**Interrogating the role of Donald Trump and his supporters in the 2021 assault on the U. S. Capitol: A dual-agency model of identity leadership and engaged followership**

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**Abstract**

This article develops a dual-agency model of leadership which treats collective phenomena as a co-production involving both leaders and followers who identify with the same social group. The model integrates work on *identity leadership* and *engaged followership* derived from the social identity approach in social psychology. In contrast to binary models which view either leaders *or* followers as having agency, this work argues that leaders gain influence by defining the parameters of action in ways that frame the agency of their followers while leaving space for creativity in how collective goals are accomplished. Followers in turn, exhibit their loyalty and attachment to the leader by striving to be effective in advancing these goals, thereby empowering and giving agency to the leader. We illustrate the model primarily through the events of 6th January 2021 when Donald Trump's exhortations to his supporters that they should 'fight' to 'stop the steal' of the 2020 election was followed by an attack on the United States' Capitol. We argue that it is Trump's willing participation in this mutual process of identity enactment, rather than any instructions contained in his speech, that should be the basis for assessing his influence on, and responsibility for, the assault.

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The storming of the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021 was a brazen and unprecedented attack on American Democracy that struck the country at its political heart (Luke, 2021; Moore, 2021). Motivated by a desire on the part of supporters of President Trump to overturn the certification of the 2020 presidential election that he had lost, the attack followed a call by Trump for his supporters to come to Washington to attend a rally to "Stop the Steal". From their perspective, Trump supporters were attempting to stop the stolen election that Trump claimed, and many believed, he had won. More specifically, Trump's tweets had urged his followers to attend a "Save America" rally, announcing "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th. Be there, will be wild!" (December 19, 2020) and "JANUARY SIXTH, SEE YOU IN DC!" (December 30, 2020).

At around noon on January 6th, Trump was the last of a series of speakers to address the "Save America" rally. He spoke of the need to "fight like hell [or] you're not going to have a country anymore" (Naylor, 2021). Approximately an hour after Trump started his speech (20 minutes before it had ended), security officers and temporary barricades on the east and west sides of the Capitol building were attacked and breached by Trump supporters. By 1.30 pm the police had been overwhelmed and a large crowd began to invade the Capitol building. The ensuing insurrection left five people dead.

In the wake of this violence, many commentators argued that the violent and unlawful actions of the insurrectionists were clearly a response to Trump's instructions and that what they did was both intended and endorsed by him (Naylor, 2021). In what appears to have been a response to calls (from both media sources and his advisors) to calm the insurrectionists, much later in the day, Trump sent a broadcast message urging protestors to

"go home". At the same time, he also reassured them "we love you, you're very special", adding in a subsequent Tweet that they were "great patriots who have been badly & unfairly treated for so long" (Beer, 2021; Moreau, 2021; Wolff, 2021).

Once the consequences of the attack had become clear, however, Trump distanced himself from his followers' actions—claiming that they had "defiled the seat of American democracy" (Kumar & Choi, 2021). And although Trump was subsequently impeached by the House of Representatives for incitement of insurrection, the Senate was unable to secure the two-thirds majority required for his conviction. A key sticking point was the argument that, although Trump may have made strong calls to action, these were non-specific. In particular, he gave no explicit instruction to attack the Capitol. Hence, according to many Republican Senators (i.e., members of Trump's own party), Trump's personal responsibility for inciting the insurrection could not be proven. Indeed, in his defence, Trump's lawyers argued that the insurrectionists had acted "of their own accord" as his references to the need to fight were "figurative" and "could not be construed to encourage acts of violence" (Goldiner & Sommerfeldt, 2021). Trump's biographers have also noted that, rather than being planned, those sections of his speech in which he urged supporters to "march over to the Capitol" were unscripted and off the cuff (Wolff, 2021).

This approach, which we will argue against, rests on a binary view of leader–follower relations in which leaders are akin to puppet-masters who either influence their followers directly or not at all. Equally, followers are seen either as passive and entirely dependent on leaders or as entirely independent of them. This leaves no space for a more nuanced approach in which leaders are understood to be able to frame the actions of followers without totally determining them and followers are understood to be influenced without entirely losing their own agency. Even more, it excludes the possibility that followers may influence the leader as much as they are influenced by the leader.

The goal of this article is therefore to flesh out this more nuanced understanding by advancing an integrative model that recognises the agency of *both* leaders and followers and that stresses their *mutual* influence. We also seek to examine the model's plausibility—something we do primarily by exploring its capacity to allow us to make sense of the events that unfolded on Capitol Hill in January 2021.

**A dual-agency model of identity leadership and engaged followership**

In this article we challenge a binary view of leadership in which either leaders have complete agency and followers none or else leaders have no agency and leaders are completely autonomous. We do so by advancing *a dual-agency model of identity leadership and engaged followership* in which both leaders and followers are understood to have influence over each other without being totally constrained by the other. This model draws upon, and integrates, a body of empirical and theoretical work in the social identity tradition and argues that leadership and followership are both aspects of a *group process* that centers on the cultivation and enactment of a sense of shared social identity—in which group members work together to advance a sense of 'us' as positive, distinctive, and enduring (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; see also Albert & Whetten, 1985).

This model is represented schematically in Figure 1 and, critically, it represents collective action as a *co-production* of leaders and followers in the context of a group membership that share and, critically, that they see themselves as sharing. More specifically, the model proposes that, for their part, leaders seek (a) to build and advance a sense of shared group membership (a sense of 'us-ness' or social identity) with followers, (b) to identify goals associated with that membership, and then (c) to outline (not necessarily in specific terms) the actions necessary for achieving those goals. In turn, for their part, engaged followers (a) embrace this same sense of shared social identity, (b) understand what they need to do to advance those group goals, and then (c) 'work towards' those goals and their

leaders through action that is both enthusiastic and creative, and in turn impacts back on leaders in helping to shape their ongoing leadership (Haslam et al., 2019; Reicher et al., 2012).
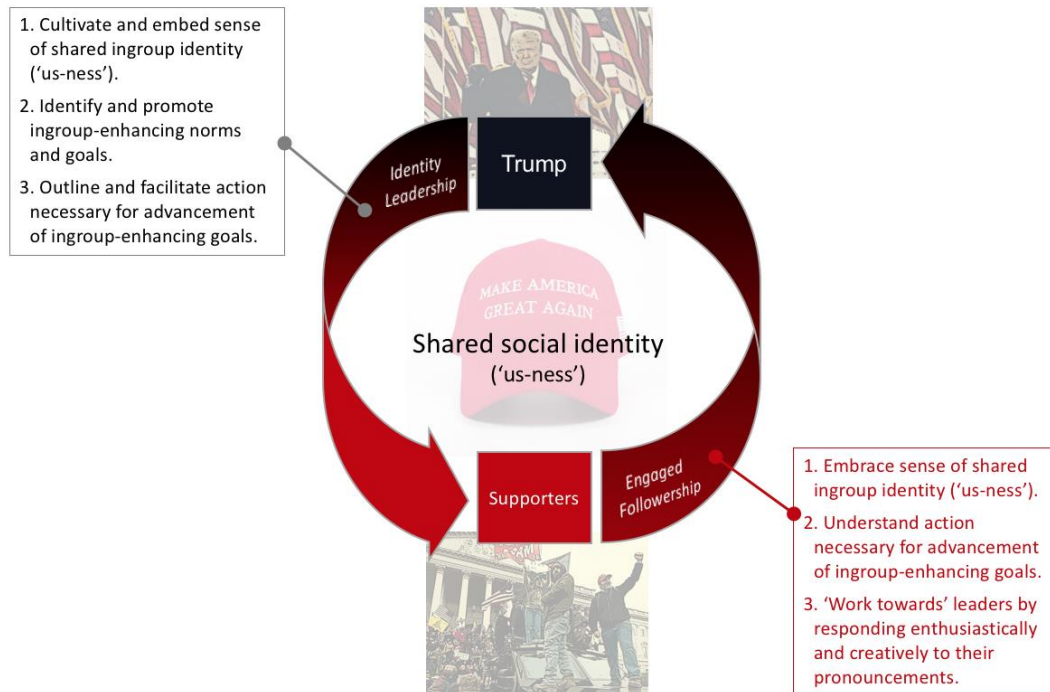


*Figure 1.* Schematic representation of the dual-agency model of identity leadership and engaged followership as it pertains to the Capitol Hill attack (adapted from Haslam et al., 2019, 2020)

This dynamic relationship between leaders and followers has the capacity to unleash powerful collective forces (Haslam et al., 2011; Van Bavel & Packer, 2021). Indeed, more generally, the co-action of followers in the context of shared social identity is the basis for an emergent group power which has the potential to constitute a world-changing social force (Simon, & Oakes, 2006; Turner, 2005; Van Bavel & Packer, 2021). As the events on Capitol Hill make clear, these can be destructive for a society (Serban et al., 2018; Yammarino et al., 2013). However, this is not necessarily the case. One can, for example, observe the same

dynamics in the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst, Martin Luther King Jr., and Jacinda Ardern (e.g., see Reicher et al., 2019).

