

**Trickle Down Culture Wars: How the European Right-wing and
Conservative Media Echo Rhetoric from their North American
Counterparts**

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Abstract

This study investigates the transversality of Culture Wars across American and European right-wing media, with a focus on the Daily Wire organization and their impact. Through an analysis of both content, audience engagement, and narrative dissemination mechanisms, the dissertation explores the extent of this phenomenon's presence. It delves as well into the process of crafting a Culture War and the sociopolitical implications that can result across different regional contexts, aiming to shed light on current transnational media dynamics and their effects on European right-wing discourse.

The dissertation aims to showcase how Culture Wars serve the role of being the universal translator of right-wing movements allowing the easy export of hot-button market tested issues. The proliferation of social media has facilitated this form of political organization where local issues can cross borders and take on a new dimension in the process. As examined in the case studies– the transgender sports debate and race discourse/immigration narratives– these issues are selectively framed to maximize outrage, polarize electorates, and justify restrictive policies.

Key words: conservative media, culture war, Daily Wire, political influence, polarization, dissemination.

Resumo

Este estudo investiga a transversalidade das Guerras Culturais nos meios de comunicação de direita Americanos e Europeus, com foco na organização Daily Wire e o seu impacto. Através de uma análise tanto do conteúdo, do envolvimento do público e dos mecanismos de disseminação narrativa, a dissertação explora a extensão da presença deste fenómeno. Investiga também o processo de elaboração de uma Guerra Cultural e as implicações sociopolíticas que podem resultar em diferentes contextos regionais, com o objetivo de lançar luz sobre as atuais dinâmicas transnacionais da mídia e seus efeitos no discurso de direita europeu.

A dissertação pretende demonstrar como as Guerras Culturais cumprem o papel de tradutor universal dos movimentos de direita, permitindo a exportação de temas testados no meio Americano. A proliferação das redes sociais facilitou esta forma de organização política, onde as questões locais podem atravessar fronteiras e assumir uma nova dimensão no processo. Conforme examinado nos estudos de caso– o debate à volta dos atletas transgénero e a educação sobre a raça/ narrativas à volta da imigração– essas questões são seletivamente enquadradas para maximizar a indignação, polarizar o eleitorado e justificar políticas restritivas.

Palavras-chave: media conservadores, guerra cultural, Daily Wire, polarização, disseminação.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1. The Research Problem

What patterns of continuity emerge between the Daily Wire's Culture War commentary and the framing of similar issues in European political discourse between 2020 and 2024?

This study aims to examine the Culture War¹ topics and moral panics promulgated by independent right-wing media, particularly the Daily Wire organization as well as their impact on the political discourse that is being activated in Europe. This phenomenon is to be analyzed by looking into the perpetuation of American cultural hegemony in the medium of political commentary and how it affects the social topics of debate present in traditional media as well as social media. The following countries will be featured in case studies: Portugal, United Kingdom and France. These countries were selected due to their varied political and media ecosystems and varying degrees of receptiveness to American narratives on culture. In this case the UK is a direct point of diffusion due to the common language as opposed to France with a long history of high profile right-wing figures and Portugal which experienced a recent rightward shift since 2019 with the rise of the Chega party. The time period contemplated is between 2020 and 2024, with occasional contextual nods to previous years. The chosen timeline corresponds with the Biden administration and the oppositional strategizing by the American right-wing that occurred during that time period, providing an up-to-date analysis of the phenomenon.

Objectives

The main objectives of this dissertation are to assess the reach and penetration of American Culture War topics in European right-wing media. The study undertakes to reach these objectives by analyzing content dynamics and thematic similarities, understanding the mechanisms of dissemination and amplification, examining audience reception and engagement, and identifying socio-political consequences of the Culture War epidemic. In these ways, the study aims to examine shifts in public opinion, in policy debates, and political strategies and how they relate to The Daily Wire's content dissemination. It seeks to

¹ This concept will be capitalized throughout the dissertation on account of being fundamental to its thesis.

understand whether European right-wing media and commentators are shaping their narratives and positions in united fashion with their American counterparts, potentially influencing broader political and social dynamics in Europe.

Outline of Chapters

The ways in which the media ecosystem has evolved in the digital age had an undeniably profound impact on political discourse. Social media revolutionized the way political discourse is disseminated. “While social media provides advantages like greater political engagement and direct communication, it also raises concerns about the dissemination of misinformation, hate speech, and propaganda.” (Saaida, 2023, p.1)

Conservative pundits, foundations, and politicians have become proficient in constructing and disseminating ideological narratives that expand beyond American borders. The main intention of the study is to analyze the historical, discursive, and transnational outreach of this phenomenon. In his work, “Identitários” José Pedro Zúquete speaks of an identitarian generation “Made in USA” when describing the transatlantic continuity of alt-right narratives around the topic of race. “We can be separated by an ocean, by two centuries of hostility, by rivalry, but we agree on a fundamental reality.” (Translated from *Identitários*, Fabrice Robert quoted by Zúquete, p.304) This dissertation analyzes how this continuity can occur for Culture War topics in general.

The establishment of independent right-wing media platforms has been an important feature of this era of global politics. In this dissertation, the focus is on the Daily Wire, a key player in this process, for its particularly large outreach and reverberation in public discourse with over a million paying subscribers as reported by co-founder Jeremy Boering (Fischer, S., 2022) and billions of views and impressions across platforms. ²

Chapter two describes the historical background and foundation of right-wing media narratives. It primarily aims to establish that the narrowing of the media landscape in favor of the political right is an American phenomenon that can trace its roots to the Cold War and anticommunist propaganda that has left a permanent mark on how Americans interpret any real or perceived leftist ideology in the United States. Herman and Chomsky’s propaganda

² The Ben Shapiro Show youtube channel alone has amassed a total of 4.3 billion views across time. (Social Blade, 2025)

model is used to explain the relevant role of legacy media in reinforcing the interests of the political class. This background then provides a helpful template for understanding the contemporary machinations of right-wing political media figures and their discourse.

Chapter three focuses on The Daily Wire: who they are, the hosts that participate in their daily production, and the business model that they follow. The interest of this Chapter is primarily contextual for the rest of the dissertation; however, it also provides an insight into the *modus operandi* of a big conservative media enterprise and their ambitions for a future orientation toward cultural production.

Chapter four utilizes discourse analysis in order to examine some of the core values of the Daily Wire, which will be used in Chapter 5 for comparative analysis. The pillars of thought transversal to the Daily Wire are distilled, steel-manned, reconstructed and then deconstructed when their basis is fallacious. A representative small video or combination of tweets accompanies each pillar.

The final Chapter examines the transatlantic dissemination of some of these fundamental narratives through two case studies that reflect both how a Culture War is crafted and how it is absorbed and adapted in different local contexts. It includes the examination of the feedback loop between American and European right-wing media and how narratives are created, launched, and repurposed.

In mapping the ideological nature of one of its main contributors, this dissertation provides a thorough analysis of independent right-wing media as a defining feature of culture and politics in the digital age. The findings contribute both to media studies and global politics studies.

1.2. Literature Review

The hegemonic perpetuation of cultural and media productions from the United States, primarily since the post-Cold War unipolar moment can be seen as reflection of cultural imperialism. The concept of cultural imperialism - understood as the domination of a culture over others through media, language, values and mores (Tomlinson, 2001) allows for the analysis of some the military actions undertaken by the United States during the bipolar moment as an effort to benefit and perpetuate its economic and material interests, but also,

according to Chomsky, another type of domination - that of representations (Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

The historical framework that I intend to use corresponds to an articulation between the Cold War and the present, the rivalry that developed after World War II between the United States, and their respective allies, and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. The Cold War was fought on political, economic, and propaganda fronts, with no armed conflict occurring between the major powers, but rather in the form of proxy wars, the vast majority of which in the Global South. Taking this historical context into account, this dissertation intends to explore the contemporary context of the mediatization of politics and its role in how the existing power structures perpetuate narratives and transform the political discourse. "It is our view that, among their other functions, the media serve, and propagandize on behalf of, the powerful societal interests that control and finance them." (Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. xi).

Herman and Chomsky explain, using discourse analysis, how the media perpetuate comfortable narratives and select convenient facts in the structuring of the stories that are told and how they are influenced by the conscious and unconscious legacy of American imperialism. The narratives of power (perpetuated by the media and other cultural vehicles) are confirmed by the context in which they are embedded. The exaltation of nationalist spirit in order to create a united front against the Soviet threat shaped public discourse. The patriotic fervor and staunch defense of the capitalist status quo are part of the historical legacy of the Cold War. Analysis that encompasses the narratives of power is relevant in order to understand the reception and media bias surrounding what is perceived as markedly "socialist" ideas and political campaigns in the current American political context. The effects of the Cold War on media and politics will be discussed so as to make clear how the indelible touch of the Red Scare³ still haunts the spectrum of acceptable politics in the American media today and allows for the success of organizations such as the Daily Wire.

The conservatives at the Daily Wire are not homogenous ideologically; for example, there is a large disparity between Michael Knowles, a Burkean, whose ideas align most with

³ Red Scare refers to a moral panic about leftist ideology. In this dissertation when the Red Scare related to the early Cold War is discussed it is in reference to the second Red Scare "The second Red Scare refers to the fear of communism that permeated American politics, culture, and society from the late 1940s through the 1950s, during the opening phases of the Cold War with the Soviet Union" (Storrs, 2015, p.1)

paternalistic conservatism and neoconservatism, and Ben Shapiro, whose ideas align mostly with neoliberal conservatism. An analysis of the nuanced core beliefs of the hosts is relevant to better understand both how it informs the ways they communicate to their audiences and how they come together to create effective propaganda for their cause. The concept of propaganda that will guide this analysis corresponds to the following quotation: "Political propaganda provides further cases of speech-like behavior that aims to manipulate its audience by circumventing rational engagement."(Khoo & Sterken, 2021, p.5). I plan to observe instances of propaganda as a form of manipulation that aims to influence people's beliefs and attitudes, often by exploiting linguistic and cognitive biases, as well as specifically discuss the role of the Daily Wire in producing and disseminating propaganda and finally contend with the legislative effects of their propagandistic endeavors.

Some scholars have delved into examinations that share the concerns of this dissertation, particularly Zhang (2023). The author partially examines how digital far-right movements contribute to transnational creations of "Culture War" narratives.

Interdisciplinary research done by ICNOVA has also been successful in showcasing how political actors strategically utilize mainstream and digital platforms in order to create insulated information ecosystems that capture audience attention through targeted communication strategies. (Ferin Cunha et al., 2023). A mechanism that also largely applies to the Culture War phenomenon.

There's also expansive literature in regards to the matter of how the right-wing has harnessed the digital space in order to expand its reach and influence, particularly through the use of algorithms (Daniels, 2018), and the usage of social media platforms for agenda setting and mobilization (Caiani & Parenti, 2016).

1.2.1 Culture War - Concept exploration

A Culture War refers to social conflict where different groups and their divergent cultural values and beliefs combat for mainstream acceptability. Culture Wars focus on identity and morality, and can be understood as the result of disparate understandings of social norms.

This concept is fundamental to the dissertation, particularly chapter five where I intend to showcase how Culture War issues that originate in America show parallel patterns and continuity across the Atlantic.

The spawning of Culture War topics is often a “backlash” prominent in societies experiencing rapid social changes, resulting in a clash between a more traditional value-based vision of social mores and emerging progressive ideas.

The author James Davidson Hunter is one of the first to introduce this concept of Culture War to American political life: "As with military campaigns, cultural warfare is always decided over the pragmatic problems of strategy, organization, and resources (. . .) The factions with the best strategies, most efficient organization, and access to resources will plainly have the advantage and, very possibly, the ultimate victory." (Hunter, 1992, p. 64). Hunter argued that American society was slowly becoming increasingly divided along cultural lines, creating two separate interest coalitions – progressive secularists and religious conservatives – fighting for influence over the moral path of the nation.

Historically, these disagreements have arisen during periods of great societal change. From the debates over Suffrage to Jim Crow to the Gay Rights Movement, all sparked resistance over challenged traditional values like gendered or sexual norms. Thinking about cultural conflict as a driving force in global politics is a well established idea (Huntington, 1996).

Ronald Inglehart and Pippa Norris argue that cultural issues have increasingly replaced economic concerns as the primary axis of political division and describe the process in the following way: “(...) the formerly predominant majority becomes a steadily shrinking share of the population, a tipping point triggers an authoritarian reflex, mobilizing socially conservative groups who feel that their core values are no longer widely respected. They react against condescending cosmopolitan elites dominating the popular media, the professional political classes, and the literary, legal, academic, and scientific establishment.” (Inglehart & Norris, 2019, p. 450)

Culture wars can be comprehended through the lens of cultural hegemony, a concept disseminated by Antonio Gramsci. “(...)hegemony comes to mean 'cultural, moral and ideological' leadership over allied and subordinate groups.” (Forgacs, 2000, p. 423). Gramsci argued that dominant social groups consolidate power by way of establishing their values as

mainstream and normative. A Culture War happens when other groups rise to prominence to challenge these values whilst the other side fights to uphold them. For example, debates over affirmative action and systemic racism in the United States reflect a challenge to the long-standing cultural narratives that have undermined the role of race and racial relations in American history and institutions.

A fundamental characteristic of a Culture War is the framing of the issue as a symbolic struggle for the soul of a nation. The existential, dire, and emotional tone of media figureheads and politicians on both sides is a staple of a Culture War issue. Furthermore, a Culture War debate can be characterized by the following features distilled from an analysis of the aforementioned literature:

1. Moral absolutism. The perception that one's position is morally superior and the resultant intransigence that marks the conversation.
2. Media megaphone. The kindling of a Culture War debate involves the media and, particularly, digital platforms. "We find that algorithms are extremely influential in people's on-platform experiences, and there is significant ideological segregation in political news exposure," said Talia Jomini Stroud, director of the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas at Austin and one of the leaders of the studies. (Klepper, 2023)
3. Political influence: The exploitation of the Culture War topic by politicians and parties to mobilize support from their base with the usage of polarizing rhetoric.
4. Frequent financial interest. Although value-related, the conflicts in Culture Wars are often accompanied by economic interests. Corporations and lobby groups often align themselves with certain cultural agenda topics in an effort to push public opinion to meet their business objectives, as seen in the aforementioned support of the fossil fuel industry for climate change denialism in the form of PAC⁴ donations and funding of conservative media enterprises.

In conclusion, a Culture War is a dispute over symbols, values, and norms deemed important to the nation's cultural identity. Despite being divisive features of modern

⁴ PAC (Political Action Committee)

discourse often utilized in disingenuous ways, Culture Wars also showcase the dynamic and ever-evolving nature of cultural identity.

1.3. Methodology

Discourse analysis is a methodological approach to studying language that is interested in actual language use beyond isolated words and sentences. Instead, it analyses the larger context they are used in as well as the social structures and power dynamics they reinforce. This method is particularly interested in the sociocultural and historical factors affecting language usage and, ultimately, how these factors affect communication. Linguist Norman Fairclough asserts, "Language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena are social phenomena of a special sort" (Fairclough, 1989, p.23). The idea that language is used to ensure the maintenance of or to challenge existing power structures comes from Michel Foucault as well: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it (...)" (Foucault, 1978, p.101).

Another aspect of discourse analysis is that it examines the ways in which language contributes to the social construction of reality and how it possesses the power to alter perceptions and beliefs. In "The Social Construction of Reality," authors Berger and Luckman explain, "Reality is socially constructed, and the sociology of knowledge must analyze the process in which this occurs" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p.13), underscoring the role language plays in creating our collective understandings. Discourse analysis also makes room for how different groups interpret language differently based on their unique experiences and how they position themselves in society. "Contexts control discourse production and comprehension. Most crucial of all is the assumption that contexts, defined as mental models, control the processes of discourse production and comprehension, and hence their resulting discourse structures and discourse interpretations." (van Dijk, 2008, p. 17).

This approach is appropriate for this dissertation because it allows for the full contextual analysis of political speeches and media segments to understand exactly how language creates and reinforces ideological beliefs.

Inside the scope of discourse analysis, narrative analysis is also a relevant framework of operations for this study. The study of narratives as interpretative devices aims to

understand how individuals create stories to decode their experiences. This method focuses on examining a narrative in order to understand how meaning is created. “Identities are narratives, stories people tell themselves and others about who are (and who they are not).” (Yuval-Davis, as cited in Riessman, 2008, p.8).

