm that supporters of parties promoting anti-Ukrainian rhetoric are significantly more likely to endorse such stereotypes. Identification with the far-right Confederation party correlates more strongly with support for anti-Ukrainian conspiracies than national identification, populism, right-wing authoritarianism, religiosity, or ideology. Stronger associations are observed only for xenophobia, paranoid ideation, collective narcissism, and belief in unique in-group victimhood.*

**Key words:** conspiracy theory; conspiracy stereotypes; anti-Ukrainian conspiracies; party identification; Russo-Ukrainian war.

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# Introduction

86

On the night of February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin delivered an address to the Russian nation in which he announced the beginning of a 'special military operation' aimed at defending the population of the Donbas from alleged 'genocide' and at 'demilitarising and denazifying Ukraine'. In practice, this declaration provided the justification for the Russian Federation to launch a full-scale invasion of Ukraine (Wilk and Domańska, 2022). The invasion marked the outbreak of one of the largest armed conflicts in Europe since the Second World War and generated a profound geopolitical crisis in the region (Grosse, 2023). As a result of the hostilities, nearly 4.5 million refugees left Ukraine between February and April 2022 alone (UNHCR, 2022). The main host countries included Poland, Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, and Hungary. This massive exodus of people posed a major challenge for the receiving states, particularly for Poland.

Prior to the war, a significant majority – 57% – of the Ukrainian minority in Poland consisted of men who had arrived primarily for work-related purposes. The refugee crisis substantially altered this demographic structure. At present, the Ukrainian minority in Poland is composed predominantly of women, children, and young people. The most pronounced change occurred among those under the age of 18, whose numbers rose from approximately 200,000 before the invasion to around 1.4 million one year later (Selectivv, 2023).

It should be emphasised that from the very first days – and indeed even hours – of the arrival of refugees from Ukraine in Poland, there was an extraordinary mobilisation of ordinary citizens, who engaged in grassroots assistance in various forms, ranging from financial support and in-kind aid to volunteering and even hosting refugees in their own homes. Moreover, the Polish authorities introduced a series of formal administrative measures. The Sejm of the Republic of Poland adopted the Act on Assistance to Citizens of Ukraine in Connection with the Armed Conflict on the Territory of That Country. On the very same day, the act was signed by the President and published (Journal of Laws 2022, item 583). The legislation primarily introduced the possibility of granting Ukrainian citizens a PESEL number, which allowed them, among other things, to access medical, social, and educational services, take up employment, and establish business activities. The act was adopted with 439 votes in favour, 12 against, with 3 abstentions, and 6 members absent. Among those who voted against it were 9 MPs from Confederation, as well as one MP each from Poland 2050, the Left, and

Kukiz'15. Confederation's opposition at that time already signalled that the assistance to Ukraine could become a significant source of division in Polish politics in the future.

Immediately after the outbreak of the war, Poles' attitudes towards accepting refugees from Ukraine were overwhelmingly positive. In April 2022, as many as 91% of respondents believed that Poland should admit Ukrainian refugees. Only 4% held the opposite view, while 5% expressed no opinion on the matter. At the same time, nearly two-thirds of respondents declared that they themselves, or members of their family, had been actively involved in providing assistance to refugees (Feliksiak, 2022). However, this initial consensus eroded over time. By September 2023, support for accepting refugees from Ukraine had declined sharply to 65%, while opposition had risen to more than one-quarter (28%) (Scovil, 2023). The downward trend continued into September 2024, when just over half of Poles (53%) expressed pro-Ukrainian sentiment. A record 40% of people had the opposite opinion. Within the span of two years, public support for Ukrainian refugees had thus dropped by nearly forty percentage points, while opposition registered a tenfold increase compared to the early months of the war. Sociodemographic patterns further highlighted the divisions in public opinion. Support for admitting Ukrainian refugees was less frequently declared by women, the youngest age cohort (18–24 years), rural residents, individuals with lower levels of education and income, as well as those who support right-wing political parties (Scovil, 2024).

## Anti-Ukrainian Narratives and Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT)

As indicated, Poles' attitudes towards Ukrainians have changed substantially over a short period. The reasons for this shift can be traced primarily to two inter-related factors. First, it is important to note the phenomenon of 'compassion fatigue' (Figley, 1995), which can arise during prolonged traumas and crises, such as war. This condition involves feelings of exhaustion and burnout resulting from extended involvement in helping others, including refugees. Moreover, continuous exposure to information about armed conflict can lead to gradual habituation and, consequently, emotional desensitisation (Bushman and Anderson,