Crucially, regardless of how others see them, followers themselves will rarely understand their actions in destructive terms. Instead, they typically perceive both the guidance of their leader and the objectives they are pursuing as virtuous and are willing to undertake extreme actions—including the assassination of opponents (Serban et al., 2018; Yammarino et al., 2013)—because, for them, these actions represent legitimate means to achieve important goals or are desirable goals in their own right (Haslam et al., 2019). Indeed, precisely how destructive (vs. constructive) the actions arising from this relationship are understood to be will often be a topic of polarized debate between followers and proponents of different perspectives (Xiao et al., 2016).

Nevertheless, in instances where followers' actions come to be widely condemned, it is precisely the fact that those actions are so creative (and clearly not just the result of 'following orders') that allows leaders to plead a case of *plausible deniability* in an effort to absolve themselves of responsibility or blame (Hodges, 2020; Poznansky, 2020).

**Overview: The structure of this article**

In this article, we advance a dual-agency model that integrates previous work on identity leadership and engaged followership. Uniquely, though, the rally of 6th January and the assault on Capitol Hill furnishes us with an opportunity to examine key elements of the model—in particular, the simultaneously interplay between leader and followers—*in situ*. Accordingly, we draw on these events as a means of illustrating the model's operation 'on the ground' (as recommended by Conger, 1988), focusing both on Trump's speech and the reactions of followers before, during, and after the assault.

Having done this, we then reflect on the model's implications for explanations of (destructive) leadership and (destructive) collective action more generally. To further

interrogate the plausibility of the model we also follow the logic of deviant case analysis (Gerring & McDermott, 2007; Gibbert et al., 2014) and discuss broader examples of contexts in which identity leadership and engaged followership have (and have not) played out. We then conclude by mapping out a research agenda for testing the model and exploring the processes it specifies more systematically.

As a consequence of this strategy, this article has an unusual form in so far as it is neither primarily conceptual nor empirical. Rather, it has a hybrid structure in which we seek to provide *both* an integrated theoretical analysis *and* a rich empirical analysis of the leadership–followership dynamic. Indeed, just as our theoretical analysis is made stronger by a rejection of the binary agency of leaders or followers, so too we hope our article is rendered more convincing by moving beyond the constraints of the empirical-conceptual binary.

**Identity leadership: Creating and advancing 'us'**

As set out in *The New Psychology of Leadership*, identity leadership refers to leaders' capacity to influence and mobilize others by virtue of leaders' abilities to represent, advance, create and embed a sense of social identity that is shared with potential followers (Haslam et al., 2020; Steffens et al., 2014). This analysis emerges from a large body of research in social psychology inspired by social identity and self-categorization theories (after Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987). These two theories center on the idea that humans have the capacity to define themselves not simply as individuals (i.e., in terms of *personal identity* as 'me' and 'I', with unique traits, tastes and qualities) but also as members of social groups (i.e., in terms of *social identity* as 'we' and 'us'; e.g., 'us conservatives', 'us Trump supporters,' 'we Americans'). Critically, it argues not only that social identities are every bit as real and important to people as personal identities, but also that the psychological understandings of self that result from internalising social identity are qualitatively distinct from those which flow from personal identities. This is primarily because social identities

restructure social relations in ways that give rise to, and allow for the possibility of, collective behavior (Turner, 1982). In particular, when we perceive another person to share the same social identity as us (i.e., to be part of our psychological ingroup) we see them as part of our self rather than as 'other' and this is a basis not just for a sense of social connection with them but also for shared perception and co-ordinated social action (Haslam, 2001; Van Bavel & Packer, 2021).

As a specific form of group behavior, the relevance of social identity for the analysis of leadership centers around three key ideas (Haslam et al., 2011). These relate to the argument that leaders answer three key questions for their followers: (a) who are "we" and what are we trying to achieve? (b) who and what stands in our way (and how are "they" stopping us)? (c) what are we going to do as a consequence? For their answers to gain traction, leaders must also explain why followers should listen to them—the principal answer being that those leaders are best placed to represent the group and its interests.

The first of these ideas relates to the fact that when (and to the extent that) people define themselves in terms of a given social identity they are motivated to see that ingroup ('us') as positively distinct from comparison outgroups ('them'; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Just as Democrats want to see themselves as different from and better than Republicans, so Republicans want to see themselves as different from and better than Democrats (Greene, 2004; Mason, 2019). Moreover, both are motivated to act in ways, and will respond positively to leaders, who help to make this true (Fowler & Kam, 2007; Platow et al., 1997; Platow & van Knppenberg, 2001). At the same time, precisely what 'better' means always depends on the content of group identity (i.e., the particular things that 'we' value and that make us distinctive in comparison to other groups) which in turn is a function of the comparative context in which leaders and followers find themselves—and part of the leader's job is to clarify this too (even, and perhaps especially, when this might otherwise be hard to

do; e.g., see Putra et al., 2021). Often this can be a matter of reverse engineering in which the leader represents their achievements as realizations of the group's most treasured goals.

Donald Trump's speech to the January 6th 'Stop the Steal' rally provides clear evidence of these processes in action (Naylor, 2021; reproduced in the Supplementary Materials). As he had done repeatedly before his 2016 election, Trump focused on American exceptionalism (distinctiveness) and all that he had done to 'make America great again', while at the same time making salient the enemies (both internal and external) who had sought to thwart him (Bender, 2021; Gutsche, 2018; Leonnig & Rucker, 2021; Mason et al., 2021; Reicher & Haslam, 2017). What is more, the 'fact' that Trump represents 'America' and 'American interests' while his opponents are (supposedly) Anti-American is used to buttress the argument that his defeat in an American election cannot be legitimate and must have been a 'steal'. In contesting the election, Trump is therefore standing up for his country once again.

Close analysis of Trump's speech sheds further light on his efforts to make a shared social identity salient and relevant. Indeed, alongside multiple effusive references to the ingroup (seen in 340 mentions of 'we', 'us' and 'our'), Trump made almost as many (in fact, 322) references to the various outgroups by which he and his supporters were threatened and against which they were fighting ('they' and 'them'— Democrats, 'weak' Republicans, the media—who were all understood to be unAmerican). In ways hypothesized by Self-Categorization Theory, this would be expected both to heighten the salience and distinctiveness of the ingroup (Branscombe et al., 1999; Turner et al, 1994) and to make an extreme ingroup position—grounded in Republican values of strength and martial prowess and mobilized against those who were seen to be unAmerican—more attractive (Gaffney et al., 2014; Turner & Haslam, 2001).