Narrative analysis also explores how narratives contribute to the construction of both individual beliefs and collective identities. “Even our own homely accounts of happenings in our own lives are eventually converted into more or less coherent autobiographies centered around a Self-acting more or less purposefully in a social world” (Bruner, 1991, p. 18). In simple terms, one becomes the narrative they construct to explain their own lives. The narratives that conjure our beliefs and identities become autobiographical, and through the examination of these narratives, we can see how identities are shaped over time. This form of analysis also considers the broader cultural narratives and their influence, and such is the way it's applied in this dissertation. “The reflexive project of the self, which consists in the sustaining of coherent yet continuously revised biographical narratives, takes place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems.” (Giddens, 2008, p. 5). Narratives do not originate in a vacuum.

Narrative analysis is also a temporal framework that commiserates over the chronological dimension of narratives and the sequencing of events: “(...) time becomes human time to the extent that it is organized after the manner of a narrative;” (Ricoeur, 1990, p. 3). The crucial aspect of time becomes relevant when understanding how individuals and their groups as well as society at large interpret their past, present and their future. This offers deep insight into the connection between individual experiences and the historical contexts they exist in.

Discourse analysis methods are employed in chapter four in order to understand how the arguments promulgated by the Daily Wire function within discourse. The aim is to clarify how the arguments unfold and expose both their fallacies and rhetorical strategies. By exposing the fallacies of an argument and reconstructing its formulation one can understand how the Daily Wire formulates their version of truth and validity.

Specifically, Van Dijk’s “Discourse and Manipulation” describes how the identification of a manipulative argument can be done: “we analysed the various discursive dimensions of manipulation by focusing on the usual polarized structures of positive

self-presentation and negative other-presentation expressing ideological conflict. In addition, we found that manipulation involves: enhancing the power, moral superiority and credibility of the speaker(s), and discrediting dissidents, while vilifying the Others, the enemy; the use of emotional appeals; and adducing seemingly irrefutable proofs of one's beliefs and reasons" (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 380). By using these tools of critical discourse analysis in identifying the Daily Wire's premises, presuppositions and fallacies, this dissertation intends to expose some of the organization's main arguments as manipulative.

In chapter five, a multiple case study approach (Yin, 2018) is employed to analyze thematic parallels and continuity between the Culture Wars in Europe and the narratives propagated by right-wing independent media in the United States, with a particular focus on one of the most prominent organizations, "The Daily Wire." This approach allows for an exploratory analysis in order to understand the same phenomenon in different contexts without direct comparison.

The primary purpose is to identify recurring trends and patterns rather than establish causation in order to achieve a neutral analysis. Although in small instances this causation may be directly apparent, this should not extrapolate to all situations/examples presented.

The relevance of the case studies (5.1 and 5.2) justifies their selection. On the one hand, it aims at prominent Culture War topics that have had a role in shaping political debate from 2020 to 2024. On the other hand, it aims at selecting Culture War phenomena that fit with the pillars of thought at the Daily Wire, as presented in chapter four. This dissertation utilizes cases that sit at the intersection of these two aspects.

The case studies presented illustrate the continuity of the Culture War phenomenon between the United States and Europe, but they are not the only possible examples. The dissertation does not attempt to make the claim that the phenomenon is universal; it merely showcases its occurrence and explores its potential consequences.

Chapter five draws on a range of qualitative data, including 1. media content (videos, articles, and social media posts) from selected relevant sources; 2. political statements and speeches by key figures; and 3. academic literature to provide contextual framing.

A source's relevancy is based on prominence. Prominence may be established through one or more of the following criteria: (1) direct association with The Daily Wire (e.g., official

statements, platform data), (2) measurable media visibility (e.g., media hits, social media impressions), and (3) demonstrable influence on broader public or political discourse (e.g., citations, political responses, or coverage by major media outlets).

Discourse analysis is utilized to identify patterns and rhetorical strategies. The analysis will focus on the framing of the issues as well as cross-context similarities in narrative and thematic structure.

The analysis is inductive in nature since a pattern of Culture War continuity has been identified before forming the hypothesis. The tools utilized are Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Fairclough's three-dimensional approach, which analyzes discourse through three interconnected dimensions: description (text analysis), interpretation (discursive practice), and explanation (social practice) (Statham, 2022). CDA is political and ideological in nature, it aims to assess how language is used to maintain and reproduce power in society by examining both the textual features and the social context of the discourse.

CHAPTER TWO

Red Scare Legacy: *How the Cold war shaped the media in the United States*

*When the wind is right, a faint odour of kerosene is exhaled from
Senator McCarthy.- Ray Bradbury (1953)*

The historical legacy of anticommunism as perpetrated by the press and political discourse during the Cold War had a significant impact on the perceptions of leftist ideologies in America and the current rhetoric on “leftism” that can be observed at the Daily Wire and other media outlets. This dissertation intends to examine how the media currently handle the radicalization of political discourse, motivated by decades of alignment with globalizing capitalism. This chapter argues that, to understand the current American media landscape—particularly the dominance of right-wing platforms such as The Daily Wire—one must first grasp the enduring effects of the Red Scare and the long-standing stigmatization of leftist ideology that happened in the United States (to a greater extent than Europe).

However the Red Scare campaign and narratives weren't constrained by American borders. A major USA export during the Cold War, anticommunism, was both reason and ad hoc justification for foreign policy. To better explore this connection, this dissertation uses the premise of imperialist intent, drawing on the framework developed by David Harvey in "The New Imperialism". Harvey (2003) argues that modern imperialism is largely driven by the need to manage capitalism's inherent crises through "accumulation by dispossession," whereby dominant nations expand their influence by seizing resources and economic control, perpetuating its material interests.

This contextualization chapter establishes the thoroughline connecting legacy media's role in propagating anticommunism and neoliberal policy. It explains as well how growing public distrust and decades of mobilizing against leftism helped pave the way for the growth of the right-wing in the social media space. In the aftermath of this journey of decline of traditional media there is interest in describing the spaces the independent media organizations have created in order to establish themselves as true competitors in the media space.

2.1 The Overton Window

When discussing the impact that the Cold War had on political discourse in America, it is imperative to talk about the narrowing of the Overton Window. The Overton Window is recognized as the range of political ideas and discourse that is deemed acceptable by the general population at a given time. It is a measure of the viability of a political idea developed by Joseph P. Overton, a policy analyst who worked as senior manager of the think tank Mackinac Center for Public Policy. "The core concept is that politicians are limited in what policy ideas they can support — they generally only pursue policies that are widely accepted throughout society as legitimate policy options." (Mackinac Center for Public Policy, n.d)

The narrowing of the Overton Window can be traced back to the mid-20th century. McCarthyism was the period between the late 40s and late 50s in which Senator McCarthy launched an anti-communist crusade that accused and blacklisted thousands of academics, entertainment industry professionals, and politicians who were accused of being communist co-conspirators and effectively ousted them from public life and, therefore, public discourse.

The House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), which was active during this period, played a significant role in enforcing this blacklisting.

When the Cold War slowly arose, the stigmatization of socialist ideas, marxism, and even some moderate social democratic ideas was already present. However, the dichotomous worldview of capitalist free America vs Soviet communism narrowed the Overton Window even more. This phenomenon also occurred in Western Europe, however to a lesser extent (due to an amalgamation of factors, such as the deeper roots of leftist thought in Europe). This disparity was driven by a combination of the press and its influence, policy agendas, and, most of all, cultural trepidations, which led ideas to be deemed unspeakable, radical, subversive, and dangerous.

For a practical example of the lasting effects of this disparity in the current time, take Bernie Sanders's healthcare proposition of "Medicare for all"⁵, which is widely considered far-left in America while it would be centrist in most European countries. The same is reflected in the continued vilification of proposals such as single-payer healthcare, the decriminalization of drugs, or even the Green New Deal. Polling data often shows that while a majority of Americans support policies like Medicare for All or a carbon tax, the political mainstream still treats these ideas as fringe or unrealistic. "As much as 67% of Americans might support a carbon tax, according to a new poll from the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago (EPIC) and the Associated Press–NORC Center for Public Affairs Research." (Greenstone, 2019). The 2020 Democratic presidential primaries (held from January to August 2020) showcased this reality when moderate Democrats and media figureheads criticized Bernie Sanders's policies as radical, despite the fact that similar policies have been successfully implemented in other nations. This is a reflection of how the Cold War-era framing of socialism as an existential threat still impacts American political discourse today, limiting the viability of left-wing ideas and constricting the Overton Window in ways that are not as prevalent in many other Western democracies.

⁵ Sanders has advocated for single-payer healthcare since the 90s, making it a big feature of his 2016 bid for the democratic candidacy. An official bill was first proposed to the Senate in 2017.

2.2. Public Policy

The narrowing of the Overton Window affected domestic and foreign policy. Any bill that promoted wealth distribution, such as expanding social welfare or universal health care, failed to pass the socialist litmus test and was labeled by the opposition as a step toward communism deemed fundamentally incongruent with American capitalism. This exclusionary approach extended to discourse expressing opposition to the proxy wars and government topplings the United States chose to engage in at the time, like the Vietnam War and Latin American regime changes. American imperialism and patriotism became closely associated. "It was an old lesson learned by governments: that war solves problems of control" (Zinn, 1980, p. 395).

As author Naomi Klein iterates, this mindset was pernicious and pervasive in Washington. "(...) this tendency has been especially pronounced in politicians who move directly from the corporate world into public office (and vice-versa, as exemplified in the 'revolving door' phenomenon). For instance, Eisenhower's Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, worked as a high-powered international corporate lawyer for most of his life, representing some of the richest firms in the world in their conflicts with foreign governments. Dulles's various biographers have concluded, like Kinzer, that the secretary of state was simply incapable of distinguishing between the interests of corporations and the interests of his country. "Dulles had two lifelong obsessions: fighting Communism and protecting the rights of multinational corporations," writes Kinzer. "In his mind, they were . . . 'interrelated and mutually reinforcing.' That meant he didn't need to choose between his obsessions (...)" (Klein, 2007, p. 310). The twin obsessions of many in power—opposing communism and protecting the free-range actions of corporate interests—merged without a hitch. In the worldview of Dulles and his peers the best and most effective way to be anti-communist was advancing neoliberal policy prescriptions that privileged private interest and the multinational corporations whose lobbying efforts helped fund the wars. This naturally stifled progressive economic reforms. Anything resembling welfare got suspicion cast upon it and was discredited as lurking socialism, reinforcing the notion that a social safety net represented a threat to the capitalist ethos.

As mentioned, this extended to any and all opposition to foreign affairs, such as the Vietnam War. Protestors were avidly smeared as subversive and unpatriotic. The Cold War's

ideological constraints thus created a feedback loop in which American imperialism and neoliberal capitalism were framed as patriotic imperatives.

This association is fundamentally how economic leftism was deemed un-American and publicly demonized. The following is clear: the Cold War created an environment where neoliberal policies were tested and enforced under the guise of fighting communism.

2.3 The Media

The media during the Cold War were a primary shaper of public opinion. Entirely different from the media ecosystem we have today, media sources were few, centralized, and were more widely trusted. “Americans' trust and confidence hit its highest point in 1976, at 72%, in the wake of widely lauded examples of investigative journalism regarding Vietnam and the Watergate scandal.” (Swift, 2016) However, what stuck from the time period were definitely the government narratives the press provided a microphone for; they all centered around one tenet-framing anticommunism as a moral imperative. The McCarthyist association of leftism with treason and foreign influence was solidified during the Cold War period.

“We don't have a free and independent press in the United States but one that is tied by purchase and persuasion to wealthy elites and their government counterparts.”(Parenti, 1986, p. 6). Through their biased framing that was reflective of the interests of the social and economic elite, the media marginalized leftist ideologies. Parenti elaborates, "Time and again the Red Peril theme propagated by the governmental-industrial-media complex played an effective part in (1) setting back or limiting the struggles and gains of labor; (2) distracting popular attention from the recessions and crises of capitalism by directing grievances toward interior or alien foes; and (3) marshaling public support for huge military budgets, cold war policies and—as we shall see in more detail—Third World interventions to make the world safe for corporate investment and profits.” (Parenti, 1986, p. 126) Anti-communist hysteria in the media reinforced capitalist hegemony and led to the marginalization of leftist ideologies as dangerous.

The media played an important role in justifying U.S. action abroad, as well as marginalized dissent at home. Herman and Chomsky describe how the media often utilized

the narrative of democratic progress to sponsor interventions as well as discredited foreign adversary leaders. They claim that given the earlier similar performance of the mass media in the cases of the U.S.-sponsored elections in the Dominican Republic in 1966 and Vietnam in 1967, allows for the tentative generalization that the U.S. mass media will always find a Third World election sponsored by their own government a “step toward democracy,” and an election held in a country that their government is busily destabilizing a farce and a sham.⁶ This is, of course, what a propaganda model would predict, although the degree of subservience to state interests in the cases they have examined was extraordinary, given the absence of overt coercion. The “filters” yield a propaganda result that a totalitarian state would be hard pressed to surpass. In the propaganda framework, the security forces of client states 'protect elections'; only those of enemy states interfere with the freedom of its citizens (Herman & Chomsky, 2002) The success is paramount in aligning public perception with U.S. interests abroad.

Herman and Chomsky go on to identify a propaganda model to describe how exactly the media aligns itself with elite interests; it certainly applies to how the American legacy media operated during the Cold War. “The essential ingredients of our propaganda model, or set of news “filters,” fall under the following headings: (1) the size, concentrated ownership, owner wealth, and profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms; (2) advertising as the primary income source of the mass media; (3) the reliance of the media on information provided by government, business, and “experts” funded and approved by these primary sources and agents of power; (4) “flak” as a means of disciplining the media; and (5) “anticommunism” as a national religion and control mechanism”(Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 2).

This framework can be useful in describing how the Cold War was not only a product of political rivalry but also served to rationalize and promote a large-scale campaign of media manipulation, with U.S. interests being depicted as synonymous with freedom and democracy. The media campaigns offered justifications for military buildups, aggressive foreign policy and suppression of leftism at home.

⁶During the Cold War the CIA sponsored multiple coups against democratic socialist governments in the Global South in what became known in Washington as the Jakarta Method. “Washington's violent anticommunist crusade destroyed a number of alternative possibilities for world development. The Third World movement fell apart partly because of its own internal failures. But it was also crushed. These countries were trying to do something very, very difficult. It doesn't help when the most powerful government in history is trying to stop you.” (Bevins, 2020, p. 311)

2.4 Contemporary Political Discourse

What are the enduring consequences of the legacy of the Cold War on current political discourse? As previously mentioned, progressive policies like the ones favored by Bernie Sanders and the more left-leaning wing of the Democratic Party have been no less dismissed as socialist by the legacy news media than by openly right-wing media organizations. The opposition to these policies, such as Medicare for all or the Green New Deal, benefit from the lingering stigma surrounding socialism and communism and has made it almost impossible for any left-wing sentiment to gain traction in the public consciousness, even when these ideas enjoy popular support. (see annexes 1 and 2)

As Herman and Chomsky (2002) observed, “Propaganda campaigns in general have been closely attuned to elite interests. The Red Scare of 1919–20 served well to abort the union-organizing drive that followed World War I in the steel and other industries. The Truman-McCarthy Red scare helped inaugurate the Cold War and the permanent war economy, and it also served to weaken the progressive coalition of the New Deal years. Then chronic focus on the plight of Soviet dissidents, on enemy killings in Cambodia, and on the Bulgarian Connection helped weaken the Vietnam syndrome, justify a huge arms buildup and a more aggressive foreign policy, and divert attention from the upward redistribution of income that was the heart of Reagan’s domestic economic program.”(Herman & Chomsky, 2002, p. 32). The Cold War certainly demonstrated the power of propaganda in constructing a narrative of good versus evil, which endures in contemporary political discourse. The systematic undermining of progressive policy as economy declining minefields laid the groundwork for their dismissal.

Despite the declining trust in legacy outlets during the Cold War, the media was largely centralized, with outlets such as CBS and NBC dominating prime time and trusted figures such as Walter Cronkite dominating public confidence. These sources amplified the government narratives, whilst broadcasters like Cronkite were referred to as “the most trusted man in America” (Zimmer interviewed in Garfield, 2009) colloquially after being named in a public opinion poll.

The decline in legacy media trust coincided with the rise of self-mass media, through social media in particular, which is elaborated on in the next section. Despite this shift, the

propaganda model outlined by Herman and Chomsky (2002⁷) remains relevant. These filters persist in legacy media while also having been adapted to new platforms. For example, corporate influence is just as heavily noted, if not more, on social media advertising and right-wing narratives still dominate discourse with the help of algorithms and misinformation campaigns, as this dissertation examines.

