Supplementary Material: Code Book and Coding Process

The Battle for the Soul of the Nation: Nationalist Polarization in the 2020 American Presidential Election | Eric Taylor Woods, Alexandre Fortier-Chouinard, Marcus Closen, Catherine Ouellet, and Robert Schertzer

This document provides supplementary information on the process and method of analysing tweets for "The Battle for the Soul of the Nation: Nationalist Polarization in the 2020 American Presidential Election," forthcoming in *Political Communication*. This material includes the framework that informed analysis, an outline of the coding process and methodological considerations, and the codebook and related descriptions of the codes used when carrying out coding with NVivo.

Coding Framework

The following framework was used to inform the review and analysis of tweets from Donald Trump and Joe Biden. This framework summarizes the key elements of the myth symbol complex for America across five referents of national identity (people, religion, territory, history, and place in the world). The framework further breaks down this complex by outlining key myths and symbols associated with the civic and ethnic traditions of American national identity. As we explain in the article, the content for the framework is drawn from a wide reading of literature on American political culture, particularly work that focuses on its bifurcation into distinct traditions (e.g., Bonikowski and DiMaggio 2016; Citrin et al. 1990; Gerstle 2017; Kaufmann 2004; Li and Brewer 2004; Lieven 2012; Schertzer and Woods; 2021; Schertzer and Woods, 2022; R. Smith 1997). This framework is the basis for the code book (provided below), which was used to analyse tweets using NVivo.

Civic and Ethnic Myths and Symbols of American National Identity

Referent	Civic myths and symbols	Ethnic myths and symbols
People *How the characteristics of the nation's membership is perceived*	**Myths** • The basis of American unity are classical liberal ideals (natural rights, liberty, equality, rule of law, representative government, etc). • Anyone can be American, regardless of their backgrounds. • America is a uniquely diverse nation, which does not prioritize any one ethnic, racial, religious, or socio-economic group. • America's diversity is a key source of its strength. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols include mottos (e.g., '*E Pluribus Unum*'); icons (e.g. The Statue of Liberty,); founding texts (e.g., the Constitution); citizenship practices	**Myths** • America is a white (and formerly Anglo-Saxon) nation, whose people are innately superior to all other "races." • White (formerly Anglo-Saxon) Americans have a uniquely innate love of the classical liberal ideals of natural rights, liberty, equality, and representative government. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols include perceived shared physical traits of white people, as well as statues and texts lauding achievements of white people (e.g., "taming the American West"). • Enduring symbols of America's Anglo-Saxonness speak to prominence of English heritage (e.g., English names, the English language).

Referent	Civic myths and symbols	Ethnic myths and symbols
	(e.g., pledge of allegiance); and democracy (e.g., voting).	
Religion *how the nation's relationship to religion is perceived*	**Myths** • America is a rational nation, which emphasizes formal separation of state from religion. • The formal separation of church and state ensures that America is inclusive of all religions. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols include founding documents (e.g., Constitution), legal institutions (e.g., Supreme Court).	**Myths** • America is a Christian (formerly Protestant) nation. • America is a gift of Divine Providence, and its triumphs and defeats are a result of God's intervention. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols include figures (e.g., vicar), icons (e.g., cross), buildings (e.g., churches), and practices (e.g., 'swearing on bible').
Territory *how the nation's territory is perceived*	**Myths** • The American territory is the homeland of all people who adhere to its liberal ideals. • Within its territory, America's liberal ideals are supreme. • All people within America's territorial boundaries have equal claim to national belonging. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols include federal icons throughout territory (e.g., American flags) • Other symbols exemplify the pre-eminence of liberal ideals within the American territory (e.g., The Statue of Liberty).	**Myths** • The American territory is the homeland of native-born, white (formerly Anglo-Saxon), Christian (formerly Protestant) people. • The American territory is the legitimate homeland of white Christian Americans because of their innate racial superiority, and because it was gifted by God. • The crucible of American identity is the American countryside, in small towns and agrarian communities. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols exemplify the primacy of white Christians in the American territory (e.g. white farmers, white majority rural communities, 'main street').
History *how the nation's past, present, and future is perceived*	**Myths** • America is a world-historical nation, whose basis in liberal ideals represents the cutting edge of human progress. • The central events in America's history involve the founding, and defense, of its liberal ideals. • Present-day America is characterized by struggle to maintain its liberal ideals against the forces of racism and other illiberalisms. • America's destiny is to progress until its ideals are wholly realized	**Myths** • America is the culmination of a long and glorious history that begins in Europe. • The central events in America's history involve white Christians (formerly Anglo-Saxon Protestants) triumphantly forging the nation. • Present-day America is characterized by a struggle to maintain it true (white and Christian) character. • America's destiny is to restore its true (white and Christian) character. **Symbols**