The overall patterning of this discourse is captured visually by the Leximancer analysis presented in Figure 2. Leximancer is a computer-aided qualitative discourse analysis software (CAQDAS) that performs algorithm-based content analysis to transform lexical co-occurrence information from natural language into semantic patterns. As such, it abstracts key themes from the text and identifies the relationships between them in ways that are reliable and reproducible (Sotiriadou et al., 2014; Smith & Humphries, 2006). A further advantage of the process is that these relationships are captured in an interactive concept map that plots key themes and the relationships between them—so that related concepts are close together and unrelated ones are further apart (see Angus et al., 2013, for an introduction to the method). As summarized by Angus et al. (2013, p. 262), Leximancer is thus a standardized tool that "supports a visualisation process that enables an analyst to examine concepts in the original text linked to a global perspective of the entire data-set provided by the automatically generated concept map".
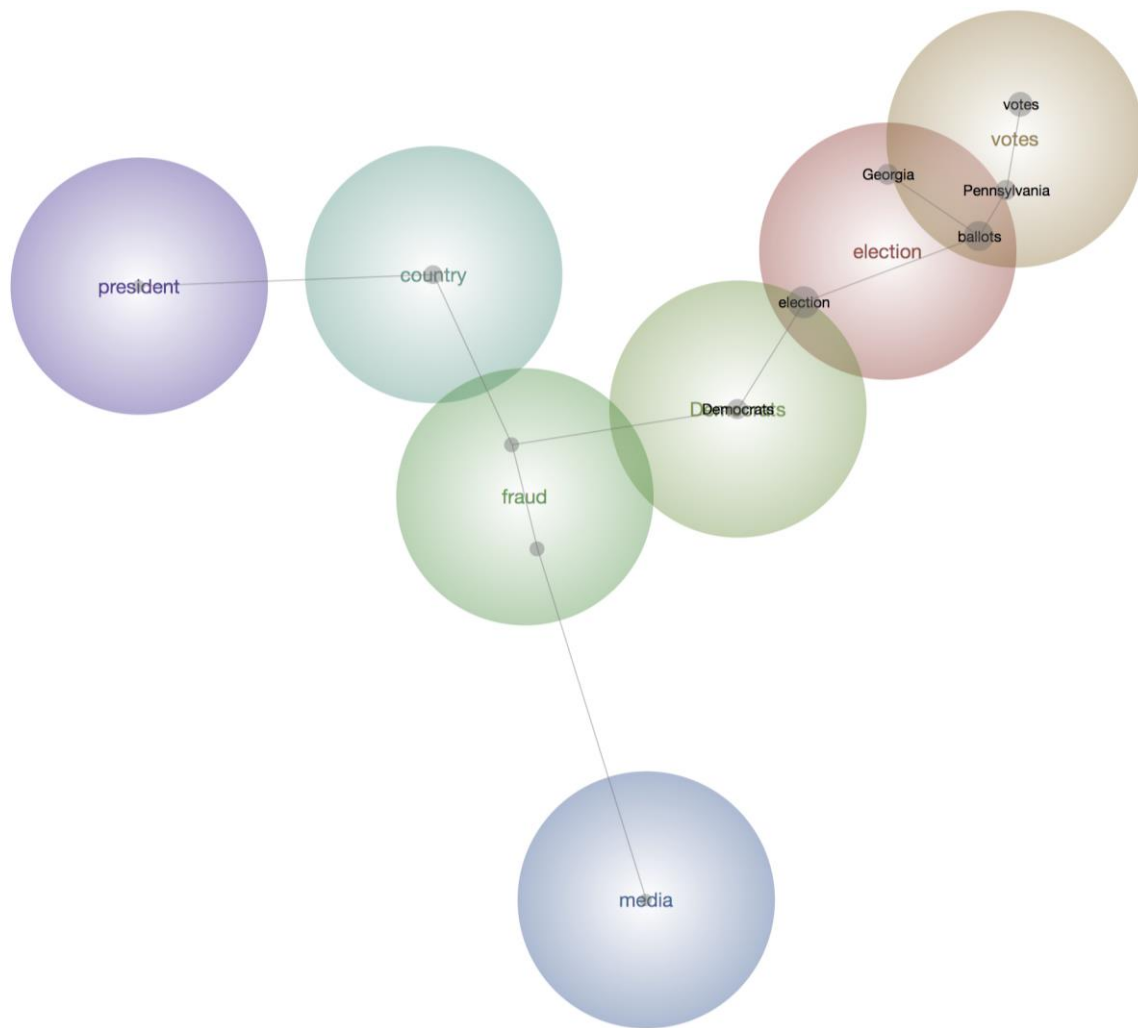
*Figure 2.* Leximancer analysis of President Trump's address to the 'Stop the Steal' rally prior
   to the attack on Capitol Hill on January 6, 2021.

Details of this analysis are presented in the Supplementary Materials. However, in
summary, and as shown in Figure 2, Leximancer identifies key themes of Trump's speech as
centering on the contestation of the election result by a President valiantly serving his
country but set against oppositional sources of fraud and corruption (notably Democrats and
the media) who were standing in the way of election victory and undermining American
democracy. Interestingly, these align closely with themes that Humphrey (2021) identifies in

the full corpus of 20,301 Tweets that Trump had posted since his election to office in 2016[1].

In the speech itself, this 'us-them' opposition was exemplified by statements of the following

form:

> Our fight against the big donors, big media, big tech, and others is just getting started.
> This is the greatest in history. There's never been a movement like that.

> We must stop the steal and then we must ensure that such outrageous election fraud never
> happens again, can never be allowed to happen again. But we're going forward. We'll
> take care of going forward.

The second idea that is relevant to leadership relates to the fact that the process of

coming to define the self in terms of a particular social identity is bound up with social

context (Oakes et al., 1994; Turner et al., 1994). In particular, a given social identity is more

likely to be a basis for perception and action if it has been a basis for self-definition in the

past (so that it is accessible) and if it allows people to make sense of themselves in the

situation they confront (McGarty, 1999). Again, then, leaders have a key role in defining this

context in ways that ensure that particular social self-categorizations make sense for group

members (Reicher et al., 2005).

In Trump's case, alongside positive references to his supporters that reminded them

who they are and what they stand for (and what they do *not* stand for), this involved

repeatedly reminding them that their ingroup identity was as American patriots, defined by

their shared victimhood (in ways discussed by Reicher et al., 2008). Elsewhere, victimhood

has been shown to be a particularly potent tool for mobilizing group members to engage in

destructive collective action (Pärnamets et al., 2019) and the rhetoric of collective

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[1] Humprey (2021) identifies five themes in Trump's Tweets that speak directly to the present analysis:
1. The true version of the United States is beset with invaders; 2. Real Americans can see this; 3. I
(Trump) am uniquely qualified to stop this invasion; 4. The establishment and its agents are
hindering me; 5. The U.S. is in mortal danger because of this.

victimization has been found to resonate with Trump's supporters (Brady et al., 2019; being also the focus for a range of conspiracy theories; Sternisko et al., 2020). Critically, in the process, it created a cohesive ingroup category by invoking enemies that 'we' need to fight against:

> All of us here today do not want to see our election victory stolen by emboldened radical-left Democrats, which is what they're doing. And stolen by the fake news media. That's what they've done and what they're doing. We will never give up, we will never concede.

> Our country has had enough. We will not take it anymore and that's what this is all about. And to use a favorite term that all of you people really came up with: We will stop the steal.

The third idea relates to the capacity for social identity to shape both perception and behavior by providing a basis for *social influence* (Turner, 1991). When people define themselves in terms of a given social identity they are motivated both to understand what that identity entails and to act accordingly. What does it mean to be a Republican, and as a Republican what policies should you support? And, more particularly, in a world where there are multiple answers to such questions, to whom should you look for answers? The obvious answer is other people with whom you share social identity (e.g., other Republicans; Wang et al., 2021).

But this alone is not enough, as clearly within groups there are multiple perspectives and positions (e.g., as put forward by representatives of different Republican factions). So which of these should you listen to and which should you ignore? The answer suggested by Self-Categorization Theory is those who are most representative of the social identity—or, in the language of Categorization Theory (after Rosch, 1978) those who are most *prototypical* of the group (i.e., those seen to be most representative of what defines 'us'; Hogg, 2001; Turner & Haslam, 2001). Importantly, rather than being a reflection simply of similarity to other ingroup members, prototypicality reflects the essence of the group in ways that make

the prototypical leaders extraordinary rather than ordinary (Haslam et al., 2011). It follows, then, that a person should be more capable of exerting influence over others (i.e., in a better position to *do leadership*) the more prototypical they are of a salient shared social identity. Indeed, this is a key principle of identity leadership (Haslam & Reicher, 2016).

Consistent with this principle, meta-analyses confirm that leaders garner more support, wield more influence, and are seen as more charismatic the more prototypical they are of the group they lead (Barreto & Hogg, 2017; Steffens et al., 2021). The latter study also confirmed the causal role of identity leadership in these outcomes by establishing that this relationship was also present in the large subset of studies that used experimental designs in which prototypicality was manipulated. Accordingly, more generally, we see identity leadership as a *driver* of charismatic leadership (Platow et al., 2006; Steffens et al., 2014; van Dick et al., 2019) and legitimacy (e.g., Syfers, 2021), rather than the other way round.