Traditional channels of communication have radically transformed. Unlike the centralized structure of broadcast media during the Cold War, the internet has fostered a decentralized, participatory environment where ideological messaging is rapidly spread by an algorithmically-driven apparatus with minimal gatekeeping. This shift has altered the dynamics of propaganda: the means of production and distribution of persuasive content are no longer restricted to governments or legacy media institutions, but are now accessible to independent political actors. “The internet would therefore allow an expansion of not only the ‘users’, but also of the producers of (political) information, increasing the channels of participation.” (Caiani & Parenti, 2016, p. 4).

2.4.1. Radio killed the video star

How the podcast took over the commentary space on the right

"Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education, and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death." (Postman, 2005, p. 1)

When discussing online media, one of the great recent phenomena has been the popularization of the podcast. Its commerciality is so paramount that it has become a feature of online infotainment that has also been foundational to the growth of right-wing independent media. Infotainment can be described as information packaged as entertainment “Infotainment is the umbrella term that covers the fusion of entertainment and journalism

⁷ The original edition of this book dates to 1988

within different media genres. Concretely, infotainment can be understood as two related developments: (a) news becoming more entertaining, and (b) entertainment taking on political topics.” (Boukes, 2019, p.1.)

Rush Limbaugh stands out as an essential figure to discuss, since he can definitely be described as the precursor of right-wing media infotainment in the airwave space. Limbaugh began his career in talk radio between the late 1970s and early 1980s. His entertaining, engaging style garnered hordes of avid listeners of his conservative viewpoints. "The Rush Limbaugh Show" became extremely popular⁸, and after national syndication⁹ in 1988, its popularity grew immensely, garnering millions of listeners across America. This was only possible after the Federal Communications Commission repealed the Fairness Doctrine in 1987, by which those with a broadcast license had to present controversial issues in a "balanced" manner.

Some of the main features of conservative online discourse were etched in stone right then. His controversial hyper-bombastic style and humor were despised by critics and loved by his loyal fanbase. Limbaugh had an undeniable impact in shaping conservative discourse during the height of his popularity in the nineties and early two-thousands. His show provided a platform for conservative ideas, often challenging mainstream narratives and advocating for Republican policies. "His [Rush Limbaugh] influence is evident in the conservative podcast industry where right-wing podcasters like Ben Shapiro and Dan Bongino have adopted Limbaugh's political positions, media strategies, and even vocal inflections." (Dowling, Johnson, & Ekdale, 2022, p. 18).

It's possible to discuss the appearance of the podcast during the two-thousands, but it was not until the mid-2010s that the increasingly prominent rise of right-wing political podcasts, with personalities like Ben Shapiro, Joe Rogan, and others started slowly gaining prominence.

Ultimately, the proliferation of digital platforms like iTunes and Spotify made it a lot simpler for podcasters to reach wide audiences.

⁸ At peak performance during the 1990s, Limbaugh drew about 20 million listeners a week. (Michaelson, 1998)

⁹ Syndicated content is created by an independent producer/company and then licensed or sold to various national platforms.

The provided accessibility and growing popularity allowed right-wing commentators to bypass legacy media gatekeeping structures and connect with their followers in a meaningful way. The listeners who felt alienated by dominant narratives gravitated toward the alternative perspectives on political issues that these hosts offered.

The lead-up to the 2016 presidential election was a time of increased polarization and ideological divisiveness: “For the first time in surveys dating to 1992, majorities in both parties express not just unfavorable but very unfavorable views of the other party. And today, sizable shares of both Democrats and Republicans say the other party stirs feelings of not just frustration, but fear and anger.” (Pew Research Center, 2016). Right-wing podcasts were smart to capitalize on this climate and grow their audiences. They effectively created a space for conservatives to express their views and gain support for their agenda whilst always differentiating themselves from mainstream narratives. It was during this period that many of the hosts and personalities prominent today solidified their role as key players in the conversation, mobilizing audiences and challenging legacy media on various issues like immigration, identity politics, and free speech.

At the same time, many right-wing podcasts adopted successful financial strategies to monetize their content, such as subscription services, merchandise sales, and sponsored content. Having editorial and creative control while generating revenue provided independence over the content produced. The Daily Wire was one of them, having built an alternative media ecosystem through their subscription model, relying on revenue from merchandise and sponsors as well.

It's relevant to mention that the same phenomenon happened on the left with perhaps less pernicious consequences for public discourse. Popular podcasts such as Pod Save America and Chapo Trap House surged at this time as well.

2.4.2. The transformative potential of the independent media space

The evolution of political discourse has an accurate and verifiable historical impact. A speaker needs to adapt their discourse to the audience to maintain support. The politician ensures they are heard and plans how they will be understood. The peak of political discourse effectiveness is achieved when it can shape the public.

This dissertation aims to illustrate how the predominant independent political discourse today is permissive of the far right and achieves successful instrumentalization of the public through the weaponization of the Culture War phenomena.

In this dissertation, I use the word "discourse" in its common usage—as speech—and also, when indicated, as the set of spectacularized politically charged performances aimed at gaining media attention both from politicians and otherwise politically active figures of relevance.

One of the current issues in public discourse is that the way the establishment or legacy media is experienced by the public is fundamentally characterized by distrust. (Gallup poll, Annex 3). Byung-Chul Han states in his work that we are no longer mere passive recipients and consumers of information. We are both consumers and producers at the same time. "(...) No univocal hierarchy separates the sender from the receiver. Everyone is sender and receiver—consumer and producer—in one. However, such symmetry exists to the detriment of power." (Han, 2017, p.3) The mediation and security that traditional communication media once guaranteed has evaporated and has been replaced by the described situation—self-mass media—which is characterized by this dual status of the individuals as both consumers and producers of information and the cacophony of all communication and informative means. The relationship between the citizen and the media has drastically changed.

This scenario brings about a multitude of issues. Reliability is a significant one. Parsing through information and determining which sources are trustworthy in the sea of blogs and social media posts is difficult even for young educated internet savvy people and amounts to an herculean feat for info-excluded elderly individuals.

Despite all the problems this new scenario brings, effective counter-discourse strategies to confront the problems that political figures who spread misinformation create are emerging. Some have utilized the advantages of new media.

The evolution of journalism, from its opinionated origins to the later objective formulation that allowed it to expand and commercialize itself (in a Market-oriented fashion that Jurgen Habermas describes in "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere"), reveals that the massive appeal that journalism creates for itself in order to fit into the capitalist logic ends up, inadvertently, distorting its discourse. A crisis of identity absence is

created. The legacy media¹⁰ has come to suffer from depersonalization, which contributes to the climate of distrust that currently characterizes it. “The partisan polarization of trust in news media, and the gulf between audiences of “mainstream” news and highly partisan outlets, is one clear sign that trust in news media is increasingly grounded in a vision of relational trust(...)” (Moran, 2021)

The far right skillfully takes advantage of this circumstance, inserting itself in the discourse with a disruptive message that promises change and deconstruction of the system. Historically, this sort of promise has been characteristic of leftist policies. Both sides promise change, but Boris Johnson, Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, and so many other figures of the same ilk favor through their actions the corporate interests that the status quo already benefited. Nothing changes structurally; what is altered is the exacerbation of emotions for discriminatory causes. The far-right is effective in showing how their discourse resonates with the electorate, exposed in the clear and verifiable form of electoral results that grow to their benefit.

The type of online radicalization that the new media landscape favors tends to operate through short messages, whether via tweets or videos, effectiveness increases with the potential for sharing, that is, with broader exposure. Platforms like the Daily Wire have harnessed the potential of the new paradigm as we will examine in further chapters.

Traditionally, a quintessential part of the danger of how the far-right operates is its violent rhetoric against the media, it shows that it rejects scrutiny and benefits from not having its authority questioned. This is still true however; the creation of media spaces to openly rival traditional media and create a relational trust with its viewer is an underexplored factor of the rise in popularity of right-wing policies.

2.4.3. Counter-narrative

The few political media figures on the left who reject establishment narratives and create their own fanbases in the market of authenticity have proven successful.

¹⁰ Legacy media is an expression that refers to established media institutions that existed before the digital age that benefit from historical institutional power.

One of the most prominent is Twitch streamer Hasan Piker. Twitch is a streaming platform primarily aimed at video games and a variety of content, but some have captured large followings with political content.

Piker has crafted a specific brand of casual commentary that has been mimicked in the Twitch space and outside. Even more surprising is his large majority male fanbase which is rare on the left (HasanAbi, 2024). Piker embraces an engaging and somewhat abrasive style where he constantly spars with his audience. The unfiltered lens of his commentary has resonated deeply with his primarily young male audience on both Twitch and Youtube.

Platforms like YouTube and Twitch have been instrumental in creating a space for independent creators from both sides to bypass traditional media. The prominence of a figure like Hasan Piker, who is consistently one of the top-watched content creators on the Twitch platform¹¹, showcases a true rarity in media consumption patterns amongst young males. It presents a remarkable challenge to the idea that progressives and socialists cannot thrive in the demographics dominated by conservative punditry.

CHAPTER THREE

The Daily Wire

3.1. Mission, Ideology and Media personalities

The Daily Wire is an independent news organization with an openly conservative slant co-founded by director and screenwriter Jeremy Boering¹² and editor emeritus host Ben Shapiro as well as CO-founding CEO Caleb Robinson.

The company is unapologetic about their conservative ideological slant, stating in their about page “The Daily Wire does not claim to be without bias. We’re opinionated, we’re noisy, and we’re having a good time.”¹³

¹¹ HasanAbi is one of the top-streamers on Twitch, earning over 2.6 million followers on his channel for his political commentary live-streams. (Streams Charts)

¹² [As of March 2025 Boering has an advisory role at the company instead of the administrative one he previously occupied.](#)

¹³ <https://www.dailywire.com/about>

Their business model is a subscription based digital media website yet select clips of their content are also featured daily on Youtube in the individual youtube channels of each host. As of 2024, the hosts of Daily news and/or social commentary were Ben Shapiro, Candace Owens, Michael Knowles, Andrew Klavan, Brett Cooper and Matt Walsh, featuring as well a multiple long form series by author and psychologist Jordan Peterson.

In a corporate meeting in June 2022 (DailyWire+, 2022) the company announced their incursion into children's content first announced as DailyWire+, but later in October 2023 renamed as Bentkey in an open effort to separate the politically minded daily news content with the attempt to create an ideologically neutral platform for children's content. However, the alleged neutrality can't be taken at face value since the creation of the kids content platform comes as a response and alternative to the current mainstream kids content made by companies such as Disney, whom the hosts and founders recurrently describe as 'woke' and improper for children for its alleged propagandizing effects into the so called 'liberal agenda'. In fact, the whole creation of this new offshoot of the Daily Wire is in direct response to a leaked Disney company call where they describe an array of goals for the next five years of the Disney brand and content that includes among their goals the inclusion of more diverse characters as well as LGBT representation.

One of the movies Bentkey proposed to release in 2025 is their take on the Brother's Grimm tale 'Snow White' starring one of their hosts Brett Cooper, who has previous experience in the acting world. This comes as opposition to Disney and the stills that had been leaked of the new live action version of Snow White where Snow White would be portrayed by Rachel Zegler (a Latina woman) and the dwarves who would seemingly be portrayed by a racially diverse group of men and women and only one little person (Peter Dinklage).

The Daily Wire has already been functioning as a production company since 2021 following the desires of host and co-founder Ben Shapiro to make content with lasting impact "My mentor, Andrew Breitbart, always said politics is downstream of culture. What he meant by this is that more people are shaped by the culture that surrounds them than by politics directly (...)" (Shapiro, 2021) They've produced movies such as "Shut in" and "Terror on the prairie" to mild success as well as politically minded documentaries featuring their hosts such as Candace Owen's 'The greatest lie ever told' about the Black Lives Matter (BLM)

organization and the popular Matt Walsh's 'What is a woman?' about transgenderism. Still, the incursion into children's content foretells a greater investment in the production side of the Daily Wire: besides the aforementioned shows and movies the Daily Wire is also investing in producing an Arthurian fantasy TV- show based on the series of novels by author Stephen R. Lawhead 'The Pendragon Cycle' that will also feature host Brett Cooper.

3.2. Hosts and Prominent Personalities

3.2.1. Ben Shapiro

Ben Shapiro is the central host around which The Daily Wire developed. Having garnered popularity with controversial daytime appearances such as the infamous gun rights debate with Piers Morgan in 2013, Shapiro launched into right-wing media stardom with his videos shared around the world, garnering a reputation as a good logical debater with his catchy phraseology: 'facts don't care about your feelings'.

Shapiro was a prodigious child having skipped 3 grades in k-12 which also in turn made him a victim of relentless bullying by older kids. After graduating highschool he studied Political Science at UCLA and later joined Harvard's Law Program. He briefly worked at a high profile law firm off of university later quitting to pursue his own ventures with friend and co-founder of the Daily Wire Jeremy Boering. He has also authored a plethora of books during his career such as "The Right Side of History: How Reason and Moral Purpose Made the West Great" and "The Authoritarian Moment: How the Left Weaponized America's Institutions Against Dissent".

Before Creating The Daily Wire, Ben Shapiro worked at Breitbart briefly under his late mentor Andrew Breitbart. His departure from the company was enveloped in controversy and later led to him creating his own company with Jeremy Boering. A series of disagreements anticipated his departure but the big catalyst was the harassment of a fellow co-worker being swepted under the rug. "Shapiro first hit my and many other left-wing radar screens in March 2016, when he called out the bullies at Breitbart News. A Breitbart reporter named Michelle Fields had been physically assaulted after a Donald Trump press conference by Corey Lewandowski, who was then Trump's campaign manager. When Fields complained, Lewandowski said Fields was "delusional" and denied the incident had

occurred. Trump spokeswoman Hope Hicks suggested Fields was just angling to get attention. Despite a Washington Post writer's eyewitness account corroborating Fields (and, later, video evidence¹⁴), the editors at Breitbart opted to accept the Trump team's brazenly false version of events over the word of their own reporter which made Shapiro furious. He had known Breitbart's founder, Andrew Breitbart, ever since he emailed to compliment a column Shapiro wrote for the Daily Bruin still as a 16-year-old undergrad at UCLA. Breitbart eventually hired Shapiro, years later, but died a month after Shapiro came aboard. Under a new boss, Steve Bannon, Breitbart News cozied up to the Trump campaign and to the burgeoning alt-right movement. Shapiro was, at the time, disgusted by both. The treatment of Fields was his breaking point." (Stevenson, 2018)

Raised orthodox Jewish, Shapiro maintains his faith practice with his also Jewish wife and four children. According to a report by the Anti-Defamation League¹⁵, spanning from August 2015 to July 2016, Ben Shapiro was the recipient of over 7,400 anti-Semitic tweets. This number positioned him as the most targeted journalist in the study.

His views can mostly be identified with neoliberal conservatism which concerns itself mostly with free market and foreign trade liberalization, reduced public spending, tax cuts and deregulation of the financial sector. "Neoliberalism attached to the values of classical conservatism proclaims itself as a critique of this conception of the welfare state, considering that it is to be blamed for the high rate of inflation, a declining trend in economic growth, and increasingly lethargic citizens." (Gjorshoski, 2016, p.79). Tendentially libertarian on economics, Shapiro is deeply interested in localism and the idea of the community and the family as the political center and propagator of values.

Shapiro has been criticized for his views on transgender issues, for instance his refusal to use preferred gender pronouns and his stance on transgender rights. Critics argue that his comments can be insensitive and contribute to a hostile environment for transgender individuals. In a particularly controversial heated debate on HLN (Headline News) that involved trans activist Zoey Tur he called her sir and got threatened with physical violence.

¹⁴https://www.washingtonpost.com/video/politics/video-shows-trump-campaign-manager-corey-lewandowski-grabbing-michelle-fields/2016/03/29/8b53c8a4-f5c2-11e5-958d-d038dac6e718_video.html?utm_term=.e9f7a9decfb0

¹⁵ (ADL, 2016)

Shapiro's views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have also sparked controversy. His broadcast of the Israel-Hamas war since the Hamas attacks of October the 7th, 2023 have been staunchly pro-Israel and he has been widely accused of downplaying the plight of Palestinians. Controversy sparked over his coverage of falsified information like the misreported claim that forty babies had been beheaded by Hamas and also of unverified information such as weaponized humanitarian donations and constructions of tunnels under Al-Shifa Hospital.