2009). This response serves as a natural adaptive mechanism that helps reduce chronic stress. As a result, public sentiment shifted after several weeks of widespread mobilisation to provide assistance – which engaged a significant portion of Polish society – and the willingness to support those in need declined. Secondly, narratives increasingly emerged in public discourse suggesting that Ukrainians were receiving preferential treatment, particularly with regard to access to medical care and medications. Such claims – often spread through social media (for example, stories alleging that Poles had to wait years for a given procedure while Ukrainians received it within weeks) – contributed to perceptions of unfairness. Increasingly, Ukrainian refugees arriving in Poland were portrayed as overly demanding, economically opportunistic, and insufficiently grateful. Przemysław Sadura and Sławomir Sierakowski (2022) referred to this phenomenon as invasive narratives, highlighting their rapid diffusion, the impossibility of identifying their source, and the difficulty of eradicating them. Research indicates that in times of heightened uncertainty – such as the outbreak of a full-scale war on Poland's eastern border – the emergence and circulation of such narratives tends to intensify (Kapferer, 1990; DiFonzo and Bordia, 2007). These narratives are used not only as instruments of hybrid warfare employed by Russia but also as tools for certain political actors in Poland to mobilise their voters.

Within weeks of the invasion, anti-Ukrainian messages started circulating on social media, emphasising the alleged entitlement of Ukrainian refugees and their negative impact on the Polish economy. Emerging false narratives included such claims that Ukrainians were migrating primarily to access social benefits, were granted priority in housing, healthcare, and education, lived lavishly at the expense of Polish taxpayers, or failed to pay Polish entrepreneurs for services (Tyminińska, 2023). At the same time, persistent assertions circulated that Ukrainians were 'taking jobs' from Poles – despite empirical evidence showing that their mass arrival did not increase unemployment (Błaszczak, 2022) and that they in fact filled labour shortages in sectors such as hospitality, gastronomy, industry, and trade (Terlikowski, 2023). The demographic structure of the refugee population also gave rise to gendered narratives, with online content suggesting that Ukrainian women were breaking up Polish families, seducing Polish men, and breaking up marriages (Długosz and Izdebska-Długosz, 2024).

In a study conducted by Franciszek Czech and Paweł Ścigaj (2023), nearly half of the respondents (47.3%) agreed with the statement: *'Today in Poland, Poles are becoming second-class citizens. Ukrainians are privileged. They receive a PESEL number, access to employment, social assistance at a higher level than Poles, and better*

*support in education*'. The belief in the privileged status of Ukrainians was more frequently expressed by women, respondents with lower levels of education, and the youngest age group. Interestingly, among political party voters, this narrative was most strongly endorsed by supporters of Confederation (71.9%). In other electorates, the proportions were 33.3% for the Left, 39.8% for Civic Coalition, 42.2% for United Right, 46.4% for Poland 2050, and 50% for Polish People's Party – Polish Coalition.

Shortly after the outbreak of the war, anti-Ukrainian narratives began to be exploited by political actors, particularly those associated with Confederation, with social media serving as their primary vehicle. According to a report by Demagog and the Institute of Media Monitoring, in 2023 – the year of the parliamentary elections – almost 290,000 anti-Ukrainian posts appeared in the Polish-language online sphere. Among the accounts most actively spreading anti-Ukrainian propaganda were the official profiles of MEP Grzegorz Braun, as well as those of Confederation of the Polish Crown, and National Movement (Grzesiczak, 2024). Messages alleging the preferential treatment of Ukrainian immigrants in access to welfare benefits and public services were also disseminated by Confederation politicians, including its leaders Sławomir Mentzen and Krzysztof Bosak. The presidential elections of 2025 further fuelled anti-Ukrainian sentiment. In 2024, the number of anti-Ukrainian narratives circulating on Polish-language social media accounts increased by 13% (Grzesiczak and Kostecki, 2025). Notably, in January 2025, the volume of negative sentiment in social media comments towards Ukrainians reached its highest level since the beginning of the war: as many as 78% of comments were critical, focusing on financial assistance to Ukraine, competition in the labour market, access to the welfare system, and historical grievances, especially references to the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the Volhynia massacre (ResFutura, 2025). During the campaign, scepticism towards immigrants was voiced not only by candidates of the far right but also by mainstream politicians, who stressed, for example, the need to suspend certain welfare benefits for unemployed Ukrainians.

The belief in the entitlement and privileged status of Ukrainians corresponds to realistic group conflict theory (RGCT), which explains intergroup tensions as arising from competition over desirable and limited resources (LeVine and Campbell, 1972). Such conflict may intensify when the balance between two groups is disrupted (Sherif and Sherif, 1953) – for example, through mass immigration, which may trigger rivalry over jobs or access to public services (Stephan, Stephan and Gudykunst, 1999). RGCT predicts that conflict with outgroups strengthens ingroup solidarity. The more strongly an outgroup is perceived to

hinder the ingroup's pursuit of desired goals, the greater the cohesion within the ingroup. This cohesion, in turn, generates increased hostility towards the outgroup.