At the same time, though, as an additional aspect of this identity leadership, leaders also need to be seen to be *for* the group not just *of* the group. In particular, they need to be seen to place the interests of the group above their own personal interests (Grace & Platow, 2015). If you are a Republican you need to be seen as a true believer in the Republican cause rather just a career politician 'in it for yourself'. Alongside a narrative that increases leaders' prototypicality by casting them as opponents of the political establishment (i.e., career politicians) this is a rhetorical strategy that has become central to the rise of an 'anti-politics' that is the hallmark of populist and anti-democratic leaders (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018). And, again, it was very much in evidence in Trump's Capitol Hill speech. Here Trump reminded the crowd of all that he and his administration had achieved for them:

> We created Space Force, We, we, we. Look at what we did. Our military has been totally rebuilt. So we create Space Force which, by and of itself, is a major achievement for an administration. And with us it's one of so many different things.

So we've taken care of things, we've done things like nobody's ever thought possible. And that's part of the reason that many people don't like us, because we've done too much.

But leaders do not just wait around until they happen to be prototypical of a particular group and are in a position to advance its cause. Instead, as the above excerpts from Trump's speech attest, they work actively and creatively both to create a sense of shared social identity amongst their followers and to ensure that this sense of identity is one that they are well placed to represent and promote. In this sense, leaders need to be *entrepreneurs of identity* (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001) who make a case for their own leadership in social identity-based terms (Reicher et al., 2005). One particularly potent way in which they do this is through references to 'we' and 'us' that speak to, and help to create, a sense of shared identity between them and their audiences (Donnellon, 1996; Steffens & Haslam, 2013). This indeed was one of the most salient features of Trump's Capitol Hill address—where, as we noted above, in a speech of 10,940 words he used 340 collective pronouns (i.e., one every 32 words). By way of comparison, a study of the 34 Australian elections that have been held since Federation in 1901 found that winning candidates used these same collective pronouns once every 79 words whereas losing candidates used them once every 136 words (Steffens & Haslam, 2013). In his rhetoric, Trump was therefore leveraging identity leadership far more than historically successful politicians.

Ultimately, though, leaders' visions of shared identity are only compelling to the extent the vision is made real for followers. Accordingly, effective leaders shape not only their own performance but also that of would-be followers. This involves them acting as *identity impresarios* to create structures that bring group values to life and thereby translate the idea of 'us' into material reality (Haslam et al., 2011). This process is exemplified by collective events and activities (e.g., meetings, conventions, demonstrations and festivals) in which people are encouraged to act out the leader's vision of group values and experience the power of social identity for themselves. Importantly too, part of this same impresarioship

centers on the process of setting out of plans for group advancement and progress (Wegge & Haslam, 2003). These create a collective agenda and a broad sense of purpose for followers that they can subsequently pursue independently and in ways that appear fitting for the particular circumstances they confront.

As was true of the many other popular rallies that were one of the hallmarks of Trump's candidacy and Presidency, the Capitol Hill rally was a supreme feat of identity impresarioship (Reicher & Haslam, 2017). As we observed of those earlier events:

> A Trump rally is a dramatic enactment of a particular vision of America. Or rather, it enacts how Trump and his followers would like America to be. In a phrase, it is an *identity festival* that embodies a *politics of hope* (Reicher & Haslam, 2017, p.29)

The envisionment of a performance that he and his supporters might achieve together was also a key feature of Trump's address to the 'Save America' rally:

> So we're going to, we're going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue. I love Pennsylvania Avenue. And we're going to the Capitol, and we're going to try and give. The Democrats are hopeless—they never vote for anything. Not even one vote. But we're going to try and give our Republicans, the weak ones because the strong ones don't need any of our help. We're going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country. So let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue.

Above and beyond specific leader traits and styles (e.g., those associated with transformational leadership and authentic leadership), research suggests that the various elements of identity leadership that we have explored above make a significant contribution to a leaders' ability to influence and mobilize groups across a wide range of social contexts. In particular, programmatic research in more than 20 countries has shown that, together, the four components of identity leadership predict leaders' ability to secure the support of followers (van Dick et al., 2018) and to stimulate innovation and creativity in those followers (Bracht et al., 2021). Importantly too, the potency of these elements of identity leadership is

not restricted to specific contexts (e.g., those where observers might judge leadership to be clearly 'bad' or else clearly 'good').

Nevertheless, researchers have argued that in order for identity leadership to be effective, it is important that leaders construe the goals towards which a group is working as both vital and virtuous. In precisely this vein, another central feature of Trump's address to those who went on to attack the Capitol was his insistence on the righteousness of their cause:

> As this enormous crowd shows, we have truth and justice on our side. We have a deep and enduring love for America in our hearts. We love our country. We have overwhelming pride in this great country and we have it deep in our souls. Together, we are determined to defend and preserve government of the people, by the people and for the people.

But it is telling too that in bringing his speech to its conclusion, Trump reminded them not only of the good work they were doing to fight 'bad' actors and forces (to which he referred 16 times), but also of the challenges that this "dirty business" presented:

> Together, we will drain the Washington swamp and we will clean up the corruption in our nation's capital. We have done a big job on it, but you think it's easy. It's a dirty business. It's a dirty business. You have a lot of bad people out there.

In common with other leaders who have steeled their followers for the hard realities of conflict (see Haslam et al., 2019), it is clear that Trump needed to prepare his supporters for the fact that the omelette they were going to make would require them to break some eggs.

**Engaged followership: Working towards 'our' leader**

So far, we have emphasized how Trump drummed up enthusiasm and whetted his supporters' appetite for action. Critically, however, he did not provide them with explicit instructions as to what to do. Instead he set them a goal (to ensure that the election results were not certified and thereby to 'stop the steal') without specifying how that goal should be achieved. Equally, Trump invoked values of strength, determination and a willingness to

fight for justice (using the word 'fight' 20 times) without indicating who they should fight or

how (e.g., metaphorically or literally). He didn't tell anyone to storm the barricades, to

invade the speaker's office, or to assault police and security guards. There were therefore no

specific instructions to be violent. In this way, it is apparent that the relationship between

Trump and his followers was not akin to that between a puppet master and his puppets.

Indeed, Wolff (2021) suggests that Trump appeared to be genuinely surprised when told of

some of the specific actions of his followers. Thus, when his Chief of Staff, Mark Meadows

talked to Trump about walking to the Capitol he at first failed to understand the suggestion,

then exclaimed "I didn't mean it literally" (2021, p.228).

So what exactly was the nature of the translational process here? As set out above, the

answer rests on an analysis of leadership which sees this not as individual-focused process

which arises simply from the psychology and behavior of an individual leader, but rather as a

*group process* which necessarily involves and engages followers (Haslam et al., 2011).

Indeed, if leadership is understood as the process through which one or more members of a

group influence and motivate other group members to contribute to the achievement of group

goals (Rost, 2008), then it follows that *without followership there can be no leadership*

(Bennis, 1999; Platow et al., 2015).

More particularly, social identity theorists have argued that effective leadership rests

on a process of *engaged followership* in which followers work hard and creatively to rise to

the challenges set out by a leader whose cause they identify with (Haslam et al., 2011;

Reicher et al., 2012). This argument aligns closely with the notion of *co-production*

*followership* explored in organizational research by Carsten, Uhl-Bien and colleagues;

Carsten et al., 2010, 2018; Uhl-Bien & Carsten, 2018; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014; see also Shamir

2007). However, the critical point for us is that the possibility of effective co-production

between leaders and followers resides in the capacity for both to see each other in terms of a

group membership that they share and identify with. Accordingly, it is the fact that followers

are engaged by a sense of social identity that that they see themselves as sharing with leaders

that motivates them to respond to, and work to realize, the goals of identity leadership. That,

then, is why we prefer the term 'engaged followership (cf. Ellemers et al., 2004; Kachanoff

et al., 2020; Platow & Grace, 2020; see also Haslam et al., 2022, for an extended discussion).

Critically, the intrinsic motivations that are associated with engaged followership

mean that leaders are often effective *precisely because they do not tell followers what to do*.