3.2.1a. Shapiro and Limbaugh

Ben Shapiro's podcast is rooted in affirming conservative principles while asserting boundaries against what he perceives as leftist media. He aims to offer The Daily Wire as a conservative alternative to mainstream media. Shapiro utilizes exclusionary discourse to position himself as a trusted truth-teller, challenging the legitimacy of traditional journalism and casting himself as a necessary counterweight to what he views as a left-leaning legacy media landscape. He delegitimizes mainstream journalists as partisan actors and justifies his attacks on traditional journalistic practices by framing them as necessary responses to existing media bias. "While questioning the legitimacy of traditional media is a strategy perfected by Limbaugh, the publication and distribution affordances of digital media have allowed Bongino and Shapiro to create conservative media ecosystems that serve as alternatives to mainstream journalism." (Dowling, Johnson, & Ekdale, 2022, p. 23).

Shapiro's podcast serves as a platform for the journalism of affirmation, catering to audiences interested in reinforcing their pre-existing political perspectives. He utilizes his podcast to affirm the beliefs of mainstream conservatives while also delegitimizing mainstream media outlets as partisan tools of the Democratic party. Shapiro's approach combines elements of affirmation and assertion, presenting himself as an alternative source of information and questioning the legitimacy of mainstream media as spaces for competing viewpoints.

Shapiro's podcast reflects a broader trend in conservative media. The podcast serves as a platform for conservative voices to push back against what they perceive as the liberal

media establishment, while also providing a space for listeners to feel like their beliefs and perspectives are acknowledged and reinforced.

Despite having widely different styles of speech, Shapiro and Limbaugh share their controversial rhetoric and “anti-mainstream” discourse. The latter was more unhinged and passionate whereas the former prides himself on his mechanical analytical mannerisms that convey a dispassionate delivery that comes across as measured and logical to the casual viewer.

Ben Shapiro himself recognizes the legacy of Limbaugh in the New York Times article he penned after Limbaugh’s passing titled “The House That Rush Built”. “By demonstrating the huge market for conservative content, Rush opened the door to a thriving alternative media infrastructure. Without Rush, there would be no Fox News, Drudge Report or Daily Wire. He leaves behind a thousand outlets doing what he once did: explicating conservatism, and fighting back against the predations of a left that seeks institutional and cultural hegemony.” (Shapiro, 2020).

3.2.2. Brett Cooper

The newest to the Daily Wire hosts lineup is Brett Cooper. The host has quickly garnered the second largest following at the Daily Wire. Unlike the other host’s her show “The Comment Section with Brett Cooper” mostly focuses on pop culture and online discourse analyzed from a Gez Z conservative perspective. Aiming for relatability Brett’s set is carefully designed to appear like a streamer from the popular Twitch platform that features young creators and attracts similarly young audiences.

Formerly an actress, the UCLA and Berkeley graduate has appeared on several movie and tv shows to moderate success, after transitioning into the right wing media space, acting opportunities for Cooper have arisen inside the Daily Wire network. She will be featured in the planned productions of the Pendragon cycle, Snow White and the Seven Dwarves and the animated series Mr. Birchum.

3.2.3. Matt Walsh

Matt Walsh is a right-wing political commentator, author, and political activist. He gained prominence in the conservative scene as the host of "The Matt Walsh Show" podcast for The Daily Wire. Walsh started his career as a talk radio host in Delaware in 2010, he later moved to Kentucky and launched his own website in 2012.

In 2014, after he joined Blaze Media he captured some interest in the media space and in 2017 he was hired by The Daily Wire. Since then he has made appearances on various nationally syndicated publications and talk shows, such as "Tucker Carlson Tonight" and "The Joe Rogan Experience."

Walsh has garnered a reputation for his extreme conservative views even amongst the Daily Wire personnel. The host has been a vocal opponent of transgender rights, campaigning against transgender healthcare for minors with ardent fervor, though he opposes all gender affirming care regardless of age. In 2022, he released the controversial children's book "Johnny the Walrus," the short picture book compares being transgender to pretending to be a walrus. Walsh has also produced a widely controversial documentary film and propaganda piece, "What Is a Woman?," where he interviews transgender people and supporters attempting to showcase that their ideology falls apart with the simple question it is titled after.

Walsh's career was recently highlighted by support from figures like J.K. Rowling and Elon Musk. He remains reviled by large swaths of the opposition, having faced criticism for his views, particularly on his stance on LGBT+ issues. He was named "Transphobe of the Year" by The New Republic in 2022. He starred in The Daily Wire's comedy film "Lady Ballers" in 2023, a movie that pokes fun at transgender athletes.

Despite his divisive views and perhaps because of them, Walsh continues to be a prominent figure in conservative media, expressing his opinions on various social and political issues and advocating for his version of traditional values.

3.2.4. Michael Knowles

One of the earlier additions to the Daily Wire lineup was 33-year-old Yale graduate Michael Knowles, first featured as a guest and correspondent on another host's programming 'The Andrew Klavan show' and then later starring in his own daily show at the Daily Wire.

The former actor is a devout Catholic who makes a point of attending a traditional Latin mass.

As opposed to some of other hosts, the particularity of Knowle's program is that it features an arguably warmer, friendlier tone, but just as harsh and deliberate criticisms of the left and its spokespeople. On economics, Knowles is more amicable to the welfare state than a lot of the media figures at the Daily Wire, naming Burke as an influence on many occasions, whose ideas align most with paternalistic conservatism and neoconservatism. Paternalistic conservatism concerns itself with social protection mechanisms for workers as an effort to keep socialist ideas at bay and the unified nation as a foundational concept. "(...) conservatives in a manner of promoting the concept of unified nation began to foster feelings of loyalty and patriotism and in this way amortising socialist ideas that the workers did not have their own state." (Gjorshoski, 2016, p. 77). By contrast, neoconservatism concerns itself most with religion as a promoter of morality, a rigid penal policy, selective censorship and political and military intervention in foreign policy. "According to them [neoconservatives] society could achieve a desired level of stability and development only if efficiency in three areas, namely: 1. Law and order - inherent moral contortions is a reality and can be overcome only through fear of punishment, and they would be effective if strict; 2. Public morality - often shaped by the educational process and the media because freedom within the choice of behavior can lead to the choice of evil and immoral views; 3. National identity - the value of the nation (in a civil and ethnic sense) consists of connecting the society and the groups within, thus giving them a common cultural and civic identity that would be as strong as it would be grounded in history and tradition." (Gjorshoski, 2016, p. 82).

Among his greatest controversies while at the Daily Wire was his 2019 appearance on a Fox News segment where he referred to the young climate activist Greta Thunberg as 'a mentally ill Swedish child' (which later the network apologized for) and more recently in March of 2023 at a Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) rally when he expressed his view that " If [transgenderism] is false, then for the good of society,

transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely – the whole preposterous ideology." (CPAC, 2023) Though Knowles later ascertained that he didn't call for the eradication of any group of people and simply protested against the ideology they ascribe themselves too, many activists flagged his comments as genocidal and the distinction between calling for the eradication of transgenderism and transgender people meaningless as they are fundamentally intertwined.

The host also published two books while at the Daily Wire: a completely blank book called 'Reasons to Vote for Democrats: A comprehensive guide' to serve as a gag gift and 'Speechless: Controlling words, controlling minds' about the verbiage and terminology the left employs and in Knowles' opinion enforces.

3.2.5. Candace Owens

Conservative commentator Candace Owens announced joining the Daily Wire in November 2020 around the time of the presidential election. The commentator was already infamous for her incendiary retorts about Black Lives Matter amongst other choice topics in the conservative movement.

In her highschool days she suffered racism and death threats from fellow classmates and her mother sued the Stamford Board of education and won a settlement of over 37 thousand dollars in 2008.

Her views on social issues were quite different before the 2016 election. Owens adamantly opposed the Republican Party in the blog column at Degree180 where she was CEO. The host claims her sudden shift to the other side came from her experience online with doxxing which made evident in her view that the liberals were the real racists and trolls and it drastically changed her online persona. Her activism on youtube caught the attention of Turning Point USA (TPUSA) founder Charlie Kirk who promptly made her director of communications of the organization in 2017.

In 2018 Candace formed the BLEXIT movement, funded by TPUSA, a conjunction of the words Black and Brexit to represent the diaspora of Black Americans from the Democratic party. The organization rejects the alleged 'victim mentality' that intersectionality has allegedly trickled into the culture. She left TPUSA in 2019.

Owens published a novel in 2020 by the name “Blackout: How Black America can make its Second escape from the Democrat Plantation”. The controversial title reflects her previously described views.

Currently Candace can be most accurately described as ‘new right’ or ‘ultraconservative’, her views are influenced by Ann Coulter, Ben Carson and Thomas Sowell. She was an avid Trump supporter going as far as describing the former president as the savior of the nation during his mandate, she has however cooled on Trump since his support for the vaccine and some mandates that Owens strongly opposes.

Since she has joined the Daily Wire Candace has produced her self-titled weekly show as well as an interview show called Taboo and both a documentary and a docuseries, the first documenting the allegedly fraudulent financial dealings of the Black Lives Matter organization and the latter called ‘Convicting a murderer’ as a response to the Netflix docuseries ‘Making a murderer’ that cast doubt over a prominent criminal case about Steven Avery portraying him as a victim of corrupt law enforcement. Both of these productions touch on one of Candace’s established core beliefs that the left has victimized black Americans on a wide scale due to the framework of intersectionality.

Since joining the Daily Wire some of the most prominent controversies she’s been a part of was her close friendship with the musician and producer turned admitted anti-semitic Kanye West. West has often named Owens as a friend and influence, even borrowing lines of hers like the paraphrased talking point that the biggest murder of Black Americans is not gun violence or police but instead abortion due to the disproportionately large number of abortions in the African American community. Another happened in late November 2023 when a public argument (Annex 4 and 5) ensued between Candace and Ben Shapiro on X (formerly known as Twitter). Shapiro and his supporters took issue with the usage of “Christ is King” in an argument against a Jewish person. Candace encouraged Shapiro to stop interpreting her quoting scripture as opposition to him and his then recent coverage of the Israel-Hamas war, in which the co-founder has taken a hardline pro-Israel stance that doesn’t resonate with all Daily Wire hosts. Candace in particular has been more amicable than most on the conservative right to the Palestinian plight.

3.2.6. Andrew Klavan

One of the earlier shows at the Daily Wire, The Andrew Klavan show has existed since the early stages of the company in 2015. Currently his show only happens once a week as opposed to the daily frequency of other Daily Wire shows and podcasts.

Klavan is an award-winning author having written multiple crime and mystery novels, some of his writings were turned into movies starring Clint Eastwood and Michael Douglas. He has been nominated for the Edgar awards five times and won twice.

Not as controversial as his fellow hosts he still got into hot-water in 2023 when a clip from the show Backstage went viral on Tiktok where he jokingly claims he never saw his wife as a human until ten years into his marriage; the comment was widely denounced as misogynistic.

3.2.7. Jordan Peterson

Jordan B. Peterson, a Canadian clinical psychologist, currently works as a cultural critic and professor of psychology. In recent years Peterson has steadily gained widespread recognition for his academic work in his public lectures, his controversial stances on various topical political issues and especially his self-help books.

Dr. Peterson received his Bachelor of Arts in Political Science from the University of Alberta and then went on to earn a degree in Psychology from the University of Alberta too. He completed a Ph.D. in Clinical Psychology at McGill University.

During his long academic career, Peterson held positions at multiple universities, including Harvard, where he taught psychology. He became a tenured professor at the University of Toronto, where he worked on research in areas such as the psychology of religious and ideological belief and the assessment and improvement of personality and performance. Toronto would be the last place he would teach at in the traditional sense.

Peterson rose to international prominence for his critique of political correctness and compelled speech legislation in Canada. He became a vocal advocate for “free speech” and an opponent of the legislation that came to be known as Title IX that enforced the usage of

preferred pronouns at his university which he perceived as ideological excess, particularly in academic and cultural spheres.

His book “Twelve Rules for life” has become a worldwide bestseller and has garnered a lot of renown and a big supportive audience particularly amongst the young male demographic.

Jordan Peterson has maintained a significant following throughout the controversies and criticisms, and has continued to have a notable effect on discussions on various topics -- from psychology and philosophy to political and cultural issues. His explosion in both the literary and conservative spaces has sparked debates and discussions about free speech, political correctness, and the role of universities in the discourse.

He is not a host of daily news at the Daily Wire, having joined as a producer and host of long form content discussions like “End of the World” “Exodus” “Vision and Destiny” “Biblical Series: Genesis” “Jordan B. Peterson on Marriage” “The Jordan Peterson podcast” and others.

3.3. Prominent ventures in recent years

3.3.1. Jeremy’s razors/ chocolates

Always looking to turn every moment of conservative cultural backlash against a brand into a business venture, CEO Jeremy Boering created Jeremy’s razors in 2022 after the company Harry’s razors pulled advertising from the Daily Wire citing not wanting to be associated with their transphobic commentary as the reason. Riding on the coattails of this perceived offense as well as Gillette’s ad against toxic masculinity in 2019 the Daily Wire created Jeremy’s razors. The marketing stunt turned into a real company that is marketed as a razor company that doesn’t hate its male customer base and “allows men to be men”.

In the same vein, in early 2023 the Daily Wire created Jeremy’s chocolates, trying to profit off of the backlash against Hershey’s Chocolates for hosting trans influencer Dylan Mulvaney as a brand representative. They created two chocolate bars, one with nuts and one nutless aimed at men and women respectively as a gag gift.

3.3.2. Suing OSHA

During the pandemic the Daily Wire was involved in a hot-button issue in the news media over challenging The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) mandate that employers of over a hundred people were obligated to enforce the vaccine or regular obligatory testing in their offices. President Biden's initial mandate came into effect in November 2021 when the Omicron variant was proliferating en masse. In the following weeks, an aggregate of many companies challenged the ruling claiming it was unconstitutional, the most prominent (and first) being the Daily Wire.

OSHA published an Emergency Temporary Standard (ETS) on November 4 that ordered all companies with at least a hundred employees to ensure that all their workers had to be either vaccinated against COVID-19 or tested weekly for the illness, effective immediately. The order activated a flurry of lawsuits. "The Daily Wire filed the first lawsuit in the Sixth Circuit hours after the order was released on November 4." (Pearce, 2022).

In January 2022 the conservative majority supreme court blocked this mandate deeming it unconstitutional in a 6-3 vote.

3.4. Scandals

3.4.1. Stephen Crowder Scandal

In January 2023, far-right commentator Steven Crowder alleged that a conservative media organization, later discovered to be The Daily Wire, was engaged in collusion with tech companies to suppress conservative perspectives. Crowder's laments came after he disclosed receiving a \$50 million contract offer (which he described as a "slave contract") from a media entity, later identified as The Daily Wire. He described the terms of the contract as oppressive, particularly the provisions that imposed penalties in the event of demonetization or boycotts affecting his social media platforms.

In a video posted online, Crowder didn't name specific outlets but suggested that some media entities were aligned with tech firms, aiming to suppress right-wing perspectives on social media platforms. He showcased excerpts from a contract proposal (from The Daily

Wire) which penalized him if his social media channels were demonetized or faced advertising revenue reductions.

Addressing Crowder's claims, The Daily Wire's then CEO, Jeremy Boreing, confirmed details of the job offer in a YouTube video. Boreing defended the contract stipulations, attributing them to running a profitable media business. He said that Crowder seemed to expect substantial pay irrespective of the revenue his show generated for The Daily Wire.

Amid this explosive situation, media personalities, including Ben Shapiro and Matt Walsh from The Daily Wire, criticized Crowder's accusations. Shapiro reacted calling the criticism "rather nasty," arguing against his attack of former friends over misunderstandings about contract terms. Owens and Walsh also dismissed Crowder's claims, labeling them baseless.

Crowder defended his position in another YouTube video, claiming that his concerns seemingly about money weren't just that but that he was instead advocating for new conservative voices on the online sphere and the sort of contracts they'd have to negotiate in the future. He said The Daily Wire should rethink its reliance on advertiser revenue, suggesting that penalties for demonetization could harm their operational model. (Porterfield, 2023)

This controversy came after Crowder's departure from TheBlaze, Glenn Beck's media company, the previous month. Crowder has faced repeated clashes with social media platforms, for example YouTube, which demonetized his main channel in 2021. The platform cited policy violations, including content on the U.S. presidential election and suspensions due to videos deemed to violate hate speech policies.

3.4.2. Facebook Scandal

The Daily Wire and its presence on Facebook were the subject of an investigation conducted by Popular Information.