Dollard (1938), for example, found that U.S. residents who were initially friendly towards German immigrants became hostile as unemployment rose, perceiving them as competitors for factory jobs. Similarly, later research indicated that white Americans, who occupied only slightly higher positions on the socio-economic ladder, expressed the strongest prejudice towards African Americans, whom they viewed as direct rivals in the labour market (Aronson and Aronson, 2011: 325).

90

Walter and Cookie Stephan (2000) identified four key sources of prejudice: realistic threats, symbolic threats, intergroup anxiety, and negative stereotypes. Realistic threats refer to challenges posed by an outgroup. Unlike the classic RGCT approach by LeVine and Campbell (1972), they are broader and encompass any threats to the well-being of the group or its members. Realistic threats also emphasise subjectively perceived intergroup conflict, which does not necessarily involve actual competition for resources. Symbolic threats, by contrast, concern intergroup differences in values, morality, beliefs, and attitudes. Intergroup anxiety involves emotions experienced during direct encounters with outgroup members (e.g., self-confidence, worry, calmness, or unease). Finally, negative stereotypes reinforce perceptions of threat by portraying outgroups as harmful to ingroup interests. Research shows that strong ingroup identification, high levels of negative intergroup contact, and perceived conflict intensify these forms of threat (Corenblum and Stephan, 2001).

## Conspiracy Stereotypes

Alongside traditional stereotypes, Janusz Kofta and Grzegorz Sędek proposed the concept of conspiracy stereotypes (Kofta and Sędek, 1999; Kofta, 2001). While a stereotype can be seen as a simplified individual image of a 'typical' member of a given community, a conspiracy stereotype constitutes a holistic representation of an entire ethnic or national outgroup as a coherent and intentional actor. Such representation is inherently negative and closely linked with beliefs characteristic of conspiracy theories (Grzesiak-Feldman, 2006). The outgroup is thus imagined as a hostile collective, attributed with power-seeking, deceitfulness, high levels of egoism, and a secret character of group behaviour (Kofta, 2001).

A conspiracy stereotype can be understood as a specific set of beliefs suggesting that an outgroup aims to dominate, subjugate, or deprive the ingroup of valued resources – and that it does so in a deceptive and covert manner. Although research in this field has typically focused on Jews, Germans, or Russians, the social climate that emerged after the outbreak of war in Ukraine created fertile ground for similar narratives directed at Ukrainians. In contexts of geopolitical insecurity and economic strain, individuals often experience a diminished sense of personal control, which in turn amplifies perceptions of the power and influence of other groups (Kay and Eibach, 2013).

Conspiracy stereotypes serve primarily an explanatory function: they allow individuals to make sense of complex political conflicts and locate responsibility in hostile ‘others’. They tend to be activated in times of collective anxiety and uncertainty but also during electoral campaigns, when they serve as useful tools of political mobilisation (Grzesiak-Feldman, 2013). Following Michał Bilewicz and Grzegorz Sędek (2015), we argue that both individual traits and situational factors contribute to endorsing conspiracy stereotypes. In addition, these beliefs are activated by specific political contexts, such as electoral mobilisation or the desire to gain political capital in the future. Research indicates that an intense election campaign is one of the triggers for conspiracy stereotypes (Enders et al., 2021). An additional driver of such beliefs is disinformation campaigns, often described as components of hybrid warfare. Social media enables hostile states to destabilise domestic politics by amplifying conspiracy narratives. After Russia invaded Ukraine, such activity intensified in Poland, often drawing on historical grievances to erode Polish-Ukrainian solidarity and to discourage public support for refugees (Wrzosek, 2024).

Conspiratorial thinking is also empirically connected to populism (Castanho Silva, Vegetti and Littvay, 2017). Right-wing populists frequently construct national identity in opposition to ethnic minorities, foreign nations, or social groups deemed a threat to cultural integrity (Mutz, 2018). Immigration plays a central role in these narratives: migrants are portrayed as a source of danger, while responsibility for this danger is attributed to ‘establishment’ parties that support refugee admission. As such, both populism and right-wing self-identification are expected to foster endorsement of conspiracy stereotypes.

Research on individual differences confirms that right-wing authoritarianism (RWA) is a robust predictor of belief in conspiracy stereotypes. Individuals high in RWA perceive the world as threatening, value order and security, and show

heightened hostility towards outgroups. This disposition makes them more receptive to conspiracy narratives portraying outsiders as dangerous plotters. Indeed, studies demonstrate that RWA is closely linked with prejudice towards minorities, immigrants, or religious groups, and conspiracy stereotypes (e.g., about alleged Jewish or Muslim conspiracies) provide justification for such attitudes (Grzesiak-Feldman, 2015).