Speaking to this point, it is significant that in Milgram's 'Obedience to Authority' research

when the experimenter prods participants to continue by telling them "you have no other

choice, you must continue" (Prod 4) none of them do (a point confirmed in replication

studies and in analogue experiments that explore this issue more forensically; Berger et al.,

2011; Haslam et al., 2014). We will return to this research later. For now, the key point to

note is that, contrary to the idea that followers are moved by orders (the message that is

customarily taken from Milgram's research), giving people orders is a peculiarly *in*effective

way of securing their compliance. Instead, people are most compliant when they are invited

to *cooperate* in a joint enterprise that allows them to experience self-determination and to

exercise agency. Thus Haslam et al. (2014) observed that of the four prods that Milgram used

to urge participants on, the one that was most effective was the one that encouraged them to

continue in the interests of science (i.e., Prod 2: "The Experiment requires that you

continue"). Indeed, in his experimental notes, Milgram made very similar observations,

noting that:

> Cooperation implies a certain willingness to perform the action or help out, a certain
> internal desire to assist, while obedience implies an action that is totally in response to a
> command, with no motivational support from inner sources…. Even in this experiment
> we must disguise the character of obedience so that it appears to serve a productive end.
> Therefore we are not dealing with 'blind obedience'…. For every command is justified as

serving some productive end. (Milgram, Box 46, Yale archive; cited in Haslam et al., 2015, pp.57-58)

As Figure 1 suggests, this process of engaged followership can be broken down into three core components. The first of these is the requirement for followers to embrace and internalize the sense of social identity ('us-ness') that the leader is promoting. If they do not, they are likely to stand on the sidelines, if not withdraw altogether (Browning, 1992; Reicher & Haslam, 2006).

Amongst the Trump supporters who assembled on Capitol Hill it is clear, however, that few had any such qualms and that their sense of shared social identity was generally very high. Indeed, many of these supporters came to the rally with their social identity "pre-loaded", and ready to enact—not least because those who attended had self-selected to do so on the basis of high identification (Grayer et al., 2021). This was captured by journalists who mingled with supporters before and during the event and documented their widespread enthusiasm. Amongst other things it was reflected in the crowd's apparel (e.g., "Keep America Great" hats, "Trump 2020" badges), their banners (e.g., Trump campaign flags; Dunleavy, 2021; Quito & Shendruck, 2021) and rallying cries (e.g., "Stop the Steal", "God Bless America", "U.S.A.!, U.S.A.!"; Barry et al., 2021; Mogelson, 2021). On social media too, the most frequently used terms in the user biographies of those who responded to hashtags related to the rally (e.g., "#stopthesteal") were "love" and "Trump" (Hitkul et al., 2021, p.10).

Most tellingly, though, it is clear that the audience did not merely listen to Trump's address but were active participants in it (Atkinson, 1984). At the most basic level, this meant that they responded enthusiastically ("Yeah!") when Trump posed various rhetorical questions (e.g., "Today, for the sake of our democracy, for the sake of our Constitution, and for the sake of our children, we lay out the case for the entire world to hear. You want to hear it?"; Naylor, 2021). At various other points they also interjected with apposite retorts and

commentary (e.g., "Bullshit! Bullshit!" when Trump shared his thoughts about voter fraud in Pennsylvania, Michigan, and Georgia; "Send it back!" when Trump indicated that this was what Vice-President Pence needed to do with the bill to certify the election result).

Yet the strongest signals of the crowd's identification with Trump and the cause they shared with him were the points at which they interrupted his speech to affirm their fealty. These resulted in the speech being punctuated with spontaneous outpourings of support and love for the President, that forced him on several occasions to pause and acknowledge the cries of "We love Trump!", "We love you!" and "Fight for Trump! Fight for Trump!" (Naylor, 2021). As Trump himself said later:

> It was a loving crowd… There was a lot of love. I've heard that from everybody. Many, many people have told me that was a loving crowd. (Goerzen, 2021)

But as well as identifying with their leader, in order for their actions to have concerted force and direction, followers also need to have a shared understanding of the goals they are working towards. The second element of engaged followership thus centers on followers' efforts to spell out and clarify those goals. As we have already seen, Trump's own address to the crowd (and many of his previous pronouncements) gave his supporters a clear idea of the general ends they were working towards and why. Nevertheless, supporters needed to work out the practical implications of this and his earlier messages for themselves. There is considerable evidence that this is something they did through extensive discussion and exchange of ideas on various social media platforms (notably Parler, Gab and 4chan; Frenzel, 2021; Heilwell & Ghaffary, 2021). They were already starting to do this in the lead up to the rally, but interest in the specifics of insurrection grew dramatically in the wake of Trump's speech. For example, the data analytics company Zignal Labs noted that social media posts mentioning unrest-related terms spiked at 3pm on the afternoon of January 6, just after Trump's speech had ended (Heilwell & Ghaffary, 2021).

As the following examples suggest, Hitkul et al.'s (2021) analysis of the content of posts on Parler and Twitter on the day of the insurrection also points to the fact that demonstrators were keen both to reaffirm their support for Trump's cause and to signal their intentions to others:

> MAGA PATRIOTS please support Trump and storm the Capitol and Congress properly.!! We will install Truml [sic] as our Lord and savior, PRESIDENT FOR LIFE... because we won the election!! THIS TIME WE TAKE THE CAPITOL WITH GUNS bcs it is not fair we lost DESTORY AMERICA OR TRUMP STAYS PRESIDENT... its the most patriotic thing to do...#maga

> I proudly stand with President Trump and I will fight to the death to ensure the sanctity of our Republic...

Analysis of the themes of protestors' discourse (as captured by the journalists cited above) also suggests that these picked up on those in Trump's address but gave them more a specific focus. This can be seen in Figure 3 which presents the Leximancer analysis of comments made by 64 protestors reported in articles by Barry et al. (2021), Mogelson (2021) and Pennacchia (2021). Details of this analysis are again presented in the Supplementary Materials, but this reveals a focus on "war" and "battle" against the "corrupt" and in defence of "America", with "Nancy" as a concrete focus for the conflict with Democrats.
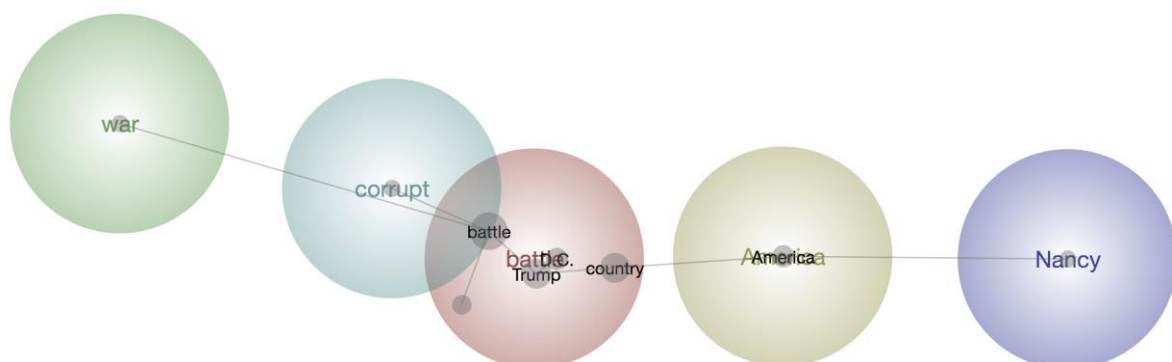
*Figure 3.* Leximancer analysis of Trump supporters' comments in the wake of the attack on the U.S. Capitol

*Note:* Analysis based on protestors' comments sourced from Barry et al. (2021), Mogelson (2021), and Pennacchia (2021).

What, though, were followers *actually to do*, in pursuit of these plans? This is a point on which leaders themselves are often relatively mute. This silence is not incidental. On the contrary it is very telling. This is a point made by the historian Ian Kershaw in his analysis of Hitler's influence in the Third Reich. In this Kershaw shows how Hitler was reluctant to issue directives that had any level of detail. He quotes one of Hitler's adjutants recalling that:

> [The Führer] spent most afternoons taking a walk, in the evening straight after dinner, there were films.... He disliked the study of documents. I have sometimes secured decisions from him, even ones about important matters, without his ever asking to see the relevant documents. He took the view that many things sorted themselves out on their own if one did not interfere. (Kershaw, 1993, p.105).

Kershaw observes, however, that it was this very lack of explicit directives that gave the Nazi project its dynamism (see also Haslam & Reicher, 2007; Rees, 1993). Speaking to this point, he cites the observations of a rank-and-file Nazi functionary that:

> Everyone who has the opportunity to observe it knows that the Führer can hardly dictate from above everything which he intends to realise sooner or later. On the contrary, up till now everyone with a post in the new Germany has worked best when he has, so to speak, worked towards the Führer. Very often and in many spheres it has been the case—in previous years as well—that individuals have simply waited for orders and instructions. Unfortunately, the same will be true in the future; but in fact it is the duty of everybody to try to work towards the Führer along the lines he would wish. Anyone who makes mistakes will notice it soon enough. But anyone who really works towards the Führer along his lines and towards his goal will certainly both now and in the future one day have the finest reward. (Kershaw, 1993, p.116, emphasis added).