The report analyses the platform's significant presence on Facebook (14 large pages that exclusively promote its content in coordination). A network of pages that appear to be independent but are centrally controlled. They collectively have over eight million followers

and generate a very high number of engagements on Facebook, which was always one of the more successful networks for the Daily Wire, maybe given the older demographic of the platform.

The investigation reveals that these pages are likely in violation of Facebook's rules on inauthentic behavior because of their undisclosed connection to The Daily Wire, which can mislead users about their identity and purpose. Despite this, Facebook has continuously given free-range to the platform and stated that it will allow this network to continue operating as is (Legum, 2019¹⁶).

The report from Popular Information also showcases examples of content from The Daily Wire that feature misogyny, bigotry, and misinformation, particularly on topics such as gender equality and LGBTQ issues. All are in violation of the platform's stated guidelines.

Popular Information also mentions Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg's then-recent dinner with Ben Shapiro, where they reportedly discussed issues like free speech and potential partnerships.

3.4.3. Bridge Too Far

It is relevant to highlight the disagreements and legal turmoil among select hosts at the Daily Wire that erupted in 2024. Tensions escalated between Candace Owens and Ben Shapiro over differing views on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Ben Shapiro, a staunch supporter of Israel and one of the most vocal defenders of the Israeli government's actions since the attacks of October 7th 2023, was confronted by Candace Owens's tentative support for Palestine. On November 3rd, 2023, Owens wrote on X, "There is no justification for a genocide. I can't believe this even needs to be said or is even considered the least bit controversial to state." (Owens, 2023)¹⁷

Since the escalation of the conflict, a faction of extreme right-wingers has emerged to defend Palestine with pernicious objectives not centered around human rights concerns who took advantage of the conflict to advance their anti-semitic rhetorical objectives. An example of this is far-right figure Nick Fuentes (Boigon, 2021) Therefore, a degree of reasonable

¹⁶ See also (Legum & Zekeria, 2020).

¹⁷ See also (Pengelly, 2024)

skepticism should be applied to Candace Owens's support given her past statements. Owens has faced accusations of making anti-Semitic comments. Her statements often perpetuate harmful stereotypes and exhibit insensitivity toward Jewish experiences and history. For instance, Owens has been criticized for downplaying the severity of the Holocaust and making inflammatory comments about George Soros, a Jewish philanthropist, echoing anti-Semitic conspiracy theories. These incidents have sparked significant controversy and backlash, given the ongoing tensions and challenges in addressing anti-Semitism in public discourse.

A particularly controversial instance occurred in 2019 when Owens stated that Hitler's actions would have been acceptable if he had confined his ambitions to Germany alone, implying that his internal policies were less objectionable than his expansionist aggression. She has also received praise for many years from white nationalists like the infamous Nick Fuentes. In March of 2024, Owens's anti-Semitic comments grew more explicit. She claimed that there was a "sinister" "ring" of Jews in Hollywood (Olmstead, 2024). While arguing with a high-profile rabbi on social media, she liked a post on X asking if he was "drunk on Christian blood again." Fuentes praised her on his online show, saying on March 19, "Candace Owens has just been on a tear lately. She has been in a full-fledged war against the Jews, and specifically some of these Zionist rabbis. And I've been watching her evolution. It's been remarkable to witness." (Media Matters Staff, 2024)

In response, Shapiro said in a recording posted on X in November, "I think she's been absolutely disgraceful. I think that her faux-sophistication on these particular issues has been ridiculous." Owens argued back on X, stating, "You cannot serve both God and money," (Annex 4) in what appeared to be a jab at her employer. Despite the heated exchanges, the November feud appeared to have been settled, with Daily Wire co-founder Jeremy Boreing releasing a statement saying Owens's "job is secured". Seemingly it wasn't, as Owens and The Daily Wire terminated their relationship between late March and early April of 2024 after disputes regarding Israel and antisemitism, and has since claimed to be open to a debate between her and Shapiro.

In an April article, Molly Olmstead from Slate reported that The Daily Wire discreetly secured a gag order against their former host Candace Owens, even while publicly expressing interest in arranging a debate with her.

Veteran controversial journalist Glenn Greenwald revealed that The Daily Wire convinced a private arbitrator to forbid Owens from making public disparaging remarks about the company. The arbitration decision, which cited her debate challenge as an example, was supposedly sought because the company believed her manner of requesting and negotiating the debate violated her contract.

Greenwald stated, "The Daily Wire has ensured that the debate with Owens that they publicly claimed to want could not, in fact, take place," (Dodds, 2024) adding that such a debate would breach the gag order preventing Owens from criticizing the site or Shapiro.

"Daily Wire and Candace Owens have ended their relationship," (Boering, 2024) said Jeremy Boreing, co-founder of the site with the rightwing commentator Ben Shapiro.

Shapiro has publicly stated since that the separation had nothing to do with Owen's stance on the Middle Eastern conflict, yet all evidence points otherwise.

3.4.4. Brett Cooper's departure from the Daily Wire

"The Comment Section" by host Brett Cooper has been the fastest growing channel on the Daily Wire since its inception, surpassing the amount of long-amassed subscribers of all Daily Wire hosts on YouTube except Ben Shapiro's, although bringing in a bigger average of views per video than even his personal channel. Her popularity is undeniable; in June 2024, after featuring her show in podcast form on Spotify, she skyrocketed to the Top 5 podcasts in America, showing real demand. (Daily Wire, 2024)

Due to her high demand, fans and bystanders were shocked to find that she had departed from the company during the year-end contract renegotiation discussions this December. Speculation preceded this departure. Viral video by twitter personality Ian Carroll commented on Cooper's alleged dismissal nine days before Cooper and the Daily Wire released a joint statement on the matter.¹⁸ Ian credited James Li as the original whistleblower for this story, having posted his video about the situation on November 22nd.¹⁹ In the weeks prior to her departure, the Comment Section YouTube channel occasionally featured the

¹⁸ <https://x.com/IanCarrollShow/status/1863640619970613465/video>

¹⁹ <https://x.com/5149jamesli/status/1860050870978728131>

producer of the show and close friend of Cooper's Reagan Conrad, first introduced as an occasional fill-in for Brett while she was on vacation, who would later take her place.

On December 11th, Brett Cooper finally addressed the rumors on what would be her final video for the Daily Wire platform. She stated the following: "Hey guys, some of you have heard the rumors online, and the rumors are mostly true. Today, December 10th will be my last day hosting the comment section and working for the Daily Wire; it is not true that I am being forced out. It was my own choice to leave and believe me; this is bittersweet. I have had the most unbelievable three years helping to craft the show, building this community and, telling stories, and sharing the truth every day (...) The Comment Section will continue with the Daily Wire. My producer Reagan is taking over as host of the comment section, and I wish her all the best."(The Comments Section, 2024) The video continues with a message from co-CEO Jeremy Boering, who gives well wishes to Brett and celebrates her feature in the previously discussed Pendragon Cycle with no mention of the other entertainment project she was set to participate in, The Snow White adaptation planned to rival Disney's which is widely speculated to not be happening anymore given Cooper's departure from the company.

This video brought about significant backlash and further speculation online.

Firstly, the comment section of the video was very negative in tone with many fans promising to unsubscribe and saying that they only watched the show for Brett Cooper. The overall impression is that followers of the show were disappointed. Fellow political commentator youtuber Shoeonhead remarked in the comments "This is like when my parents replaced my dead goldfish with another goldfish as if I wouldn't notice."

Comments from other prominent right-wing influencers like Candace Owens likened Cooper's goodbye to an "Isis beheading video." (Owens, 2024), suggesting, like many online, that it was a disingenuous hostage situation created by stringent Non-disclosure Agreements (NDAs).

The online speculation was not at all abated by the statement; on the contrary, popular channels like Decoy Voice pointed out the similarity of the mannerisms and expressions used by substitute Reagan Conrad and Brett Cooper, even speculating she'd taken acting classes to act like the former host. The majority opinion seems to be that the continuation of the show with the change from colorful lighting to a sepia tone and not much else was not earned and will not thrive. The website Social Blade, that tracks YouTube views and subscriptions, saw

the Comment Section YouTube channel lose about 200 thousand subscribers in the ten days following the goodbye statement. (Social Blade, 2025)

Fuel was added to the fire when Brett Cooper unfollowed her friend and maid of honor Reagan Conrad as well as the Daily Wire and Jeremy Boering himself. This seemingly confirmed to the online masses that the split wasn't as amicable as it was presented.

Brett Cooper advertised on her Twitter a new channel that has amassed about 400 thousand subscribers in ten days with no uploaded videos.

What does this mean for the Daily Wire?

In under a year the Daily Wire has lost two of its most popular (and only female) hosts. Many have made the comparison of this loss to Candace Owens's departure in early 2024. Despite not being replaced, Owens was placed under a judge mandated gag order. Cooper's seemingly inorganic statement and the speculation that followed about her inability to speak honestly about her departure has created an air of suspicion around the Daily Wire.

In the online independent media landscape, authenticity is the main currency, and these moves from the Daily Wire have given them a corporate air of formality and dishonesty to many. It's bad for a business that relies so heavily on personality: "Relational trust is tied to hyper-individualized assessments of the authenticity of the journalist that give leverage to micro-celebrities and pseudo journalists on social media." (Moran, 2021). The Daily Wire has come to find that their viewers tune in for the people they hire and that they have a moveable fanbase that is more loyal to the personalities than to the company. My belief based on these factors and data is that if the Daily Wire continues to express the heavily corporatized *modus operandis* of the traditional media they claim to rally against, they will see less success.

3.4.4a. Why Are the Women Leaving?

Is it a coincidence that the two media personalities the Daily Wire has lost are the two and only prominent and successful female hosts? It's possible. However, it's interesting to think about the environment and image that is fostered.



Image 1: Screenshot from Daily Wire Backstage

The greatest piece of evidence that the Daily Wire wants to craft a carefully curated performance of masculinity is the monthly show “Backstage.” Where the hosts of the Daily Wire gather around a table with their whisky and cigars and comment on current affairs and company news, it’s the only show co-CEO Jeremy Boering has a presence on. The intellectual spar is presented as sort of a meeting of enlightened minds like a Tuesday at Marquise Lambert’s Renaissance salon, besides the part where it’s hosted by a woman. Candace Owens has been featured occasionally while she was at the company but always as a sporadic inclusion not so much a stable presence, meanwhile Brett Cooper was never one of the hosts featured for discussions on Backstage.

The glasses of whisky and cigars are cultural signifiers associated with power, masculinity and status—historically tied to spaces dominated by men, such as exclusive clubs.”Our findings elucidate how the tobacco industry built upon their perception of a preexisting construct of the “new lad,” enticing him as they understood him to exist, and constructing this form of masculinity in tandem with other commercial forces.” (Cortese, 2010, p. 30) The set design, the exclusively male composition, and the props are deliberate choices to align with and perform the brand’s ideological stance. From this, I extrapolate that the lack of female representation is a semiotic cue to enforce the show’s and Daily Wire’s identity as traditional and male-centric.

3.5. Who funds the Daily Wire?

There is a significant difference between independent media on the left and the right, and that is funding. There is a simple reason why the right-wing is more heavily funded and well liked by funders. Corporate interests largely align with the messaging of right-wing commentators and are entirely oppositional to most left-wing orators. This dynamic largely explains why the political right has cultivated a vaster, more prominent cohort of trusted figures within the independent media landscape. Conservative media personalities have honed in on the success formula for audience engagement - bleeding visceral reactions from their keen understanding of cultural anxieties. They have tapped into this reservoir of discontent with traditional institutions, positioning themselves as the voices who “tell it like it is,” capturing audiences that way whilst often receiving money from sources similar to PAC money-funded politicians and legacy media outlets.

The Wilks brothers oil tycoons, Farris and Dan Wilks, are powerful political donors who showcase this disparity. During the last decade, they have donated millions of dollars to conservative think tanks, media organizations, and religious groups through their foundations. Among the high-profile organizations they’ve funded, there’s the Heritage Foundation, Family Research Council, Focus on the Family, PragerU, and, of course, the Daily Wire. These outlets promote wide-ranging conservative agendas, including climate change undermining and denialism. “The Wilks brothers, for instance, have poured millions of dollars into PragerU and the Daily Wire, two right-wing media outlets that have promoted wide-ranging conservative agendas, including climate crisis denialism to school-age kids and adults via short videos, articles and other materials.” (Stone, 2023).

In its infancy, the Daily Wire received 4.7 million dollars from Farris Wilks. “In 2015, Farris Wilks gave \$4.7m to help launch the Daily Wire and remains an owner of the media company, whose founding editor and co-owner Ben Shapiro has forged ties with Dennis Prager, the PragerU founder and talk show host. Shapiro and Prager are slated to attend a PragerU “founders’ retreat” in September for donors who give at least \$100,000 a year.” (Stone, 2023).

The Wilks' generous contributions to media outlets like the Daily Wire reflect a broader strategy to influence outcomes in American politics. “Historically, the two brothers

have also backed a number of right-wing Texas Republicans including Senator Ted Cruz, whose abortive run for president in 2016 was bolstered by \$15m they gave to a pro-Cruz Super Pac.” (Stone, 2023) This showcases how media enterprises are often interwoven with the PAC money that exchanges hands in political campaigns, which allows them to dominate much of the media landscape while promoting political agendas that protect their financial and ideological goals.

By framing themselves as underdogs in a battle against hyper-powerful forces, right-wing commentators of the Daily Wire build trust with their audiences while their checks are regularly signed by special interest groups. By tapping into these deep pockets, “independent” right-wing media corporations are able to grow exponentially.

CHAPTER FOUR

The pillars of thought transversal to the Daily Wire

4.1 Existing Literature

The 2023 analysis published in the Journal of Magazine Media mentions the evolution of thought at the Daily Wire (Speakman & Funk, 2023) and how both traditional social values and free market principles are emphasized at the organization. In a deeper analysis, Edsall’s doctoral thesis (Edsall, 2023) applies sociological analysis to various right-wing media enterprises, including The Daily Wire, to understand the effects these outlets have on polarization. In the process of doing so he identifies how they blend different strains of conservatism like traditional conservatism and libertarian thought in their content strategies.

The existing literature establishes two dominant ideological principles of Advocacy of Conservative Values (4.3.) and Economic Conservatism (4.5.) I propose adding four additional pillars of thought, informed by an attentive analysis of The Daily Wire’s content: Limited Government and Individual Liberty, National Security and Immigration, Gun Rights, and Climate Change Skepticism. These new categories emerged inductively reflecting a pattern-based assessment of recurring themes and ideological frameworks evident across a large pool of articles and media output, prioritizing intertextuality across the different host’s platforms in order to reflect consistent messaging strategies.

In order to analyse the arguments presented at the Daily Wire, representative samples of each category were selected and are included as footnotes marked as essential viewing material. The selection was based on thematic relevance, featuring content emblematic of each argument drawing from a range of media formats including tweets and video segments as well as public speeches from the hosts and podcast appearances. The selection includes various hosts in order to represent the Daily Wire institution as a whole.

4.2. Limited Government and Individual Liberty

One of the Daily Wire's central tenets is the unyielding advocacy of limited government. All hosts share the notion that a smaller government footprint allows for more comprehensive freedoms and for individuals to flourish. Arguments espoused center around opposition to social programs and praise of the innovative spurts they attribute to free-market principles.

The call for reduced government is reflected in their chosen news spotlights, often covering how regulatory hurdles stifle small businesses and arguing that trimming red tape creates further entrepreneurship and, therefore, economic growth. There's also the overarching theme of self-reliance and promoting individual responsibility over government intervention.²⁰

Ben Shapiro often advocates for localism and limited government, which are certainly fundamental elements of his broader ideological stance. He favors the conservative arguments for individual actualization, autonomy and self-determination. His preference for decentralized decision-making, as opposed to Washington bureaucracy, is rooted in a belief in individual liberty. He argues that people are generally better poised to make decisions about their own lives and communities than a faceless and distant government. As he perceives it, localism allows for a more responsive, immediate, and attentive form of governance that reflects the community's choices and preferences.

²⁰ ESSENTIAL VIEWING: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5cjo-yU1v0> - Ben shapiro on legitimacy of government and localism 3.45- 4.51
<https://x.com/benshapiro/status/1260964742601904128> - Ben Shapiro 2020 twitter thread on localism

One of Shapiro's main arguments is that local communities are better equipped to understand who they serve and address their unique sets of issues and challenges. He argues that the one-size-fits-all approach from a distant government is less effective in solving problems than solutions crafted at the local level. Local governments can tailor policies to suit the specific needs and values of their communities.