Referent	Civic myths and symbols	Ethnic myths and symbols
	and all Americans are treated equally. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols exemplify America's progress to its liberal destiny (e.g., Declaration of Independence; the Civil War; the Civil Rights Movement)	• Indicative symbols include events that focus on white Christians 'building' the nation (e.g., pioneers, settlement, revolution, expansion)
Place in the World *how the nation's relationship with other nations is perceived*	**Myths** • America is unlike all other nations - it is *exceptional* because it is grounded in liberal ideals. • America's place as the most powerful nation demonstrates the righteousness of its ideals. • America has a special mission to be a beacon of liberal ideals for the rest of the world. • America is fundamentally a force for good. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols exemplify America's participation in 'just wars' (e.g., WWII), and its leadership in international organizations devoted to liberal-democratic principles (e.g., UN).	**Myths** • America's place as the world's most powerful nation demonstrates the *exceptional* ethnic and religious superiority of its people. • America has a special mission to defend Christianity in the world. • America has attained its place at the apex of power by autonomously choosing its own path. **Symbols** • Indicative symbols refer to people and events that played a key role in the expansion and defense of America (e.g., Boston Tea Party; 'winning of the west')

Coding Process

Our method in this paper drew from qualitative content analysis. As we explain in the paper, our goal is to identify the use of nationalist myths and symbols in the tweets of Donald Trump and Joe Biden in the 2020 presidential election. This goal presents multiple challenges for designing a coding process that can achieve the benchmark of qualitative content analysis – notably trustworthiness, understood as credible, dependable and transferable/replicable research findings (Krippendorff 2019; Graneheim and Lundman 2004). The challenges relate to both the content of the communication we are studying, and the medium. On the content: nationalist myths and symbols are deeply embedded historical artifacts, which are often communicated through opaque, contested, and implicit codes (Schertzer and Woods 2022). The challenge of identifying nationalist content is particularly acute for ethnic nationalist myths and symbols. They tend to be communicated through rhetorical devices like "dog whistles" and "fig leaves," which require contextual and historical knowledge to accurately decode (Hanley-Lopez 2014; Mercieca 2020; Saul 2017; Woods and Hahner 2019; Rowland 2021). However, even for civic myths and symbols, as we discuss in the article, the content of a message can be open to multiple interpretations and be highly context dependent requiring historical and cultural knowledge to identify. On the medium: the relatively circumspect and short nature of tweets means that these complex codes can be buried in short, subtle, and opaque

phrases and language. Indeed, the short-form prose in tweets means that coders can face more challenges unpacking the meaning of the message than for longer-form mediums, since tweeters do not have ample space to elaborate on their position. More importantly, though, while tweets are in some respect one-off messages, in a months-long political campaign they are anything but: a candidate's Twitter account acts as an aggregator for their entire campaign, and messages build on one another over time to craft a narrative. In this respect, messages that appear later in time often repeat earlier ideas or codes, but in truncated form or with slight changes to account for the daily context of the campaign. Accordingly, coders seeking to uncover meaning must deal with the challenge of both the atomistic *and* iterative nature of tweets as a form of political communication.