Our point here is not to make a specific comparison between Trump and Hitler or between the Assault on the Capitol and the events of the Nazi era. Rather, it is to make a general point

about the dynamics of leadership and followership—where we see that effective leadership rests not on spelling out the demands of followership but on ensuring that followership is sufficiently engaged.

The third feature of engaged followership is thus that rather than being told what to do, followers take it upon themselves to *"work towards"* the vision of their leader. This is a stimulus for creativity and innovation in the face of the novel challenges that they necessarily confront. Critically, though, the forms of creativity and innovation that followers display are informed by the *normative content* of the social identity by which they are motivated and the associated goals to which they are working (Haslam et al., 2012).

History provides manifold case studies of these processes at work. One of the most telling concerns a man often held up as the textbook example of the bureaucratic killer (one who thoughtlessly but efficiently carries out orders, no matter how toxic): Adolf Eichmann. Yet against the idea that Eichmann was merely a compliant functionary, recent biographies show how he gained advancement by pursuing Hitler's broad goals of deporting and murdering Jews with ingenuity, creativity and zeal (Cesarani, 2004; Stangneth, 2014). Moreover, what is true of Eichmann is true more generally of Hitler's bureaucrats. As Lozowick memorably puts it:

> Eichmann and his ilk did not come to murder Jews by accident or in a fit of absent-mindedness, nor by blindly obeying orders or by being small cogs in a big machine. They worked hard, thought hard, took the lead over many years. They were the alpinists of evil. (2002, p.279; cited in Haslam et al., 2009, p.617).

Creativity and innovation are equally apparent when it comes to lesser (but still serious) acts of toxic followership. For example, they can be seen in the resourcefulness of Volkswagen engineers when developing a device to circumvent environmental regulations by lowering diesel emissions during laboratory testing (Ewing, 2015), in the ingenuity of News Corp journalists when discovering ways to obtain information about unsuspecting people on

whom they wanted to discover 'dirt' (Davies, 2014), and in the various schemes devised by

Enron accountants to manipulate financial reporting practices in ways that concealed liability

and debt (McLean & Elkind, 2003; Swartz & Watkins, 2003).

Turning to another (in)famous example of toxicity in the psychological research

literature, the Stanford Prison Experiment, it is apparent that here the cruelty that the guards

meted out to prisoners was a reflection of their creative interpretation and implementation of

briefings given by Zimbardo and his Experimenters (Bartels, 2019). Thus rather than

explicitly tell the Guards to brutalize the prisoners, Zimbardo informed them that "We're

going to take away their individuality in various ways. In general what all this leads to is a

sense of powerlessness" (1992, cited in Bartels, 2019, p.781). And for their part, in order to

act upon this information, the guards needed to read creatively between the lines. As one of

their victims observed, "If I had been a guard, I don't think it would have been such a

masterpiece. If I had been a guard I don't think I would have had such imagination"

(Zimbardo, 1992; cited in Haslam et al., 2007, p.619).

Likewise, when they arrived at the Capitol, Trump's supporters were minded to do

much more than simply paint by numbers. Nevertheless, as they mounted their assault on the

building and its occupants their actions were informed by a clear sense of shared identity and

of the norms and goals associated with that identity. Far from being indiscriminate, their

violence therefore sought out targets that had clear meanings in relation to those identities (in

ways discussed by Reicher, 1984). Principal amongst these were the Democratic Speaker of

the House, Nancy Pelosi and Vice-President Pence—the latter having been identified as by

Trump as a key obstacle to his progress who needed to be persuaded to "do the right thing"

and "come through for us". Thus after working with his fellow insurrectionists to break down

the door of the Senate chamber and finding the leather chair reserved for the Vice-President,

one triumphant Trump supporter declared:

I'm gonna take a seat in this chair, because Mike Pence is a fucking traitor. I'm not one to

usually take pictures of myself, but in this case I think I'll make an exception (cited in

Mogelson, 2021).

In all of this too, Trump's supporters invoked his assumed wishes as justification for

their actions (with Trump himself saying later that he was sympathetic to their calls to "Hang

Mike Pence"; Reuters, 2021). This was seen, for example, when, after clarifying that Ted

Cruz was an ally of Trump's, one of the number who had invaded the Senate chamber

observed "Cruz would *want* us to do this, so I think we're good" (Mogelson, 2021).

Likewise, another announced "Our President wants us here" (Barry et al., 2020).

Aligned with the understanding that Trump had promulgated, at the heart of these

actions there was also a clear understanding that—notwithstanding the destructiveness and

violence of the insurrectionists—the cause they were advancing was, for them, profoundly

virtuous and noble. Indeed, this sense of virtue appears to have been consolidated by the fact

that as well as being justified by the necessity of fighting for Trump in order to defend a

threatened ingroup, destructiveness and violence were understood to be selective and focused

rather than meaningless and random (Reicher, 1987). At multiple points this meant that

protestors engaged in collective self-policing to channel their energies in what they saw as

appropriate ways (Stott et al., 2007). Thus after breaking into the Capitol several of the

throng reminded their fellow insurgents to make sure their actions were suitably targeted—

reminding each other "Don't trash the place. No disrespect" (Mogelson, 2021).

This crusader-like sense of self-righteousness is perhaps seen most clearly in the

reflections of Patrick Rodriguez, one of the insurrectionists who was subsequently identified

and brought in for interrogation by the FBI. In the course of this, he offered up the following

commentary in defence of his actions:

I thought that we were going to save this—I thought we were going to do something. I

thought that it was not going to end—happen like that. I thought that Trump was going to

stay President and they were going to find all this crooked stuff and were going to—I mean, we found out that—we thought that we did something good. We were getting Nancy …. [We thought] we could just bust everything and find the truth and it'll be all exposed and we'll see that she's corrupt or some kind of evidence. And we thought we were being a—we were part of a bigger thing. We thought we were being used as a part of a plan to save the country, to save America, save The Constitution, and the election, the integrity. (cited in Pennachia, 2021)

For Trump supporters, then, far from being a day of shame and infamy, this was a day of vindication, empowerment and glory. The reason for this was that they had been able to play a meaningful role in enacting a shared social identity and to do so in ways that allowed them to translate their leader's stirring analysis and vision into material reality—as part of what one described as "the most awe-inspiring and inspirational and incredible thing I have seen in my entire life" (Mogelson, 2021). As another succinctly put it, "We are here. See us! Notice us! Pay attention!" (Barry et al., 2021).

**Implications and the importance of identity content**

Thus far our analysis has suggested that the events of January 6 (and others like them) represent the outcomes of generic processes of effective identity leadership and the engaged followership it engenders. On this basis one might conclude that identity leadership (and perhaps social identity more generally) is a dangerous force that needs to be suppressed or at least diffused. Yet the problem with this inference is that in many other contexts identity leadership—and the social identity that it marshals—is essential for emancipation and progress. In particular, there is abundant evidence that it is central to the development of resistance movements that emerge to challenge tyranny and oppression (Langbein, 1994; Mandela, 1994; see Haslam & Reicher, 2012). And more generally, there is considerable evidence that it is a driver of individual, group and organizational success—for example, in fields of business, enterprise, health and sport (Lee et al., 2021; Steffens et al., 2014; Stevens et al., 2021; van Dick et al., 2019).

The general point here, to which we have already alluded, is that, because it mobilizes social identity, identity leadership is a source of social *power* (Haslam et al., 2011; Turner, 2005; Simon & Oakes, 2006; van Bavel & Packer, 2021). It is how that power is crafted and then wielded upon which matters of virtue hinge. Whenever identity leadership is a basis for a group to achieve power—and a sense of recognition through that power—it is likely to be celebrated by members of that group as evidence of good leadership. Indeed, as we have observed, a key reason for this is that even when their objectives are cruel and vicious, leaders go—and need to go—to considerable lengths to convince would-be followers and backers that this is not the case (Haslam et al., 2019). Thus, we can observe a direct connection between Trump's assertion that "we have truth and justice on our side" and insurrectionist Rodriguez's conviction that "I thought I was a good guy" (Pennacchia, 2021).