Another reason for this strong conviction are his often-expressed concerns about the erosion of cultural values in a more centralized and expansive government. He argues that localism helps preserve cultural norms and traditions because communities can uphold values that matter to them without interference from a distant authority. This supposedly minimizes division, hatred and other unfortunate consequences of the political climate, because citizens can have their values catered to on a microlevel.

He further argues that efficiency and responsiveness are more likely to be better in localized governments because they can afford to be more attuned to the needs of their constituents. The bureaucratic hurdles that arise in a centralized decision-making process make for slower responses to local issues. In his view, decentralized government also leads to more accountability, which would replace an overwrought trust in federalism. When decision-makers are closer to the communities they serve, they are more directly accountable to the people. Citizens have greater influence and control over local policymakers, which in turn creates a sense of responsibility among elected officials.

Shapiro advocates for a limited role of government in people's lives, explaining that governmental power should be restricted to essential functions such as national defense, law enforcement, and protecting individual rights. It's one of his core beliefs that an overly powerful government can infringe on personal freedoms and stifle innovation.

Reconstruction

Shapiro cares about principles centered on individual autonomy, hence his established preference for decentralized decision-making and a restrained government role. Where could these ideas originate from? The Daily Wire host echoes Russell Kirk's²¹ emphasis on the regeneration of spirit and character as a fundamental feature of conservatism and

²¹ While there is no direct reference to Kirk in this very instance, he relies on his ideas in his book *The Right Side of History* (Shapiro, 2019).

conservative ideology. He believed that true conservatism is not merely a political stance but a comprehensive philosophy encompassing complex moral and spiritual dimensions.

According to Kirk, the decline of society is often rooted in the erosion of its moral and spiritual foundations, which, in his view, were the absence of conservative ideals. This way, the renewal of society necessitates a revival of individual character and collective spiritual values. Kirk argued that the preservation of cultural and moral traditions is paramount for assuring the maintenance of social order and stability. He viewed these traditions as the accumulated wisdom of generations that are capable of providing a moral compass and a sense of continuity. This very conservative perspective relies on the notion that societal progress should be guided by respect for the enduring values that have stood the test of time rather than a blind pursuit of innovation and change, an idea that Shapiro often echoes. "Political problems, at bottom, are religious and moral problems." This is evidenced by the notion that the essence of conservatism lies in addressing the moral and spiritual challenges that serve as a base for all political issues. "(...) religion and politics are inseparable, that the decay of one must produce the decay of the other. Conservation of our moral order must be paralleled by conservation of our political order. " (Kirk, 2001, p. 5 and p. 116).

Kirk's emphasis on the regeneration of spirit and character establishes the link between personal virtue and the health of the broader society. By fostering a culture of moral integrity and spiritual awareness, conservatism seeks to cultivate a society that upholds enduring principles and values in order to achieve a stable and prosperous future. This relates to Ben Shapiro because when he argues for localism, his view of the idyllic community is certainly centered around religion and religious virtue and the wish to distance himself from what would be the equivalent community say in a liberal city such as San Francisco or New York where he'd argue crime would run rampant and there would be no religious locus tethering the community and establishing the values that make for good communal living practices. Shapiro also echoes, in his arguments, Friedrich Hayek's concerns about state planning and the inherent challenges and dangers associated with excessive government intervention.

One of the commonalities is the idea that over-planning by the state leads to inefficiencies and stifles individual freedom, which will in turn result in unintended negative consequences. Friedrich Hayek, in "The Road to Serfdom", articulates this argument that

central planning undermines economic freedom and ultimately leads to totalitarianism (Hayek, 1944). In this book, he makes the case that the complexity of economic systems makes it impossible for centralized authorities to plan effectively without infringing on individual liberties. Shapiro endorses this viewpoint by advocating for a limited government that allows market forces to operate freely: "It's tempting to mobilize our ardor for collective mobilization and use it as a state-wielded club to force individual virtue, or to force large-scale change. Tyranny rarely begins with jackboots; it usually begins with ardent wishes for a better future, combined with an unflinching faith in the power of mass mobilization." (Shapiro, 2019, p. 28).

However, one could argue the biggest influence from which insights are drawn in creating this argument is Thomas Sowell. The economist has proved to be a favorite of conservatives at the Daily Wire, who mention him often. He argued that centralized policies often fail to account for the diverse needs and circumstances of different communities. Sowell advocates for localized approaches that enable more precise solutions.

Sowell's work, in his book "A Conflict of Visions," pours over the inefficiencies and unintended consequences of broad, one-size-fits-all policies. He argues that local knowledge is crucial in crafting effective solutions because only those can reflect the specific realities and needs of the community. Sowell explains that: "Even when leaders have more knowledge and insight than the average member of the society, they are unlikely to have nearly as much knowledge and insight as exists scattered among the millions of people subject to their governance." (Sowell, 2007, p. 136).

This principle suggests that empowering local authorities and communities can lead to more successful outcomes.

Shapiro builds on this insight and, in his books, adds the importance of localism in policy-making, leading to more effective governance. "So, what does positive communal capacity look like? It looks like a governmental system capable of mobilizing to stop external threats but unable to threaten individual liberties; it looks like a social fabric powerful enough to support community members, confident enough to avoid the tools of governmental compulsion. " (Shapiro, 2019, p. 28). Shapiro reinforces Sowell's critique of centralized planning and the benefits of decentralized approaches. Both hold the belief that prioritizing local entities not only respects the principle of subsidiarity but also increases the chances of

successful and adaptive problem-solving. In their view, ultimately, localism ensures that policies are more attuned to the specific needs and conditions of the different communities.

Deconstruction

The deconstruction of this particular argument of the Daily Wire relies on a very diverse array of thinkers. The purpose of this diversity is to showcase (1) a perspective grounded on classic theory to counteract the classic examples the hosts often reference on this topic (2) a critical perspective of power dynamics within decentralized systems (3) historical evidence of localism enabling oppression.

(1) John Rawls' concerns about potential inequalities stemming from over-reliance on local governance challenge Shapiro's single-minded focus on autonomy. Philosopher Rawls, in his famous "Theory of Justice" (1971), argues that justice should be understood in terms of fairness and that inequalities must be arranged and collimated to benefit the least advantaged members of society. He posits that too-powerful local governance can lead to significant disparities in resources and opportunities, and wealthier communities might have more capabilities to address their challenges than poorer ones. "Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity." Rawls, 1971, p. 72). The concern is that without central oversight, local autonomy might exacerbate existing inequalities rather than mitigate them. A predominantly local and laissez-faire governance model doesn't include the appropriate amount of oversight and intervention; meanwhile, significant inequalities and economic instabilities can arise.

(2) Chomsky has always been wary in his many works of strategies that instill fear to control people. The renowned linguist and political critic has consistently cautioned against the use of fear as a tool for maintaining social control or influencing public opinion. Fear-mongering tactics employed by the powerful are a tool to undermine democratic processes, leading to the erosion of civil liberties. In the context of localism, Chomsky fears the abuse of local power through fear and misinformation; decentralization alone is insufficient in ensuring democratic and equitable governance. He underlines the necessity of a vigilant public as the true assurance of democracy. "“(...)minimizing the state,” that is,

transferring decision-making power from the public arena to somewhere else: “to the people,” in the rhetoric of power; to private tyrannies, in the real world. All such measures are designed to limit democracy (...) They are designed to transfer decision making about people’s lives and aspirations into the hands of private tyrannies that operate in secret and without public supervision or control. Not surprisingly, the public doesn’t like them.” (Chomsky, 2001, pp. 131-132).

(3) Malcolm X's critique of historical discrimination under local power structures is also a powerful counter to the over-idealization of localism. He argued that local governments were very much empowered in the Southern United States and often responsible for enforcing segregation and discriminatory practices against African Americans. Local authorities frequently upheld oppressive laws and used their power to maintain systemic racism.

In his speeches, Malcolm X poured over the dangers of relying on local governance without strong safeguards against abuse and discrimination. He pointed out that the civil rights of minorities were often violated by local officials who, under the guise of decentralized governance, were not held accountable by higher authorities. In one of his speeches, he argued: "(...)They never refer to the white section as a segregated community. It's the all-Negro section that's a segregated community. Why? The white man controls his own school, his own bank, his own economy, his own politics, his own everything, his own community, but he also controls yours. (...)" (Malcolm X, 1964) Without federal oversight and intervention, local authorities can be free to abuse authority and perpetuate injustice and inequality.

4.3. Advocacy of Conservative Social Values

The Daily Wire is one of the most popular outlets that contribute to the defense of conservative social values against the currents of modern cultural change. The hosts and the principles of the platform are staunchly committed to upholding traditional norms, perceiving themselves as warriors in a steadfast defense against modern encroachments on traditional societal standards.

Central to its mission is the constant support for conservative principles on contentious topics like abortion, gender transition, and the use of birth control pills.²² Of course, there are other topics that could be featured, but these are particularly relevant and are some of the most mentioned. When it comes to abortion, The Daily Wire articulates a very pro-life stance deeply rooted in the sanctity of life notion, mirroring the sentiments of many within the conservative religious tradition. The hosts oppose abortion on moral grounds, framing the protection of the rights of the unborn as a fundamental aspect of a just and ethical society. In discussions about transgender individuals and gender transition, the Daily Wire hosts turn to their audience in advocacy for biological realism doctrine, fully rejecting the idea of alternative gender identities and even the notion that a person can "become" the opposite gender. The importance of recognizing immutable biological distinctions is certainly an idea often mentioned. This stance is associated as well with a broader commitment to preserving traditional understandings of gender and sexuality.

On another topical issue, The Daily Wire joins the thousands of influencers online in a trend of raising concerns about the societal implications of widespread contraceptive use. The angle is often one of medical concern over the side effects of the drug, painting the matter as a health concern for the (often exaggerated) pernicious effects of hormonal contraception. But it'd be remiss not to point out that the critique fits as well with conservative outrage over modern family structures and the express intent of preserving traditional family values.

Reconstruction

A. The pro-life debate has evolved over the years, yet in some ways remains the same. The contributions of various authors and thinkers who passionately advocate for the protection of the unborn inform the stances the Daily Wire hosts promulgate. The central question that shapes the debate is the following: When does human life begin, and what are the moral implications of its termination?

²² ESSENTIAL VIEWING:

A. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqTtNDVmAug> - Michael Knowles on abortion in debate with college student.

B. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFYAN_fHYEQ - Matt Walsh on detransitioners and the overall trans experience and its aftermath.

C. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wjc9u_WBraM - Brett Cooper and the birth control pill.

The pro-life movement gained momentum in the mid-20th century when activists challenged the legalization of abortion in the United States, especially after the passing of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973. A conservative base was animated on this topic and made their voices heard.

During the later half of the 20th century, when more progressive legislation was passed on the matter, scholars like Dr. Robert P. George established themselves as leading proponents of the pro-life cause. The Daily Wire shares a set list of the principles articulated by these scholars.

Robert P. George states: "We shall argue that the choice of abortion is objectively immoral. By 'objectively,' we indicate that we are discussing the choice itself, not the (subjective) guilt or innocence of someone who carries out the choice." (George & Lee, 2013, p. 13). The idea reflects the often-espoused conservative notion that the weakest and most vulnerable members of society, unborn children, are directly threatened by legalized abortion. A conservative approach to abortion considers a just society to be one that respects and protects the rights of all its members, including those who are voiceless. George's principles against abortion rest on the belief that the protection of human life is essential for the preservation of a just and morally upright society. This idea is so central to the pro-life argument that it's repeated in screeches outside Planned Parenthood as well as high-minded conservative forums and certainly the Daily Wire: that the recognition of the inherent dignity and worth of every human being, including the unborn, is impossible to separate from principles of justice and equality.

In his book "Embryo: A Defense of Human Life," co-authored with Christopher Tollefsen, George repeats that the right to life is the most fundamental of all human rights, that it is the right upon which all other rights depend, and that defending the rights of the unborn is a cornerstone of a morally coherent society.

George was also an important figure in promoting the argument that the legalization of abortion undermines the moral fabric of society by devaluing human life and eroding the principles of justice and compassion. He warns that the abortion license has contributed to the erosion of the respect for the sanctity of human life. It has become a cultural norm that diminishes the moral standing of our society "Laws that authorize the killing of the unborn or

infirm are permissive in form. They license and sometimes encourage private killing, but do not positively command it.” (George, 2023, pp. 66-67).

Echoing these notions, The Daily Wire underscores the moral imperative of protecting the rights of the unborn. In his argument, Michael Knowles recalls this idea that abortion is paramount to killing and murder and that recognizing it is an inconvenient reality for the pro-choice movement.

B. When The Daily Wire covers transgender individuals and gender-affirming care, their insights are not different from the insights of scholars like Paul R. McHugh, the former psychiatrist-in-chief at Johns Hopkins Hospital. Known for his conservative stances on transgender issues, he's a prominent proponent of biological realism, a theory that insists on the recognition of biological facts and realities over subjective feelings/identities. McHugh discusses the implications of affirming transgender identities, particularly through medical interventions like surgery and hormone treatments such as puberty blockers. He's been vocal about his skepticism regarding the benefits of gender transition surgeries and hormone treatments. Controversially, the author asserts, "The hypothesis that gender identity is an innate, fixed property of human beings that is independent of biological sex—that a person might be 'a man trapped in a woman's body' or 'a woman trapped in a man's body'—is not supported by scientific evidence" (McHugh, 2016, p. 9). It is worth noting that his views are highly contested within the medical community, which has generally embraced transgender care. When addressing the role of sociopolitical infrastructures on transgender issues, McHugh has proclaimed that policymakers and the media are doing no service to both the public and transgender individuals by treating their "confusion" as a right in need of defending instead of a condition that deserves understanding and proper treatment "The scientific evidence summarized suggests we take a skeptical view toward the claim that sex-reassignment procedures provide the hoped for benefits or resolve the underlying issues that contribute to elevated mental health risks among the transgender population."(McHugh, 2016, p. 113). He argues that many individuals who undergo gender transition do not achieve the psychological relief they seek; instead, he claims that these treatments can lead to further psychological distress.²³ This assertion, however, is in direct opposition to numerous studies

²³ See also (McHugh, 2016)- WallStreet Journal Article

and professional guidelines that support gender-affirming care as beneficial for many transgender individuals. These will be mentioned later. McHugh has called upon studies indicating high rates of regret and mental health issues among individuals who have undergone gender transition procedures. He points to research suggesting that the suicide rate among transgender individuals who had reassignment surgery is still far higher than the general population. While these statistics are alarming, it is important to approach them critically, considering the broader context of societal discrimination and lack of support that many transgender individuals face.

C. As was previously espoused, conservative viewpoints against birth control focus on its potential negative impacts on women's health and the natural balance of the body while often hiding a more pernicious agenda regarding women's control over their own reproductive system. Advocates for a more natural approach, such as host of the Daily Wire Brett Cooper claim that synthetic hormones disrupt the endocrine system, causing issues like mood swings and depression. Dr. Jolene Brighten claims, "The truth is, the pill hasn't kept up with the times, and there's been a bit of an 'If it ain't broke, then don't fix it' attitude about it." (Brighten, 2019, p. 9). The nutritional biochemist believes that women are experiencing side effects from birth control that are significantly impacting their quality of life, and many doctors are dismissing these concerns as just being 'part of being a woman'.

These concerns are bolstered by a 2018 study from Denmark, which found an association between hormonal birth control and increased risk of suicidal ideation amongst birth control users (Skovlund et. al, 2018). The study's findings suggest that women using hormonal contraceptives may face a higher risk of developing serious mental health issues. Informed consent and caution in prescribing these medications are necessary, but evidence shows these concerns are overblown.

Many on the right have become proponents of natural family planning (NFP) and advocate for methods that track the body's natural rhythms. NFP avoids the potential risks associated with hormonal contraceptives. However, it is important to note that while NFP tracks fertility signals to prevent or achieve pregnancy, it has a significantly higher failure rate, with 24 in 100 women falling pregnant each year, compared to the much lower failure

rates of hormonal contraceptives when used correctly (NHS, 2024). Natural family planning (NFP) is often promoted as an alternative without the context of its flawed effectiveness.

Deconstruction

A. The pro-choice position on abortion is supported by several arguments articulated by thinkers and institutions. Some will now be presented. Judith Jarvis Thomson, in her famous essay "A Defense of Abortion," uses the famous analogy of the "violinist" to showcase the infringement on bodily autonomy that is making a woman carry an unwanted pregnancy to term "You wake up in the morning and find yourself back to back in bed with an unconscious violinist (...). To unplug you would be to kill him. But nobody would think you morally obligated to stay plugged into him. You are entitled to unplug yourself even if it means the violinist's death" (Thomson, 1971, pp. 48-49).