Social identity processes are also critical in this context (Eskelinen et al., 2022). Secure forms of attachment foster resilience and intergroup openness, whereas narcissistic forms promote antagonism. Collective narcissism, defined by an exaggerated sense of uniqueness and superiority of the ingroup with a strong need for external recognition of their special status, predisposes individuals to interpret outgroup actions as hostile conspiracies and correlates with prejudice towards outgroups with whom the ingroup shares historical conflicts (Golec de Zavala and Lantos, 2020). Another factor fostering belief in conspiracy stereotypes is the belief in unique in-group victimhood. This conviction – that one's own national or ethnic community is a distinctive victim of past or present injustices – renders perceived grievances central to group identity and frames intergroup relations in terms of ongoing antagonism and threat (Bar-Tal et al., 2009).

## Methods

The study was conducted using the survey method (CAWI technique) within the Ariadna research panel on a nationwide random-quota sample of adult residents of Poland (N = 1,040) in November 2024, as part of the *Social Identity and Belief in Ethnic Stereotypes* project, co-financed by the Student Research Grants of the European City of Science 2024.<sup>2</sup> The sample was stratified to reflect the population distribution across four variables: gender, age, size of place of residence, and political preferences in the 2023 Polish parliamentary election. The study was reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee for Scientific Research of the University of Silesia in Katowice, Poland (KEUS/O/5/10.2024). The research sample consisted of 560 women (53.9%) and 480 men (46.1%). The participants'

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2 The project was carried out by a team composed of Sandra Malikowska (student) and Agata Olszanecka-Marmola (supervisor).



mean age was 48.21 years (SD = 16.38). Detailed sample characteristics, including sociodemographic variables and voting preferences, are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1: Sample characteristics*

Gender					
Women			Men		
560 (53.9%)			480 (46.1%)		
Age					
18–24	25–34	35–44	45–54	55–64	65+
87 (8.4%)	169 (16.3%)	215 (20.7%)	160 (15.4%)	166 (16.0%)	243 (23.4%)
Place of residence					
rural area	city up to 20,000 inhabitants	city between 20,001 and 100,000 inhabitants	city between 100,001 and 200,000 inhabitants	city above 200,000 inhabitants	
407 (39.1%)	137 (13.2%)	200 (19.2%)	90 (8.7%)	206 (19.8%)	
Education					
incomplete primary	primary	vocational	secondary	higher	
1 (0.1%)	36 (3.5%)	123 (11.9%)	446 (42.9%)	434 (41.7%)	
Financial situation					
I live very poorly	I live moderately	I live on an average level	I live well	I live very well	
33 (3.1%)	154 (14.8%)	569 (54.7%)	257 (24.7%)	27 (2.6%)	
Party preferences in 2023 parliamentary elections					
Law and Justice (PiS)				273 (26.2%)	
Civic Coalition (KO)				236 (22.7%)	
Third Way (TD)				112 (10.7%)	
Left				66 (6.4%)	
Confederation				55 (5.3%)	
other party				28 (2.7%)	
I did not vote				271 (26.1%)	

Source: own elaboration.

To assess the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians, we employed two original items, with responses recorded on a five-point scale (1 = definitely not true; 5 = definitely true): (1) Job Theft Narrative measured by attitudes towards the statement: *Ukrainians are taking jobs and development opportunities away from Poles* [Polish: *Ukraińcy zabierają Polakom miejsca pracy i możliwości rozwoju*]. (2) Romantic Rivalry Narrative operationalised through respondents'

attitudes towards the statement: *Ukrainian women deprive Polish women of the opportunity to be in a relationship and start a family by entering into relationships with men from Poland* [Polish: *Ukrainki odbierają Polkom możliwość związania się i założenia rodziny, wchodząc w relacje z mężczyznami z Polski*].

Both statements, in the context of realistic group conflict theory, imply that the mass immigration of Ukrainians is not perceived as a consequence of war but rather as an intentional effort to deprive Poles of valuable resources, such as employment or family. They also exhibit features of conspiracy stereotypes, as they attribute to immigrants from Ukraine deliberate, deceitful, and hostile actions intended to harm Poles.