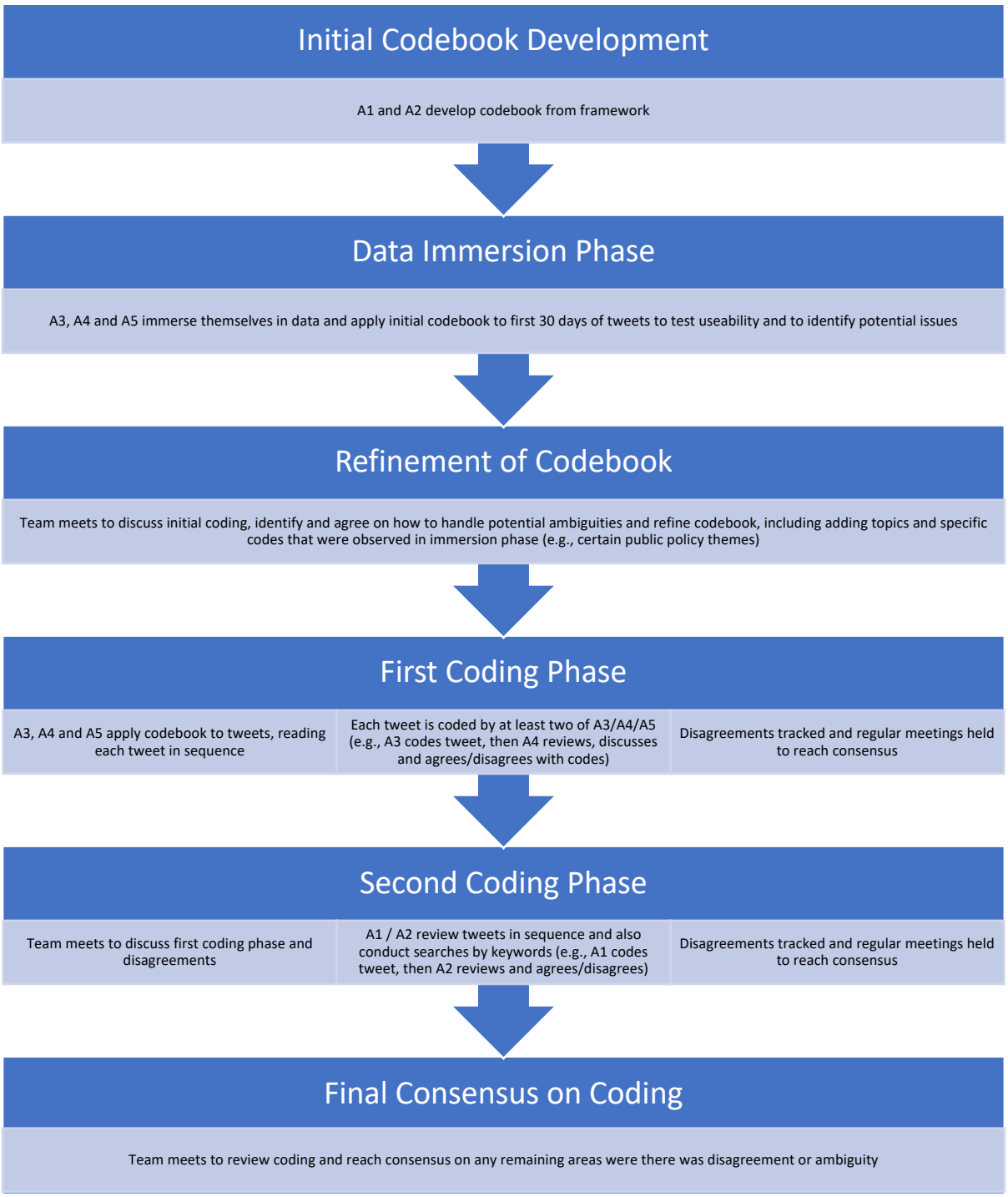
To manage these challenges, we adopted a coding process informed by a more interpretivist and deliberative, rather than positivist, approach to qualitative content analysis. Accordingly, we approached coding in a collaborative, team-based manner with a process designed to achieve intercoder consensus and agreement, rather than reaching a threshold score of intercoder reliability achieved through comparing the coding of individuals working independently. There is great value in seeking intercoder reliability – particularly as a means to enhance trustworthiness in qualitative analysis. This can often be achieved through a set of processes that largely aim to have multiple coders independently reach the same understanding of the data (Lacy et al. 2015; MacPhail et al. 2015; Clarke et al. 2023). At the same time, we follow the view that an over-emphasis on a positivist measure of intercoder reliability and processes that stress siloing and independence during data analysis can both obscure the inherent subjectivity of content analysis and hinder deep, reflexive, context-dependent analysis of complex meaning (see Braun and Clarke 2013; Thorogood and Green 2018; Guba and Lincon 1994). Of course, we agree with the primary objectives of coding processes designed to achieve intercoder reliability, that is to increase confidence in the research findings (to signal quality in the research and improve trustworthiness of replicability) and to "foster reflexivity and dialogue within the research team" (O'Connor and Joffe 2020: 3-4). We have adopted an approach in this article to achieve these objectives, largely through aligning with many of the best practices of work that both seeks to achieve intercoder reliability and that which adopts a more collegial, team-based, and discursive approach to coding focused on consensus-building. As O'Connor and Joffe (2020: 4) outline, the research designs for work adopting a more collegial and discursive approach to coding include "transparent reporting of the analytic procedures, producing 'thick description' with plentiful samples of raw data, triangulation between numerous studies, attention to deviant cases, and asking research participants to validate the legitimacy of analytic interpretations." In our study we adopt all these approaches, save asking the candidates to validate our analysis. This supplementary material and the methods explanation go into considerable depth to explain our analytical procedures. The study does not simply report on our findings, but also provides numerous examples and analysis of how the candidates use myths and symbols in their messaging – including providing quotes from tweets and providing all the raw data in an accessible repository. We have sought to triangulate our findings within the emerging work on the rhetoric and use of national identity in political campaigns. And we have paid particular attention to the deviant cases of Trump adopting a measure of civic nationalism in some tweets and Biden a measure of ethnic nationalism in some tweets – both during the coding process (through extensive discussion among the team) and in how we dedicated space in the article to considering these instances of communication.