The landmark U.S. Supreme Court decision – *Roe v. Wade*, which was recently overruled in the case of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* – had been a guarantee that personal privacy and autonomy constitute fundamental rights. The *Roe v. Wade* court had stated, "This right of privacy (...) is broad enough to encompass a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy" (*Roe v. Wade*, 1973). The *Dobbs* decision has now overturned *Roe v. Wade* rights, and the power to regulate abortion has been relegated to the individual states, resulting in a patchwork of laws across the country, with some red states banning or severely restricting access to abortion.

The pro-choice stance is focused on health and safety considerations. The World Health Organization remains a bastion in remarking on the critical importance of access to safe abortion services: "Restriction in access to safe abortion services results in both unsafe abortions and unwanted births. Almost all deaths and morbidity from unsafe abortion occur in countries where abortion is severely restricted in law and/or in practice." (World Health Organization, 2015). The data presented illustrates the direct impact of legal and accessible abortion on women's health and safety. The *Dobbs* decision, however, has led to concerns that women in restrictive republican majority states may now face increased health risks due to a lack of access to safe and legal abortion services. Many women are forced to travel out of state for the procedure, and that is a privilege not accessed by many.

Data from the Guttmacher Institute showcases the dire consequences of restricting abortion access, "According to WHO, unsafe abortion is one of the three leading causes of maternal mortality, along with hemorrhage and sepsis from childbirth. The good news is that deaths from unsafe abortion worldwide have dropped from 69,000 in 1990 to 47,000 in 2008" (Barot, 2011). Particularly, the steep decline in maternal mortality when abortion access is provided can certainly make the case that it's a public health imperative to provide safe, legal abortion options to prevent unnecessary deaths and health complications. The recent changes in abortion laws post-Dobbs have intensified these concerns, as women may resort to unsafe methods in states where abortion is heavily controlled and/or banned.

Another way to look at this matter is the fact that even the most ardent supporters of the pro-life movement consider abortion as a viable option when the mother's health is at risk. It follows that it would be an *Ad absurdum* fallacy to (given the option) defend saving the 'life' of an embryo in a fertility clinic over a living human. Therefore, one woman dying from an unsafe abortion is worse than abortion itself.

Finally, the socio-economic implications of abortion access are alarming in a post-Dobbs World. Planned Parenthood claims that access to birth control and safe, legal abortion are essential to ensuring that all women can achieve their educational, career, and family planning goals. Reproductive rights are crucial for women's socio-economic advancement and equality, allowing them to make decisions that best suit their personal and professional lives. The Dobbs decision poses significant challenges to these advancements, potentially hindering women's ability to fully participate in society and the economy.

Despite the overruling of *Roe v. Wade*, the pro-choice argument remains robust, built on the principles of bodily autonomy and socio-economic equity and grounded on the concerns over health and safety. The recent legal changes demonstrate the ongoing struggle for reproductive rights and the critical importance of maintaining access to safe and legal abortion services.

B. Matt Walsh, in the video above²⁴, attempts to paint the anecdotal evidence of a detransitioner (name commonly given to an individual who regrets their transition and may attempt to transition back to the gender that matches their sex) as evidence of the failure of

²⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iFYAN_fHYEQ also included here for easier access.

transgenderism. The host utilizes an argument from an anecdote, therefore fallacious as a form of hasty generalization; however, more interesting takeaways can be observed.

The video includes a woman stating she was androgenized and deeply regrets her transition. Matt Walsh utilizes this as fodder to accuse the left of not being empathetic toward the plight of this woman as she's shunned for coming out against transitioning and sharing her negative experiences, using as evidence negative commentary left by X users who identify with the political left, claiming speaking out leads to backlash from the community as a social penalty for changing course.

Although it's true that trans activists and supporters are quite sensitive to criticism or dissenting voices online, that can be explained by the growing anti-trans movement that, as a reaction, justifiably raises their defenses. "For the last few decades, the story of LGBTQ plus rights in America has been one of increasing public support. But now a new survey finds that for the first time in years, there's a slight decline in that support." (Brangham & Lane, 2024).

Matt Walsh claims all transgenderism comes from a detachment from reality and should be pathologized, but the evidence cited below doesn't bear that out. He also argues that affirming transgender identities equates to endorsing a form of mental illness. Walsh contends, "Transgenderism is a mental illness that must be treated as such" (Walsh, 2020).

This perspective is highly controversial and not supported by a significant body of scientific evidence. Research from respected psychological and medical organizations indicates that being transgender is not a mental illness. The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) explicitly states that "gender nonconformity is not in itself a mental disorder" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). What is, in fact, pathologized is gender dysphoria, known as deep discomfort with one's body as of or relating to gender, which can but does not necessarily arise from being transgender.

Pathologizing transgender identities exacerbates stigma and discrimination. Judith Butler is a well-known figure in postmodern and gender theory, particularly for her work on challenging the notion that gender identity should conform to rigid, binary categories. She states the following: "Sometimes a normative conception of gender can undo one's personhood, undermining the capacity to persevere in a livable life" (Butler, 2004, p. 1).

Multiple studies have shown that support and affirmation of transgender identities contribute positively to mental health outcomes. A study by the American Psychological Association found that “Psychologists recognize that TGNC (transgender and gender non-conforming) people are more likely to experience positive life outcomes when they receive social support or trans-affirmative care.” (American Psychological Association, 2015).

The World Health Organization (WHO) has also moved away from pathologizing transgender identities. In the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-11), the WHO no longer classifies gender incongruence as a mental disorder. In June 2018, WHO approved a resolution to delete the term “gender identity disorder” from ICD-11 and created a new chapter dedicated to sexual health. “Another new chapter on sexual health brings together conditions that were previously categorized in other ways (e.g. gender incongruence was listed under mental health conditions) or described differently.” (World Health Organization, 2018).

Further disproving Walsh’s argument, the rates for regret of GAS (Gender-Affirming Surgery) seem to be lower than other plastic surgeries, and even other medical surgeries such as knee surgery. “The pooled prevalence of regret after GAS was 1% (95% CI <1%–2%). Overall, 33% underwent transmasculine procedures and 67% transfeminine procedures. The prevalence of regret among patients undergoing transmasculine and transfeminine surgeries was <1% (IC <1%–<1%) and 1% (CI <1%–2%), respectively.” (Bustos et.al, 2021, results).

In conclusion, while Matt Walsh asserts that transgenderism should be pathologized, the prevailing scientific and academic consensus does not support this view.

C. When countering the argument against hormonal birth control, the main concerns are the following: 1. the claim about lack of informed consent, 2. the association between hormonal birth control and mental health issues, and finally, 3. the effectiveness of natural family planning compared to hormonal contraceptives.

Critics contest that birth control pills interfere with natural hormonal cycles and may have adverse health effects. Both claims are true. However, numerous studies and health organizations affirm the overall safety and benefits of hormonal contraceptives. According to

the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG), for most women, the benefits of hormonal contraceptives far outweigh the risks (Committee on Gynecological Practice, 2019). The fact of the matter is that the risks the birth control pill poses are heavily dramatized and no more intense than other types of hormonal medicine.

Regarding the issue of informed consent, it is indeed crucial that women receive comprehensive information about any medication they are prescribed, including birth control. The suggestion that women are being prescribed birth control without informed consent is a serious concern. Healthcare providers are mandated to discuss potential risks and benefits with their patients. The ACOG states the importance of patient education and that every woman should be fully informed about the risk-benefit analysis of hormonal contraception before starting the medication. (Committee on Gynecological Practice, 2019).

As for the 2018 study from Denmark that found an association between hormonal birth control and suicidal ideation, it has indeed been met with scrutiny. Subsequent research and expert reviews have raised questions about the study's methodology and the generalizability of its findings. While hormonal contraception is known to precipitate or perpetuate depression in some patients, the effects vary significantly among individuals, and current evidence suggests the need for more comprehensive research to fully understand this phenomena "Further research is required to determine why some women experience hormone contraceptive-precipitated depression and anxiety, while many women taking hormone contraceptives do not experience mental health issues." (Kulkarni, 2022). Therefore, Brett Cooper commits the fallacy of false evidence in her argument.

In terms of effectiveness, hormonal birth control methods are exponentially more reliable than natural family planning (NFP). Planned Parenthood reports that "when used correctly, hormonal contraceptives are more than 99% effective" (Planned Parenthood, 2024). In contrast, natural family planning methods, which rely on tracking fertility signals, have a much higher failure rate: "24 out of 100 women using fertility awareness-based methods may become pregnant each year with typical use" (NHS, 2024).

While some advocate for NFP as a way to avoid synthetic hormones, it's important to be aware of its limitations in terms of effectiveness. Hormonal contraceptives offer a more reliable method for preventing pregnancy and have been thoroughly studied for safety and efficacy by worldwide health organizations.

4.4. National Security and Immigration

The Daily Wire's stance on national security and immigration relies on the constant emphasis on the importance of robust defense measures and controlled borders to protect economic resources and maintain cultural cohesion.²⁵

It is the view of most conservatives and certainly the Daily Wire hosts that economic prosperity for native citizens is achieved with stringent immigration policies. National identity is also closely rhetorically linked to secure borders.

The conservative argument is generally that unchecked immigration leads to significant economic challenges and strains public resources. They also mention the increasing competition in job markets and how immigration potentially drives down wages for native workers. The conservative protectionist ideal posits that public services should always prioritize its citizens, and a potential unintended consequence of immigration is the overburdening of these systems, including healthcare, education, and welfare by an influx of immigrants, leading to diminished quality for citizens. However, the main point of contention of the Daily Wire with immigration is the cultural implications it carries. Conversations about preserving national identity and social cohesion are paramount. The implied and sometimes explicit suggestion is that reduced immigration is essential to preserve the national identity of America and guarantee social cohesion. A more restrictive immigration policy is necessary, in their view, to ensure newcomers assimilate into the host country's cultural and legal norms. It's an old idea that large-scale immigration might lead to cultural fragmentation and social unrest. Conservatives often frame it as a threat to unity and cultural heritage.

There's a deep association of unrestricted immigration policy with national security concerns. The narrative promulgated is that robust border control is crucial to prevent illegal entry and mitigate potential threats to public safety. Security risks, such as the infiltration of terrorists and the trafficking of drugs and humans across unregulated borders are constantly brought up. The Daily Wire builds a case for stringent immigration enforcement as a necessary measure for America to protect its citizens.

²⁵ ESSENTIAL VIEWING: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z8ZYCmKg5Oc> - Michael Knowles on immigration

Reconstruction

The Daily Wire's stance on national security and immigration is an exercise in overemphasizing the importance of strong defense measures and controlled borders. There is also a deep association between those ideals and the notion that economic stability and cultural cohesion are threatened by immigration. This perspective is rooted in the belief that unchecked immigration poses significant risks like the ones mentioned (economic strain on public resources and job markets as well as potential threats to national security). Hosts will often dwell on how illegal immigration can burden overly relied on social security services and create job competition, potentially harming American workers.

Robust border control is framed as a requirement for maintaining national security and preventing the influx of individuals who may pose security threats. The platform often chooses to highlight stories that showcase the perceived failures of immigration policies under the Biden administration, which they argue has led to a surge in illegal immigration and a subsequent border crisis. For instance, they report on the economic and social impacts of large numbers of illegal immigrants entering the country, citing issues such as increased pressure on border patrol resources and local communities.²⁶

The implementation of stricter immigration laws and increased funding for border security measures are the advocated measures of choice, as are additional border patrol agents and improved technology to detect illegal crossings. The Daily Wire emphasizes the need for policies that prioritize the safety and economic well-being of American citizens, arguing that a secure border is fundamental to the nation's prosperity and security.

These standards of robust defense measures and heavily controlled borders protect economic resources and cultural cohesion are aligned with classic thinkers.

Plato, in his work "The Republic," emphasizes the importance of maintaining a strong and secure state. He argues "(...) we affirmed that Justice was doing one's own business, and not being a busybody". (Plato, 2003, p. 121). This idea parallels The Daily Wire's stance on

²⁶<https://www.dailywire.com/news/arizona-gov-declares-state-of-emergency-over-bidens-immigration-crisis-deploys-national-guard-to-border>
<https://www.dailywire.com/news/president-biden-blames-congress-for-border-crisis-elon-musk-calls-foul>

immigration, suggesting that a well-ordered, safe and just society depends on clear boundaries and ensuring that each state prioritizes its own internal security.

John Stuart Mill, known for his defense of individual liberty within a framework of limited government intervention, proclaims, "The worth of a State, in the long run, is the worth of the individuals composing it" (Mill, 2001, p.106). The Daily Wire hosts express concern that unchecked immigration could strain public resources and diminish opportunities for native workers, thereby impacting economic stability and general well-being. From their viewpoint, preserving the integrity of the state and ensuring that its citizens and culture are not disadvantaged by excessive immigration aligns with Mill's broader argument that the strength and value of a society ultimately rests on the prosperity of its individual members. Despite Mill's original point, immigrants are often deemed lesser contributors by the right-wing media apparatus and the Daily Wire is no different in that regard.

Samuel Huntington argued in "The Clash of Civilizations" that cultural identity is crucial for global politics: "It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural" (Huntington, 1996, p.[22]). This supports the idea that controlled immigration is essential for preserving national identity and social cohesion, mitigating potential cultural fragmentation and societal discord.

Legal scholar Richard Posner, particularly concerned with terrorism in his analysis of national security and immigration policy, stressed the importance of maintaining a nation's borders in order to achieve security. "In times of danger, the weight of concerns for public safety increases relative to that of liberty concerns, and civil liberties are narrowed." with the Daily Wire, he states, "The challenge to constitutional decision making in the era of modern terrorism is to restrike the balance between the interest in liberty from government restraint or interference and the interest in public safety, in recognition of the grave threat that terrorism poses to the nation's security. " (Posner, 2006, p. 9 and p. 31)

Deconstruction

Michael Knowles argues that excessive virtue, without prudence, can lead to harm. The potential consequence, in his view, of allowing an exceeding amount of even migrant women and children into the country is that it could result in the loss of national identity.

However, this argument contains several fallacies. To start with, it presents a false dichotomy by oversimplifying the options: it's either accepting all migrants and risking the dissolution of the country or being prudent and restrictive in narrowing immigration – an oversimplistic and inaccurate dichotomy. Knowles' suppositions also assume that cultural preservation and national identity are inherently threatened by immigration rather than enriched by it, overlooking evidence of successful cultural integration.²⁷

Knowles considers the way to provide justice to the United States' citizens is to majorly restrict immigration.

Rawls presents a different definition of justice "The primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" (Rawls, 1971, p.6). Based on this definition we should evaluate migration not through fear of cultural dissolution but through a lens of fair social organization which has no reason not to include the contributions made to the social and economic fabric of the country by immigrants.

Knowles's argument also depends on an appeal to consequences, fear-mongering about negative outcomes without adequately considering potential benefits or ethical considerations involved in humanitarian responses. "Whatever the guise in which he or she appears, the stranger is someone with whom the modern political state must come to terms. He or she cannot be ignored." (Galloway, 1994, p.149) The host ignores the idea that ethical obligations should guide immigration policies.

Finally, Knowles utilizes a slippery slope argument, suggesting that allowing migrants into the country could inevitably lead to catastrophic consequences for national identity. The argument profiles migrants as incapable of integrating and excludes them a priori from the possibility of partaking in the national identity. As Matthes (2018) notes, the debate around

²⁷ See also (Abramitzky, 2023) and (Garsd, 2024)

cultural heritage involves a tension between universal values and culturally specific rights "On the one hand, there is a pull towards conceiving of cultural heritage as universally valuable, grounding consequent rights or permissions for all concerning its use and ownership. On the other hand, there is a push for culturally specific rights and restrictions that recognize the special claims of particular cultural groups (...). A third theme concerns how we understand the composition and boundaries of cultural groups and whether any such account can avoid charges of essentialism" (Matthes, 2018, p. 1). This suggests that rather than viewing migrants as a threat to national identity, we should recognize the potential for cultural heritage to be both inclusive and adaptable. It is of great importance to craft policies that balance national security with humanitarian concerns. It's possible to do so without resorting to extreme (all or nothing) solutions.