Party identification was assessed using feeling thermometers, where respondents rated six relevant political parties (Civic Platform, Confederation, The Left, Polish People's Party, Poland 2050, Law and Justice) on a scale from 0 to 100. Scores below 50 indicated negative feelings, a score of 50 represented neutrality, and scores above 50 reflected positive and favourable attitudes towards the party. This approach is widely used in research on party-voter relationships in both established and emerging democracies (Turner-Zwinkels et al., 2025; Gidron, Sheffer and Mor, 2022; Olszanecka-Marmola, 2020). In the study, we also included several variables reflecting different dimensions of social identity:

- 1) National identification: a Polish short 6-item version (Puchała and Bilewicz, 2023) of the national identification scale (Cameron, 2004; Bilewicz and Wójcik, 2010). The Cronbach's alpha for the measure reflects high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.922$ ).
- 2) Collective narcissism scale (Golec de Zavalá et al., 2009). The reliability analysis indicates high internal consistency ( $\alpha = 0.916$ ).
- 3) Populism: a 3-item index that reflects people-centrism and anti-elitism ( $\alpha = 0.723$ ) – two dimensions of populism indicated by Blassnig et al. (2019). In this study, we used the following statements: *a. Those in power should stay close to the people and understand their views and needs* [Polish: *Rządzący powinni być blisko ludu oraz znać ich poglądy i potrzeby*]. *b. The political elites are responsible for the country's problems because of the negative consequences of their decisions and actions* [Polish: *Elity polityczne są odpowiedzialne za problemy w państwie przez negatywne skutki swoich decyzji i działań*]. *c. The political elites do not understand the needs of the people* [Polish: *Elity polityczne nie rozumieją potrzeb ludu*] (Olszanecka-Marmola, Marmola and Jagoda, 2025).
- 4) Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA): a modified three-dimensional authoritarianism scale by Funke (2005) excluding reverse-coded items ( $\alpha = 0.851$ ).

- 5) Xenophobia Scale ( $\alpha = 0.877$ ): a 4-item scale that measures the extent to which respondents perceive identity-cultural, material, and physical threats related to the presence of immigrants in their country (Jasińska-Kania and Skarżyńska, 2009)
- 6) Belief in unique in-group victimhood assessed with the statement: *No other nation suffered as much as Poles did* (Bilewicz et al., 2019).
- 7) Paranoid ideation measured with the statement: *Those who claim that powerful forces in the world are conspiring against Poland are quite right.*
- 8) Identification with the local community ( $\alpha = 0.877$ ): 4 community items of the Identification with All Humanity (IWAH) scale (McFarland, Webb and Brown, 2012) in Polish version (Hamer et al., 2020).
- 9) Religiosity ( $\alpha = 0.902$ ): a 4-item of the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Plante and Boccaccini, 1997). In this study, we used the following statements: *a. I look to my faith as providing meaning and purpose in my life. b. I enjoy being around others who share my faith. c. I consider myself active in my faith or church. d. My faith impacts many of my decisions.*

We also asked the respondents to define their ideological self-identification on a 7-point scale (1 = extreme left; 7 = extreme right).

The main goal of the study was to examine how sociodemographic characteristics, political preferences, and party identification influence support for conspiracy stereotypes targeting the Ukrainian minority.

In this part of the study, we formulated the following hypotheses:

*H1: Gender influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

In the context of realistic group conflict theory, we assume that women are more inclined to endorse both the Job Theft Narrative and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative. Given the predominance of women among Ukrainian refugees, Polish women should feel intergroup threats more strongly, both in relation to labour market competition and in the sphere of romantic relationships.

*H2: Age influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

We expect that younger people should be more susceptible to conspiracy stereotypes, as they face greater uncertainty in competing for scarce resources such as jobs and romantic partners. Conversely, the lowest levels of support for the Job Theft and Romantic Rivalry Narratives are anticipated among the oldest respondents, who are usually retirees or individuals long settled in stable relationships.

*H3: Education influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

Prior research demonstrates that individuals with higher education are not only more open to others, including immigrants and refugees (Umansky, Weber and Lutz, 2025), but also display greater critical thinking abilities (Clouston et al., 2020) and higher levels of cognitive reflection, which reduce the susceptibility to conspiracy narratives (van Prooijen, 2017).

*H4: Economic status influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

We assume that economically disadvantaged groups should express higher support for conspiracy stereotypes, especially the Job Theft Narrative. Members of these groups are more likely to perceive migrants as direct competitors in the labour market and in access to resources such as social benefits and public assistance.

*H5: Place of residence influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

We expect that residents of rural areas and smaller cities should more frequently endorse anti-Ukrainian conspiracy narratives, especially the Job Theft Narrative. This stems from the specific conditions of these localities, where employment opportunities are limited. Statistical analyses confirm that rural areas have higher unemployment rates than urban centres (Statistics Poland, 2025).

*H6: Intergroup contact influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

In line with contact theory, both the frequency and quality of personal contact with members of a given community shape perceptions of the group as a whole. Positive contact reduces feelings of threat from outgroups and, consequently, diminishes stereotypical perceptions (Stephan and Stephan, 2000: 38). It may also mitigate the influence of conspiracy narratives circulating in the media.