There is a danger, though, if necessary psychological relativism bleeds into social and political relativism (Oakes et al., 1994). To say that all people generally understand the causes for which they fight to be good, does not mean that they actually are. So what distinguishes 'good' identity leadership from 'bad' identity leadership? Before attempting to answer this, it is worth noting that the more general form of this question (what makes leadership good or bad?) has stood as a perennial problem for leadership scholars (e.g., Bass & Steidlemeier, 1999; Brown et al., 2006; House & Howell, 1992). In large part this reflects the fact that within the leadership literature there is a general tendency to assume that effective leadership is good leadership (Alvesson et al., 2016). However, Ciulla (2003) points to "the Hitler problem" as evidence that this is not the case. It is possible, she notes, to argue that Hitler was effective, but clearly to the extent that he was this led only to tyranny, terror and destruction.

From a social identity perspective, then, the problem with Hitler was not that he engaged in identity leadership in ways that secured engaged followership. Rather, it was that

the *content* of the social identity that he mobilized was one that fuelled hatred, oppression and ultimately genocide. In particular, the vision of German 'Volk' that he and his followers subscribed to was one that progressively (a) constructed a tightly defined ingroup, (b) identified selected outgroups as external to that ingroup, (c) represented those outgroups as a threat to ingroup identity, (d) championed the ingroup as uniquely good, and (e) celebrated the eradication of the outgroup as necessary for defence of the ingroup (Reicher et al., 2008). As a result, Hitler's Nazis came to see violence as the supreme expression of ingroup virtue (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017; Fiske & Rai, 2014; Koonz, 2003).

It was a homologous model of ingroup identity, we suggest, that underpinned the violence that unfolded on Capitol Hill. Again, we stress that this is not to say that the goals that animated Trump and his supporters were equivalent to those that mobilized Hitler and his fellow Nazis. Rather, we suggest that the psychological primitives were the same in both cases. Thus, all five of the above elements can be identified in the statements by Trump and his supporters that we have already quoted (see also Humphrey, 2021). At the same time, in terms of specific content, the nature of the ingroup and outgroup differed (focusing on an ideological divide between patriots and traitors rather than a racial divide between Germans and Jews), the nature of the outgroup threat differed (a reversible act of political choice rather than something in the very essence of the other) and, critically, the nature of eradication differed (a destruction of the other as a political force rather than the murder of all outgroup members).

Nevertheless, Trump's analysis culminated in the argument that those involved in 'stealing' their country must be destroyed. This can be observed in statements of the following form made by those who were living the identity out within and around the occupied Capitol building (cited by Mogelson, 2020):

> We're gonna take this country back—believe that shit. Fuck Black Lives Matter. What y'all need to do is take your sorry asses to the ghetto.

It's time for us to start saying another word again. A very important word that describes the situation we're in. That word is 'parasite.' What is happening in this country is parasitism. It is the American people, and our leader, Donald Trump, against *everybody else* in this country and this world.

So, yes, it was identity leadership that brought these followers to this point. But it was not any old identity leadership. Rather it was a peculiarly pernicious brand, borne of a Manichean vision of who we are, of who we want to be, and of who stops us from achieving that.

**Avoiding confirmation bias: Counterfactual and deviant case analysis**

As we stressed at the outset, our aim in this article has been to lay out a model of leader–follower relations which accords agency to both parties and which shows how leaders achieve influence less by constraining followers through the provision of specific instructions than by enabling their creativity through the setting out of general goals that advance the group's cause. We have used a range of illustrations to flesh out this model, most notably ones relating to the relationship between Donald Trump and the self-styled 'patriots' who stormed the Capitol. We would stress that these examples were intended not as 'proof' of our model but rather as a means of demonstrating how the model provides a framework for understanding large-scale social and organizational events and thereby clarifying otherwise abstract concepts. Nonetheless, there is a real danger that such an approach can lead to confirmation bias (McSweeney, 2021). Consequently it is critical to 'stress test' our approach by considering the conditions where we would and wouldn't expect it to work, and to consider its applicability beyond the specific case of Trump's leadership (Gerring & McDermott, 2007; Gibbert et al., 2014). In other words, we need to consider some counterfactuals and deviant cases.

Conceptually, our account suggests that the ability of leaders to inspire engaged followership depends upon two key factors. The first is that leaders and followers must share

a salient social identity such that followers see leaders as 'one of us'. Where they don't, the leader (however adored by the ingroup) will have little appeal and is more prone to be actively repudiated. This is encapsulated in Milgram and Toch's (1969) famous observation that riot police are unlikely to be swept away by a crowd demagogue. It is equally encapsulated in the fact that Democrats are bemused by the appeal of Trump and assume that his followers must be either bad or stupid people (Plutzer & Berkman, 2021).

More systematic evidence of the relationship between identity leadership, identification with the leader and leader influence comes from some more unlikely sources that we have already alluded to—notably the willingness (a) of teachers to administer shocks to a learner in Milgram's (1963, 1974) 'Obedience to Authority' studies, and (b) of guards to brutalize prisoners in the Stanford Prison Experiment (Haney et al., 1973). In both these paradigms, the experimenters had to do a considerable amount of work both to build a sense of shared social identity with participants and to make the goals of the research appear virtuous and noble so that participants would identify with them. In Milgram's case this work centered on the effort he put into building rapport with participants and ensuring that the experimental set-up (and, in particular, the shock machine) looked appropriately scientific (Laurens & Ballot, 2021; Russell, 2011), and into devising an experimental cover story that stressed the role the studies would play in advancing scientific understanding of the learning process (Gibson, 2013; Haslam & Reicher, 2017; Russell, 2014). Similarly, Zimbardo's experimenters recognised that guards needed a reason to be cruel to prisoners. Thus when a guard proved unwilling to be sufficiently "tough", Zimbardo's Warden urged him on by saying:

> If you need an excuse, and I think most of us do really, it is so we can learn what happens in a total institution . . . And we want to know about them. So that we can, we can get on the media and, um, and, and into press with it. And, and, and say "Now look at what, what this really about". (cited in Haslam et al., 2019, p.817).

Importantly, the sense of shared social identification that the experimenters cultivated in both of these contexts underpinned participants' willingness to engage in destructive behavior. Thus in the Milgram paradigm, participants prove much more willing to follow destructive instructions when they identify with the source of those instructions (the scientists and the community they represent; Haslam, et al., 2014; Reicher et al., 2012). But as a corollary, participants are much more reluctant to continue if the context or instructions undermine their identification with the experimenter or the science (e.g., because the experimenters argue, or the study is conducted in a commercial office rather than a university laboratory; Blass, 2004; Reicher et al., 2012). Likewise, in the SPE Guards who were unconvinced by the experimenters' claims about the study's scientific merits were wont to disengage (Haslam et al., 2019; Le Texier, 2019). The key point, here, then, is that before followers are willing to do harm, they first need to be persuaded by leaders that this is a *good* thing to do. And the more egregious the harm, the more important it is for leaders to justify it.

The second factor which is critical to the success of identity leadership is grounded not in the ingroup relationship between the leader and followers but in the relationship of consonance or dissonance between what the leader proposes and the content of group identity. On the one hand, we have done much work examining the way leaders seek to construe themselves and their proposals as exemplifying and realizing what the group is all about (e.g., see Haslam et al., 2011). Out of many examples, one of the most powerful is Franklin Roosevelt's famous 'whistle-stop tour' during the 1932 Presidential election campaign. Roosevelt's advisors counselled against this on the grounds that this would expose his disability (he was thought to have polio and could only move slowly and painfully in leg braces). In the event, though, Roosevelt was able to use the performance of overcoming his disability on the tour as a metonym for his ability to overcome American economic paralysis during the depression—a theme reflected in the well-known lines from his 1933 inaugural

address following a landslide victory in which he secured over 57% of the vote: "the only thing we have to fear is ... fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance" (cited in DiNunzio, 2014, p. 82).

As well as a wealth of evidence that points to other leaders gaining influence by assimilating proposals to identities, there is also some evidence of Trump failing to mobilize his audience with proposals that are at odds with the identity they share. Most memorably, this was seen at a Trump rally in Alabama in August 2020 when he recommended that his supporters get vaccinated (having previously railed against various COVID measures as an affront to American freedoms and 2$^{nd}$ amendment rights; Hornsey et al., 2020):

> I value your freedoms, I really do. You gotta do what you have to do.
> *[Crowd cheers]*
> But I recommend take the vacccines. I did it—it's good. Take the vaccines.
> *[Some people in the crowd boo]*
> No, that's OK. That's alright. You got your freedoms. But I happen to take the vaccine. If it doesn't work you'll be the first to know.
> *[Booing intensifies].* (Smith, 2021).