At the same time, we also adopted a coding process that abided by many of the guidelines and suggested practices associated with qualitative content analysis to achieve intercoder reliability (e.g., Lacy et al. 2015; MacPhail et al. 2015). Notably, we: maintained a bifurcation between the developers of the codebook and the initial phase of coding; we adopted a data immersion phase to both train coders and to refine the codebook through a deductive feedback process; we tracked and had a clear process to resolve

coder disagreements through discussion and meetings; we did not analyze a sample of the data, rather we included all data (all direct tweets) during a period of time; we have made available all raw data (the tweets); and, we paid careful attention to the power dynamics among the coders. As we note in the paper and below, all five authors of the study played a role in the coding process. In establishing our coding procedures, we were cognizant of the potential for power dynamics among the team (particularly since we adopted a collegial, deliberative approach) to influence coders (see Naganathan et al. 2022: 4).

Below is a process map that outlines how our coding procedures are informed by these two approaches of collegial/discursive coding and those focused on achieving intercoder reliability thresholds.

Process Map for Coding



Code Book

The following code book was used to carry out analysis of the tweets of Donald Trump and Joe Biden. To identify whether a tweet corresponds to a particular code – to interpret the content – the coders relied upon the coding framework above. The codes are listed in alphabetical order, with parent and child nodes identified by spacing, and with brief descriptions. Coding was carried out using NVivo.