*H7: Party preferences influence the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

We hypothesise that voters of parties promoting negative or conspiracy narratives about Ukrainians – particularly Law and Justice (PiS) and Confederation – show stronger support for anti-Ukrainian conspiracies than those who voted for parties forming Donald Tusk's governing coalition. This pattern is expected to apply to both the Job Theft and Romantic Rivalry Narratives.

In the correlational design, we also examined whether endorsement of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians was associated with party identification and other dimensions of social identity. As noted earlier, party identification was measured using a 101-point feeling thermometer scale anchored at 0 = most negative and 100

= most positive, on which each respondent rated their feelings towards six parties (Law and Justice, Civic Coalition, Poland 2050, Polish People's Party, the Left, and Confederation). We hypothesised that identification with Confederation and Law and Justice – parties that have expressed negative attitudes towards immigrants, including those from Ukraine – would be positively correlated with conspiracy stereotypes. In addition, we conducted an extended correlational analysis incorporating variables representing different dimensions of social identity, including national identification, collective narcissism, belief in unique in-group victimhood, and local community identification. This enabled us to compare the relative strength of these associations with the Job Theft Narrative and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative.

## Results

### *H1: Gender influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

The independent samples t-test did not reveal significant differences between women and men in support for anti-Ukrainian conspiracies. On the Job Theft Narrative scale, women scored an average of 3.05 (SD = 1.18) and men 3.05 (SD = 1.14). For the Romantic Rivalry Narrative, the corresponding results were 2.70 (SD = 1.15) and 2.73 (SD = 1.13). Thus, H1 was not supported. Importantly, the in-depth analysis also did not confirm any significant differences between young women and young men in their support for conspiracy stereotypes, including the Romantic Rivalry Narrative.

### *H2: Age influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

A one-way ANOVA confirmed H2 for the Job Theft Narrative [ $F(5,1034) = 9.616, p < .001$ ]. Post-hoc analyses (Games–Howell) showed that the oldest age cohort supported this conspiracy stereotype significantly less ( $M = 2.66, SD = 1.03$ ) than respondents aged 18–24 ( $M = 3.26, SD = 1.18$ ), 25–34 ( $M = 3.28, SD = 1.21$ ), 35–44 ( $M = 3.08, SD = 1.25$ ), 45–54 ( $M = 3.31, SD = 1.13$ ), and 55–64 ( $M = 2.99, SD = 1.04$ ). No other significant intergroup differences were observed. Similar patterns appeared for the Romantic Rivalry Narrative, though the differences did not reach statistical significance.

### *H3: Education influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

A one-way ANOVA confirmed that education affects support for both the Job Theft Narrative [ $F(3,1035) = 12.151, p < .001$ ] and the Romantic Rivalry

Narrative [ $F(3,1035) = 8.067, p < .001$ ]. Post-hoc Tukey HSD tests showed that respondents with higher education were significantly less likely to endorse anti-Ukrainian conspiracies than those with secondary or vocational education.

*Table 2: Education level and support for anti-Ukrainian conspiracies*

Education	Job Theft Narrative		Romantic Rivalry Narrative	
	M	SD	M	SD
primary	3.29	1.09	2.76	1.28
vocational	3.30	1.06	2.93	1.09
secondary	3.20	1.19	2.85	1.19
higher	2.80	1.13	2.52	1.05

Source: own elaboration.

*H4: Economic status influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

A one-way ANOVA confirmed that perceived economic situation affects the endorsement of both the Job Theft Narrative [ $F(4,1035) = 2.761, p = .027$ ] and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative [ $F(4,1035) = 3.322, p = .010$ ]. Follow-up analyses indicated that better-off respondents were less likely to agree with conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.

*Table 3: Financial situation and support for anti-Ukrainian conspiracies*

Financial situation	Job Theft Narrative		Romantic Rivalry Narrative	
	M	SD	M	SD
I live very poorly	3.41	1.22	3.20	1.30
I live modestly	3.15	1.17	2.89	1.21
I live on an average level	3.09	1.16	2.71	1.09
I live well	2.87	1.13	2.59	1.17
I live very well	2.96	1.32	2.55	1.02

Source: own elaboration.

*H5: Place of residence influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

A one-way ANOVA did not show statistically significant differences between rural and urban residents in endorsement of conspiracy narratives. However, respondents living in rural areas and cities of up to 20,000 inhabitants displayed slightly higher agreement with both the Job Theft Narrative and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative.