To round this discussion out, we can also turn our attention from the conditions of success and failure in identity leadership to consider the agency and creativity of engaged followers more generally. We have already given a number of accounts of such creativity which suggest that those who assaulted the Capitol were far from unique. But these were general examples rather than specific incidents, they related to people acting alone rather than together, and they were limited to toxic behaviors. So let us conclude this section with a somewhat more detailed description of the constructive agency of crowd members as framed by an identity leader. It relates to a November 1985 Anti-Apartheid Movement demonstration in London attended by the second author. Due to an upsurge of struggle in South Africa, the demonstration was far bigger than expected and only just fitted into Trafalgar Square where

it concluded with speeches. Many protestors were jammed up against the South African embassy, defended by the police. Conflict began to break out, stones were thrown.

At that point the civil rights leader Jesse Jackson was talking. He paused from his script and pointed towards the embassy. He denounced the conflict and argued that it was in the interests of the apartheid regime because any violence would dominate the headlines and distract from the message of the demonstration. He then urged demonstrators to stop fighting, to link hands and to chant the key demand of the Movement: 'Free Nelson Mandela'. Demonstrators complied. The conflict subsided. The chant was taken up throughout the crowd. Moreover, when Jackson then tried to continue with his speech, he was drowned out by the crowd and forced to join them in calling 'Free Nelson Mandela'.

On the one hand, then, Jackson influenced the crowd by drawing on his understanding of group identity—both marginalizing conflict for silencing the group voice and uniting crowd members around an articulation of the key group demands. But on the other hand, though they took up the chants on Jackson's suggestion, demonstrators did not simply act as directed. They embraced the chanting as their own. They used it to silence Jackson and to force him to join in with them. What we see, then, is that both leader and followers exercised agency—followers influenced the leader as much as the leader influenced followers.

**Limitations and an agenda for future research**

The events that unfolded on Capitol Hill are consistent with a large and growing body of research which speaks to the power of identity leadership and engaged followership to energize groups and turn them into the engines of history (Reicher & Haslam, 2013). However, it remains the case that although each of the elements of this analysis has been subjected to rigorous empirical test elsewhere (including experimental research), we are not in a position to point definitively to the causal status of these processes in the events we have described (Antonakis et al., 2010). Indeed, qualitative research is typically not focused on

issues of causality but instead seeks to provide rich insight into the deeper structures and patterns of leadership and followership as well as to describe the way that these *actually work* (Conger, 1998, p.110; see also Bryman & Burgess, 1994). As such, our approach is well-suited for social reality-based theory building that can provide a useful platform for further empirical analysis.

The potential for a rich interactive analysis in which the actions of each party frame the understandings and actions of the other is pointed to by the various illustrations we have discussed—most notably those related to the events of 6th January. Yet, rich as they are, these illustrations are based on post-hoc analysis that draws principally on second-hand sources. The power of our analysis would clearly be greater if it were based on contemporaneous ethnographic studies and more systematic data sources (for relevant examples of ethnographic research in the social identity tradition see Blackwood et al., 2013; Drury et al., 2003; Drury & Reicher, 2005; Smith et al., 2018). In particular, there would be value in a more fine-grained analysis of the way that followers respond to leaders' speeches and of the ways in which they invoke the leader in devising and accounting for their own actions. Ideally too, the present analysis would be replicated in other contexts where the arguments presented above can be treated as pre-registered hypotheses to be competitively tested in relation to alternative models—notably those that might see the impact of leaders like Trump primarily to be a consequence of their personal charisma or narcissism (e.g., Antonakis et al., 2018; O'Reilly et al., 2021). In these contexts too, it would be interesting to develop an integrative analysis that clarifies the ways in which social identity processes are implicated in leaders' and followers' co-production of these and other aspects of leadership processes (e.g., along lines discussed by Klein & House, 1995; Mergen, & Ozbilgin, 2021).

In line with this objective, there would also be value in abstracting some of the key points that we have set out above and subjecting them to experimental investigation. This is

particularly relevant in light of the fact that our specification and analysis of counterfactual and deviant cases is necessarily both selective and circumscribed. Modelling a form that future experimental research might take, Bartels (2019) showed that it was possible to confirm the importance of the role that Zimbardo's briefing of his guards played in the violence they subsequently visited upon prisoners by exposing participants to different versions of the briefing and asking them how oppressively they thought they were meant to behave (see also Carnahan & McFarland, 2007). As expected, when participants were exposed to the briefing that Zimbardo gave his guards, they were far more likely to think that they were meant to be hostile than was the case when they were given a briefing that only presented basic information about the study. On this basis Bartels (2019) concluded that Zimbardo played a key role in sanctioning the abuse that was seen in the SPE. Clearly it would be possible to conduct conceptually similar studies to isolate the impact that Trump's identity leadership had in motivating his supporters to behave as they did in Washington D.C in the wake of his election loss. At a more granular level, it would also be instructive to examine the particular role played by different aspects of leaders' definition of ingroup identity (e.g., the five components identified by Reicher et al., 2008).

A number of studies of this form are currently underway as part of a global effort to better understand the mechanics of identity leadership and the ways in which it can be directed, misdirected and derailed (e.g., Bracht et al., 2021; Maskor et al., 2020). Part of this work will also need to examine the attributions that we make to leaders and groups, and those that leaders themselves make, in the face of different collective outcomes (cf., Meindl et al., 1985). In particular, when are we inclined to hold leaders accountable for the crimes their groups commit and when do we let them off the hook (noting that in this case, as in many others, there was a reluctance to bring leaders to trial—this in part being a reflection of the limitations of the legal system; Petterson, 2021)? When and why do we believe their claims

(e.g., those made by Murdoch, Zimbardo and Trump) that they are "shocked and appalled" by their group's misdeeds and their protestations that they had no part in them? (Brown, 2011; Reicher, 2021). If plausible deniability is the price we pay for keeping the 'romance of leadership' alive, at what point does that price become too high (Fisk, 2021)?

**Concluding comment**

In his address to his assembled supporters before they mounted their assault on the Capitol, President Trump assured them that "I'll be there with you, we're going to walk down, we're going to walk down". As Mogelson (2021) notes, in the event, Trump did not actually accompany protestors as they progressed down Pennsylvania Avenue (and, according to Wolff, 2021, probably never intended to). Nevertheless, *psychologically*, he *was* with them by virtue of the shared social identity that he had cultivated and that they had internalized. Moreover, the crimes that some of those supporters went on to commit were not just committed in Trump's name, but as part of the enactment of that same social identity. In this, they represented the creative 'working through' of a collective project inspired by the President's very effective identity entrepreneurship and identity impresarioship. Without these it is inconceivable that the attack on the Capitol would have had the ferocity that it did or indeed that it would have taken place at all.

At the same time, though, it is important to recognize that Trump was no puppet master and that his followers were far more than puppets. Instead, he was the unifier, activator, and enabler of his followers during the dark events of January 6, 2021 (cf. Kershaw, 1993). As such, rather than eclipsing or sublimating their agency, he framed and unleashed it. And to account for this dynamic, it is apparent that we need a theoretical model of destructive collective action which centers on the fact that leadership is a co-production between leaders and followers rooted in a sense of shared social identity. Rather than

emphasize the agency of one at the expense of the other, this recognizes and respects the agency of both.

Importantly, empirical validation of this model has practical as well as intellectual value. For as we see from the assault on Capitol Hill, it is precisely because leaders and followers are so closely bound together psychologically that their actions need to be seen as a co-production. And this in turn means that that leaders' denial of responsibility for the way that events unfold is ultimately implausible. In these terms, the power of Trump's speech lay in its provision of a moral framework that impelled his audience to do work creatively to 'stop the steal'—fuelling a dynamic which ultimately led to insurrection. The absence of a point at which Trump instructed his supporters to assault Capitol Hill makes the assault on Capitol Hill no less his responsibility. The crimes that followers commit in the name of the group are necessarily crimes of leadership too.

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**Supplementary Materials**

**1. Trump's Capitol Hill Speech** (from Naylor, 2021)

**2. Statements from Trump's supporters** (from Barry et al., 2021; Mogelson, 2021; Pennacchia, 2021)

**3. Details of Leximancer analysis**