Name	Description
Anti-Establishment / Elite – Populism	Use of clear populist or anti-elite language
Business / Brand Promotion	Direct promotion of businesses or brands associated with candidate or family
Civic Myths and Symbols	Use of myths and symbols associated with civic tradition (see Table One for elaboration of content)
C-History	Use of myths and symbols associated with the civic tradition of American national identity that frame the nation's past, present and future
C-People	Use of myths and symbols associated with the civic tradition of American national identity that frame the membership of the American nation, the characteristics of true Americans and the boundaries for membership to the nation
African Americans	Reference to African Americans drawing from civic myths and symbols
Migrants	Reference to migrants drawing from civic myths and symbols
People of Color	Reference to people of color drawing from civic myths and symbols (not including African Americans)
C-Place in World	Use of myths and symbols associated with the civic tradition of American national identity that frame America's place in the world and its relationship with other nations
America First - Exceptionalism	Use of myths and symbols that emphasize / reinforce view of America as exceptional, powerful nation on special mission as a force for good in world
C-Religion	Use of myths and symbols associated with the civic tradition of American national identity that frame the nation's relationship to religion, particularly a separation of church and state and an inclusive, acceptance of religious diversity
Islam	Reference to Islam that reinforces America as an inclusive and accommodating nation

Name	Description
C-Territory	Use of myths and symbols associated with the civic tradition of American national identity that frame the nation's territory as a homeland for all people sharing liberal-democratic ideals
Democracy	Reference to American democracy
Election Process	Reference to the electoral process (e.g., electoral college, voter fraud, vote counting, etc.)
Ethnic Myths - Symbols	Use of myths and symbols associated with ethnic tradition (see Table One for elaboration of content)
E-History	Use of myths and symbols associated with the ethnic tradition of American national identity that frame the nation's past, present and future
Great People of History	Reference to Americans from the past that are framed to symbolize the greatness of the nation
MAGA	Reference to "Make America Great Again" (frame for a lost glorious past)
Monuments and Names	Reference to American monuments and place names as symbols of America's past greatness, its heritage and history
E-Territory	Use of myths and symbols associated with the ethnic tradition of American national identity that frame the nation's territory as a homeland for native-born, white Christian people
Cities	Reference to cities that frame them as corrupt, immoral, and/or dangerous places, owing to their diverse and heterogenous populations (in contrast with the rural, small towns of the "real" America)
Suburbs	Reference to suburbs as bastions of (a fading) white America – and as places that are in threat and being infiltrated by diverse populations
Border Wall	Reference to the border wall as a symbol protecting (white) America from invading, illegal migrants
E-People	Use of myths and symbols associated with the ethnic tradition of American national identity that frame the membership of the American nation, the characteristics of true Americans and the boundaries for membership to the nation
African Americans	Reference to African Americans drawing from ethnic myths and symbols
Asians	Reference to Asians drawing from ethnic myths and symbols

Name	Description
Hispanics	Reference to Hispanics drawing from ethnic myths and symbols
Migrants	Reference to migrants drawing from ethnic myths and symbols
Majority Group (Silent Majority - Movement)	Reference to members of the white majority as the real core of the American nation using coded language such as "silent majority," "forgotten men and women" or "movement"
Middle Class - Workers - Blue Collar	Reference to members of the middle and working class as the real core of the American nation
Muslims	Reference to people of the Islamic faith (framed as outsiders and un-American)
People of Color	Reference to people of color (framed as outsiders and un-American)
Veterans	Reference to veterans as exemplars of the true American nation (particularly when contrasted to other groups of people framed as un-American, e.g., "illegal immigrants")
E-Place in World	Use of myths and symbols associated with the ethnic tradition of American national identity that frame America's place in the world and its relationship with other nations (e.g., as a consequence of the ethnic or religious characteristics of its people)
America First - Exceptionalism	Use of ethnic myths and symbols that emphasize / reinforce view of America as a uniquely exceptional, powerful nation at the apex of the world order
E-Religion	Use of myths and symbols associated with the ethnic tradition of American national identity that frame the nation's relationship to religion, particularly emphasizing its Christian foundations
Christianity	Reference to Christianity as a central element of American national identity (e.g., America as a Christian nation)
Islam	Reference to Islam using exclusive frames and as an un-American ideology (e.g., references to Jihad or extremism)
Judaism	Reference to Judaism as a central element of American national identity
Judeo-Christian	Reference to Judeo-Christian faith as a central element of American national identity
Links to Other Twitter Accounts	Reference to other Twitter user or account directly