Table 4: Place of residence and support for anti-Ukrainian conspiracies

Place of residence	Job Theft Narrative		Romantic Rivalry Narrative	
	M	SD	M	SD
rural area	3.11	1.10	2.74	1.12
city up to 20,000 inhabitants	3.23	1.15	2.92	1.05
city between 20,001 and 100,000 inhabitants	3.03	1.24	2.67	1.16
city between 100,001 and 200,000 inhabitants	2.91	1.09	2.53	1.11
city above 200,000 inhabitants	2.89	1.16	2.67	1.22

Source: own elaboration.

99

*H6: Intergroup contact influences the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

As we expected, personal contact with Ukrainians reduced endorsement of conspiracy stereotypes. An independent samples t-test confirmed that respondents reporting contact scored lower on the Job Theft Narrative ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.21$ ) than those without such contact [ $(M = 3.15$ ,  $SD = 1.05)$ ,  $t(1038) = 2.049$ ,  $p = .041$ ]. A similar pattern emerged for the Romantic Rivalry Narrative: those with personal contact ( $M = 2.63$ ,  $SD = 1.16$ ) scored lower than those without [ $(M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 1.07)$ ,  $t(1038) = 3.941$ ,  $p < .001$ ].

*H7: Party preferences influence the intensity of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians.*

Party preferences proved to be the strongest determinant of support for conspiracy stereotypes relative to the other variables. A one-way ANOVA confirmed differences across electorates in endorsement of the Job Theft Narrative [ $F(5,762) = 12.487$ ,  $p < .001$ ]. Post-hoc analyses revealed that these differences followed the expected government–opposition cleavage: voters of Law and Justice (PiS) and Confederation were significantly more likely to perceive Ukrainians as a threat to the developmental opportunities and labour market position of Poles compared to the electorate of governing coalition parties.

*Table 5: Party preferences and support for Job Theft Narrative*

Formation	M	SD	post hoc (Games-Howell)
Law and Justice (PiS)	3.25	.98	PiS > KO, TD, Left
Civic Coalition (KO)	2.67	1.15	KO < PiS, Confederation
Third Way (TD)	2.87	1.21	TD < PiS, Confederation
Left	2.58	1.21	Left < PiS, Confederation
Confederation	3.60	1.11	Confederation > KO, TD, Left
other formation	3.01	1.17	

Source: own elaboration.

100

Significant differences also emerged for the Romantic Rivalry Narrative [ $F(5,762) = 8.799, p < .001$ ], with PiS and Confederation supporters again showing higher support for this conspiracy stereotype than Civic Coalition and Left voters. These results indicate that political preferences are closely tied to endorsement of anti-Ukrainian conspiracy narratives.

*Table 6: Party preferences and support for Romantic Rivalry Narrative*

Formation	M	SD	post hoc (Games-Howell)
Law and Justice (PiS)	2.94	.97	PiS > KO, TD, Left
Civic Coalition (KO)	2.44	1.12	KO < PiS, Confederation
Third Way (TD)	2.53	1.15	TD < PiS
Left	2.27	1.07	Left < PiS, Confederation
Confederation	3.01	1.28	Confederation > KO, Left
other formation	2.72	1.12	

Source: own elaboration.

We also examined the relationship between party identification and support for conspiracy stereotypes targeting Ukrainians using a Spearman's rank-order correlation. The analysis confirmed that identification with Confederation – a party whose politicians most frequently reproduce anti-Ukrainian narratives – was significantly associated with both the Job Theft Narrative ( $p = .310$ ) and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative ( $p = .275$ ). Positive but weaker correlations between identification with Law and Justice (PiS) and the two stereotypes were also observed. Once again, the findings indicate that perceptions of Ukrainian migrants largely reflect the government–opposition cleavage. Identification with Civic Coalition was negatively correlated with endorsement of both the Job Theft Narrative ( $p = -.307$ ) and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative



( $p = -.243$ ). Similar, though weaker, negative correlations were recorded for identification with other parties of the ruling coalition – the Left, Poland 2050, and the Polish People's Party.

*Table 7: Correlations between party identification and anti-Ukrainian Conspiracies*

Party identification	Job Theft Narrative	Romantic Rivalry Narrative
Law and Justice (PiS)	.213***	.189***
Civic Coalition (KO)	-.307***	-.243***
Poland 2050	-.191***	-.169***
Polish People's Party (PSL)	-.082**	-.079*
Left	-.257***	-.208***
Confederation	.310***	.275***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Source: own elaboration.

*Table 8: Correlations between independent variables and anti-Ukrainian Conspiracies*

Variables	Job Theft Narrative	Romantic Rivalry Narrative
National identification	.124***	.142***
Collective narcissism	.417***	.421***
Populism	.094***	-.006
RWA	.270***	.298***
Xenophobia	.675***	.486***
Belief in unique in-group victimhood	.385***	.414***
Paranoid ideation	.468***	.422***
Identification with the local community	.021	.074**
Religiosity	.280***	.269***
Ideology	.261***	.240***

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ . Source: own elaboration.