Name	Description
Media	Raising or discussing the media as a subject
Media Attack	Attack or direct criticism of media coverage or outlet (e.g., use of "Fake News")
Media Praise	Praise or direct agreement/promotion of media coverage or outlet
Social Media	Reference and discussion about social media platforms themselves (e.g., Twitter, Face Book, etc.).
Negative Framing	Use of negative sentiment and language to frame message
Political Opponent	Reference to political actors/opponents/organizations
Anti-Quarantine Protesters	Reference to people/groups protesting lockdown and vaccination mandates
BLM	Reference to Black Lives Matter (and BLM and racial justice protestors)
Democrats	Reference to Democrats and the Democratic party
Joe Biden	Reference to Joe Biden
Fitness for Office	Reference to Joe Biden's fitness for office and mental/physical capacities (e.g., age)
Hunter Biden	Reference to Hunter Biden
Leadership	Reference to the leadership of political parties and organizations
QAnon - Alt-right	Reference to the membership and actors/organizations/movements of far-right (e.g., using terms like QAnon, alt-right, conspiracy theorists)
Radical Left - Socialist - Antifa	Reference to the membership and actors/organizations/movements of the far-left (e.g., using terms like radical left, radical socialist, antifa)
Republicans	Reference to the Republicans and the Republican party
Donald Trump	Reference to Donald Trump
Positive Framing	Use of positive sentiment and language to frame message
Public Policy	Reference to specific public policy issues or topics
Civil Rights	Reference to civil or human rights (e.g., racial justice)

Name	Description
Courts	Reference to courts of law, particularly the US Supreme Court (both composition and decisions)
COVID	Reference to COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., its impact, its origins, its management, the vaccine)
Economy and Trade	Reference to economic policy and performance, and particularly trade
Education	Reference to education policy and outcomes (e.g., school choice)
Environment	Reference to the environment and climate change (e.g., policy proposals, impact of climate change)
Foreign Policy and Military	Reference to foreign policy and international relations, including military policy and actions
China	Reference to China and foreign / trade relations
Israel	Reference to Israel and foreign / trade relations
Mexico	Reference to Mexico and foreign / trade relations
Russia	Reference to Russia and foreign / trade relations
Healthcare	Reference to healthcare, policies and programs (e.g., "Obamacare," Medicare, Medicaid)
Infrastructure	Reference to infrastructure programs, spending, and policy
Law and Order	Reference to policies, programs and actions related to law enforcement and criminal justice policy/reform
2nd Amendment - Guns	Reference to the 2nd amendment and firearms / firearms policy (gun-control)
Seniors	Reference to seniors and elderly issues and care
Taxes	Reference to tax policy
Terrorism	Reference to terrorism
Welfare and Social Safety Net	Reference to policies and reforms to the social safety net and welfare programs
Standard Campaigning	Communication and messaging related to the campaign itself

Name	Description
Endorsements	Specific endorsements of (or from) political actors or organizations
Event Info	Making announcements and notices related to campaign events (including commenting on past events, such as crowd size)
Polls	Referencing polls and polling numbers
Women and Gender	Raising or discussing issues or topics through a gendered frame (including specifically talking about gender or women)