To place the strength of party identification in a broader context, we incorporated into the analysis a range of other variables that previous research has linked to belief in conspiracy theories (Pilch et al., 2023). The results showed that identification with Confederation was more strongly associated with both the Job Theft Narrative and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative than national identification, populism, right-wing authoritarianism, religiosity, or ideology. Stronger associations

with anti-Ukrainian conspiracies were observed only for xenophobia, paranoid ideation, collective narcissism, and belief in unique in-group victimhood – all of which are recognised in the literature as powerful individual-level predictors of prejudice and conspiratorial thinking.

## Discussion

102

Intergroup conspiracy stereotypes serve to delegitimise an outgroup by portraying it as deliberately depriving the ingroup of valuable resources or exercising illegitimate domination. Such narratives are disseminated not only by troll farms and individual social media users but also strategically employed by politicians and political parties. Political actors, in particular, exploit conspiracies and conspiracy stereotypes to present themselves as defenders of ‘ordinary citizens’ while consolidating and mobilising their electoral base.

In Poland, research on the determinants of belief in conspiracy stereotypes has focused mainly on Jews, Germans, and Russians, while relatively little attention has been paid to Ukrainians. Therefore, this chapter aimed to identify the characteristics of individuals who endorse statements suggesting that Ukrainians deprive Poles of scarce resources. We operationalised this through two narratives: the Job Theft Narrative and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative.

In our study, we tested sociodemographic, political, and psychological variables. Our findings show that, among sociodemographic variables, education and material situation played a significant role. Better-educated and economically advantaged respondents were less likely to endorse conspiracy stereotypes. Contrary to a study by Piotr Długosz and Dominika Izdebska-Długosz (2024), which suggested that young women oppose the admission of Ukrainian refugees due to fears of labour market and marital competition, our research did not confirm such effects. Gender and other basic sociodemographic factors proved less important than party preferences. The strongest endorsement of anti-Ukrainian conspiracies was found among supporters of Confederation and Law and Justice. While the position of Confederation’s voters is consistent with the long-standing anti-refugee stance of this party, Law and Justice initially framed assistance to Ukraine as a matter of solidarity but later adopted a more sceptical rhetoric, reflecting both shifting public opinion and competition with Confederation.

Party identification, measured with feeling thermometers, also emerged as a significant correlate of conspiracy stereotypes. Respondents identifying strongly with right-wing parties (Confederation, Law and Justice) were more inclined to accept both the Job Theft Narrative and the Romantic Rivalry Narrative, whereas those closer to liberal and centrist parties showed weaker endorsement. Given our correlational design, we cannot determine whether party identification drives belief in conspiracies or whether individuals predisposed to conspiratorial thinking gravitate towards particular parties. This leaves open the question of whether political elites merely mirror preexisting attitudes or actively radicalise their electorate by amplifying anti-Ukrainian narratives.

Interestingly, identification with Confederation correlated more strongly with anti-Ukrainian conspiracy stereotypes than variables typically considered robust predictors of general conspiracy mentality and belief in specific conspiracy theories, such as religiosity, national identification, or right-wing authoritarianism. Only xenophobia, paranoid ideation, collective narcissism, and belief in unique in-group victimhood demonstrated stronger associations with anti-Ukrainian conspiracies. The latter two constructs, however, are based on a sense of exceptional injustice and harm suffered by the ingroup. Individuals who strongly identified with their national group and simultaneously believed that Poland was uniquely victimised in international relations were more likely to believe in conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians. Such narratives reinforce the 'us vs. them' dichotomy and simultaneously facilitate the legitimisation of conspiracy theories that frame Ukrainians as existential threats.

Future analyses in the context of conspiracy stereotypes about Ukrainians should expand the focus to other individual psychological variables, such as anxiety, need for cognitive closure, or sense of control. It is also worth exploring how populist communication and social media reinforce the susceptibility to conspiracy stereotypes. Discourse analysis and experimental designs testing narrative framing (e.g., community-oriented vs. threat-oriented messages) could shed further light on factors influencing belief in conspiracy stereotypes.

Finally, our findings carry broader social implications. The spread of conspiracy stereotypes targeting Ukrainians not only exacerbates xenophobic attitudes but also undermines intergroup relations and public support for humanitarian assistance. By fuelling 'us vs. them' thinking, politicians hinder the social integration of refugees from Ukraine. Thus, conspiracy theories serve not only a cognitive but also a political and identity-building function – becoming powerful tools for polarisation and division.

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