4.5. Economic Conservatism

Economic conservatism is truly considered a cornerstone at The Daily Wire; despite hosts disagreeing on what the exact extent of it should be, they all lean classically liberal on most matters. The emphasis on fiscal responsibility is heralded as a focal point for economic success. The Daily Wire frequently showcases arguments advocating for low taxes, reduced government spending, and business-friendly policies, presenting these principles as essential for fostering economic growth and stability.²⁸

They often express disdain for so-called "blue-cities" run by democrats where they claim criminality runs rampant and both economic policies and lax attitude to crime fail in making them a pleasant place to live. The economic policies of states governed by conservative principles are praised, and their successes are attributed to the implementation of low taxes, minimal government interference, and a regulatory framework that encourages entrepreneurship. The Daily Wire often brings up these examples to demonstrate the effectiveness of conservative economic models, arguing that red states are better at fostering job creation, increased investment, and just an overall sense of economic prosperity.

²⁸ ESSENTIAL VIEWING:

<https://x.com/mattwalshblog/status/1618004682055778314?s=46&t=dRIeqGydc3xQmHc8RFm7lQ> - Matt Walsh homelessness tweets

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gJtwpyV3RbU> - Ben Shapiro on unpaid internships

The notion that limited government intervention is crucial for stimulating economic innovation and sustaining long-term growth is constantly defended. The belief that economic freedom and a robust private sector are the engines of prosperity is woven into the fabric of the Daily Wire's content.

Reconstruction

The reconstruction of the Daily Wire's argument relies on classic liberal economic thinkers because their analysis often references them.

One of the fathers of Neoliberalism, Hayek argued in "The Road to Serfdom" (1944) that central planning and excessive government control stifle individual freedoms and economic growth. The Daily Wire aligns with this perspective. Often, the podcast's conversations revolve around critiquing cities with high regulatory burdens and expansive welfare programs, which they argue lead to increased dependency and reduced economic vitality. As stated, they often express disdain for so-called "blue cities", claiming that these are plagued by rampant criminality and failed economic policies, making them repellent.

The successes of right-wing-led cities are always attributed to the implementation of low taxes, minimal government interference, and a tough-on-crime approach. The importance of free markets and limited government intervention are heralded as the best means to achieve economic prosperity. This reflects Adam Smith's view that "Little else is requisite to carry a state to the highest degree of opulence from the lowest barbarism, but peace, easy taxes, and a tolerable administration of justice"²⁹ (Stewart, 1829, p. 64).

Locke's "Second Treatise of Government" (1689) is an early exposition of the Daily Wire's notion that limited government intervention is the fundamental piece of the puzzle for stimulating economic innovation and sustaining long-term growth. The Daily Wire's content, which consistently defends the belief that economic freedom and a robust private sector as the engines of prosperity, does also borrow from Locke's enlightenment arguments for property rights and individual liberty as the foundation for economic development.

²⁹ The utilized quote is from Stewart's notes on Adam Smith's lectures.

The Daily Wire's ideological background can also be found in more recent right-wing economic liberal thought such as Milton Friedman's (1962) "Capitalism and Freedom", particularly the concept of economic freedom as a prerequisite for political freedom.

The Daily Wire's stance on crime and homelessness is also heavily influenced by the belief that strict law enforcement and personal responsibility are essential for societal well-being, like Thomas Hobbes' (1651) view in *Leviathan* that a strong government is necessary to maintain order and prevent societal decay.

The platform critiques the lenient policies of Democratic cities, suggesting that these approaches lead to higher crime rates and homelessness. This perspective is not entirely baseless. For instance, modern thinkers like James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling (1982), creators of the broken windows theory, posit that maintaining urban environments in a well-ordered condition prevents small crimes and helps to create an atmosphere of order and lawfulness, that eventually leads to preventing more serious crimes.

The Daily Wire's advocacy for conservative economic policies and stringent crime control measures is deeply rooted in classical liberal and conservative thought. The Daily Wire positions itself as a proponent of conservative economic policies, constantly espousing the importance of fiscal responsibility, limited government intervention, and strong law enforcement.

Deconstruction

Matt Walsh's tweet uses sarcasm to criticize those who oppose harsh punishments for criminals, likening leniency to allowing American cities to become "post-apocalyptic wastelands." We'll now go through several fallacies and demonstrate how his approach to a serious issue can be described as cruel. First, it includes a straw man fallacy by misrepresenting his critics' position, implying they support drug use and crime and that their goal is for cities to become "unlivable, disgusting hellscape." In reality, his ideological opponents advocate for more humane and effective approaches to crime and drug addiction rather than evilly endorsing chaos and decay. The tweet also presents a false dichotomy by suggesting only two extreme options: harsh punishments like those in Singapore or complete tolerance of crime and drugs resulting in societal collapse. This oversimplifies a complex

issue, ignoring middle-ground solutions like rehabilitation, social programs, and community policing for reducing crime. Moreover, Walsh's use of vivid and negative imagery, such as "post-apocalyptic wasteland" and "zombie film," is designed to provoke fear and anxiety rather than contribute to a rational discussion on crime and punishment. It's an emotional appeal that distracts from a constructive debate about crime policies that are both effective and empathetic.

The tweet's tone is also cruel and dismissive, showing a lack of empathy for individuals struggling with addiction and those affected by systemic issues. By referring to individuals in dehumanizing terms and sarcastically suggesting execution, Walsh disregards their humanity and potential for rehabilitation. The tweet also deploys a slippery slope fallacy, suggesting that not adopting harsh punishments will inevitably lead to societal ruin. This argument lacks evidence and ignores the effectiveness of various alternative crime reduction strategies that do not involve severe punitive measures.

Recent data from the Biden administration contradicts The Daily Wire's narrative on crime. As noted in a White House statement, "Today, the FBI released preliminary data collected from over 11,000 law enforcement agencies around the country showing that, in the first quarter of this year, murders decreased by 26%, robberies by almost 18%, and violent crime overall by 15%. These large decreases follow major reductions in crime in nearly every category in 2023 – including one of the lowest rates for all violent crime in 50 years and significant declines in murder." (White House, 2024).

Ben Shapiro's argument in favor of unpaid internships posits that they are crucial for gaining experience and skill development and that requiring payment for interns would reduce opportunities as employers would favor hiring more experienced workers. However, this perspective overlooks significant socio-economic disparities and the broader implications of unpaid internships.

Unpaid internships inherently favor individuals from wealthier backgrounds who can afford to work without pay. This perpetuates a cycle of privilege where only those who have financial support from their families can afford to gain valuable experience and make connections in their desired fields. Working-class individuals and those from lower-income backgrounds are excluded from these opportunities. This is one of the many ways in which

socio-economic inequalities are exacerbated. Ben Shapiro's argument dismisses the significant barriers that unpaid internships pose to those who cannot afford to work for free.

Shapiro's argument that the market will still favor wealthier candidates for paid internships is an acknowledgment of the systemic bias that already exists. If internships were paid, it would level the playing field, allowing talented and capable individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds to compete fairly. Paid internships provide financial stability and make it possible for a broader range of individuals to gain the necessary experience to advance in their careers.

There's also a false dichotomy presented by Shapiro when he implies that, given the cost, companies won't choose to hire interns. Here, he necessarily posits that the beneficiary of the unpaid internship is exclusively the employee because he claims that if there's a financial disincentive, they won't be hired over fully qualified candidates. This is untrue since internships are very beneficial to companies which train potential future employees that will become profitable for them in the future.

Shapiro's comparison of unpaid internships to minimum wage laws is flawed. Minimum wage laws aim to ensure fair compensation for work and to protect workers from exploitation. Unpaid internships, by their nature, do not provide this basic protection, effectively devaluing the labor of interns. This is exploitation and perpetuates a culture where work is not fairly compensated, or in this case, compensated whatsoever.

4.6. Gun Rights

Another central tenet of the Daily Wire organization is the Second Amendment as a bastion of individual liberty. The hosts all, to differing degrees, resent encroachments on gun rights, hailing the right to bear arms as essential for safeguarding personal freedoms against potential threats.³⁰

A lot of the narrative on guns built at the Daily Wire comes down to the choice of the stories covered. They'll often spotlight instances where armed citizens successfully defended themselves, arguing that an armed populace acts as a powerful deterrent to crime. By

³⁰ ESSENTIAL VIEWING: Ben Shapiro on Gun Rights:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_JrRUUIMabc

highlighting these stories, the Daily Wire helps reinforce the idea that responsible gun ownership is not just a right but an integral part of preserving individual and civil liberties.

The platform champions arguments that defend the importance of the Second Amendment in maintaining a free and secure society, deploying the belief that an individual's ability to protect themselves is a fundamental aspect of their personal freedom as well as their American identity. The Daily Wire often draws on historical context, reminding viewers that the Founding Fathers enshrined the right to bear arms as a critical measure to prevent tyranny and ensure self-reliance. This multifaceted focus on personal safety and historical precedent helps solidify the platform's stance that gun ownership is a cornerstone of American liberty.

Reconstruction

As James Madison noted in *The Federalist Papers*, "The advantage of being armed, which the Americans possess over the people of almost every other nation (...) forms a barrier against the enterprises of ambition" (Madison, 1788/2003). According to Madison, the right to bear arms was a structural safeguard of liberty - essentially arguing that an armed population serves as a deterrent to governmental overreach.

Philosopher John Locke's concept of natural rights is often invoked to support this argument as well. Locke argued that the right to self-defense was essential to social life: "This makes it lawful for a man to kill a thief, who has not in the least hurt him, nor declared any design upon his life, any farther than by using force to get him in his power" (Locke, 1690/1980). The Daily Wire extends this principle in order to argue for the notion that gun ownership is a necessary component of self-preservation and autonomy.

Contemporary scholars like John Lott have added an element of empirical research to the argumentation. Lott, in his book *"More Guns, Less Crime,"* asserts, "The empirical work provides strong evidence that concealed-handgun laws reduce violent crime and that higher arrest rates deter all types of crime." (Lott, 2010, p.97). This backing adds weight to the argument that an armed populace can effectively deter crime. "While right-to-carry laws—now operating in thirty-nine states—do reduce violent crime generally, the effect is much larger for multiple victim shooting" (Lott, 2010, p. 324). The Daily Wire places the

Second Amendment in high regard as a fundamental protector of a long-standing tradition of individual, American-style liberty.

Deconstruction

These data points in John Lott's "More Guns, Less Crime" have been a topic of debate. The correlation between increased gun ownership and decreased crime rates is not as clear-cut as Lott suggests. The claim that concealed-carry (shall-issue) legislation reduces crime is simply unsupported when analyzing a broader range of factors. "Universal background checks were associated with a 14.9% (95% CI, 5.2–23.6%) reduction in overall homicide rates, violent misdemeanor laws were associated with an 18.1% (95% CI, 8.1–27.1%) reduction in homicide, and “shall issue” laws were associated with a 9.0% (95% CI, 1.1–17.4%) increase in homicide" (Siegel, 2019, p. 2021). Lott's analysis does not adequately account for variables like socioeconomic factors, differing law enforcement practices, and public safety measures that can influence crime rates.

There is also the matter of the risks associated with widespread gun ownership. Increased availability of guns can lead to higher rates of all sorts of crimes like accidental shootings, domestic violence incidents, and suicides. The data bears out that it's as intuitive as it seems, higher levels of household gun ownership are associated with higher rates of firearm deaths. "The available evidence is quite consistent. The few case-control studies suggest that households with firearms are at higher risk for homicide, particularly firearm homicide". (Hepburn, 2004, p. 417). This suggests that the potential incidents of harm that come along with widespread gun ownership may outweigh the purported benefits in terms of crime reduction.

A study by Donohue, Aneja, and Weber (2019) published in the *Journal of Empirical Legal Studies* found that the most complex and thorough evaluations of RTC (right-to-carry) laws suggested that they increased rather than decreased violent crime. "Our preferred panel data regression specification, unlike the statistical model of Lott and Mustard that had previously been offered as evidence of crime-reducing RTC laws, both satisfies the parallel trends assumption and generates statistically significant estimates showing RTC laws *increase* overall violent crime." (Donohue, Aneja, & Weber, 2019, pp.198). This effectively counters Lott's argument - more permissive gun laws lead to higher rates of violent crime.

The popular notion in conservative circles that more guns create safer communities is deeply flawed.

The video of the discussion between the college student and Ben Shapiro³¹ focuses on firearm policy and its impact on gun violence, with a comparison between the United States and Australia. The student presents data suggesting that Australia's gun buyback and other firearm policies led to significant reductions in gun-related deaths and homicides. He argues similar policies could be effective in the U.S.

Shapiro proceeds to respond by questioning the causal link between Australia's gun buyback program and the reduction in gun violence. He notes that only one-third of guns were bought back, leaving two-thirds still in circulation. He refers to an article critiquing comparisons between U.S. and Australian gun policies, arguing that the contexts are too different to draw direct parallels. Finally, his argument concludes with the bombastic claim that despite an increase in the number of guns in circulation in the U.S., there's been a significant decline in gun violence from 1994 to 2015.

Shapiro (conveniently) argues against lumping suicide statistics with homicide rates when discussing gun violence, claiming it could skew interpretations. He points as well to Japan's high suicide rates despite strict gun control laws, questioning the effectiveness of having fewer guns in circulation.

The host's argumentation is vulnerable to logical fallacies. Shapiro engages in cherry-picking by selectively presenting data that supports his view while not fully addressing the statistics provided by the student. He questions the direct correlation between Australia's gun buyback and the reduction in gun violence, saying that only a fraction of firearms were actually bought back, leaving a significant portion still in circulation. This selective focus on the limitations of the policy implementation in Australia is used to undermine the broader discussion on its overall impact on reducing gun-related deaths. Shapiro's other argument is a straw man fallacy when he shifts the discussion toward suicide prevention.

While the student's inquiry centered on homicide rates and overall gun violence, Shapiro redirected the debate to the issue of suicide, which was not the student's primary concern. Focusing on suicide, Shapiro deflects from addressing the effectiveness of gun

³¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JrRUUIMabc> here also for easier access.

control measures in reducing intentional homicides, which was the topic of discussion. Shapiro's assertion that the understanding of suicide prevention is not well-established on a social science level is an appeal to ignorance. Research certainly exists, such as studies from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, that suggest that reducing access to means (firearms) can indeed lower suicide rates. "Firearms owned by family members pose a significant suicide risk, particularly for younger individuals. Research shows that approximately 50% of suicide deaths among 18- to 20-year-olds, and nearly all suicides by those under 18, involve a family member's firearm. For women, about one-third of firearm suicides involve a spouse or partner's firearm." (AFSP³², 2019)

4.7. Climate Change Skepticism and Energy Policy

Amidst the burgeoning global discourse surrounding climate change³³ The Daily Wire emerges as one of the main conservative platforms marked by skepticism regarding the causes and extent of environmental changes. Their discussions navigate the complex balancing act of environmental conservation with economic stability. The prioritized side is often the economy. Along with a wide sect of right-wing orators, they advocate for a robust and affordable energy sector. Fossil fuels, from a pragmatic, short-term lens are, according to the hosts, essential in maintaining this delicate balance.

At the heart of The Daily Wire's views on climate lies an exploration of the economic repercussions that come with a potential transition away from fossil fuels. There's anxiety around the potential for job losses and economic instability, and the main concern - the loss of corporate profits. Critical questions are raised about the trade-offs inherent in pursuing environmental goals while safeguarding economic well-being and if it's even possible to care about both at the same time.

At the Daily Wire, the approach to climate change is skeptical. Discussions mainly revolve around the relationship between environmental concerns and sustainable economic growth; very little time is spent considering the human cost of climate catastrophe.

³² American Foundation for Suicide Prevention

³³ An overview of this discourse is well summarized by (Lewiński & Üzelgün, 2019).

Reconstruction

The video presented is a podcast episode where the host, Lex Fridman, asks his guest, Ben Shapiro, to explain his current climate perspective based on a viral video criticizing an old clip of him speaking at an event about it.³⁴

Ben Shapiro's current perspective on climate change is interesting. On the one hand, he does not deny its reality and the human contribution to it, rooted in scientific consensus and empirical evidence. He acknowledges the potential impact of rising sea levels and climate change over the next century but argues against drastic and economically disruptive mitigation policies like those proposed in the Paris Agreement or the Green New Deal. Shapiro instead supports a focus on adaptation strategies- building sea walls, geoengineering, and technological innovations that can help mitigate the effects of climate change over time. The host criticizes the current emphasis on subsidizing green technologies, citing a lack of significant progress in their reliability and their inability to fully replace fossil fuels.

Shapiro strongly supports the expansion of nuclear energy, a proven and efficient source of clean energy, suggesting it as a litmus test for seriousness about addressing climate change. He often criticizes what he sees as fear-mongering tactics employed in climate discourse, arguing that such approaches undermine public trust and are ineffective in achieving long-term solutions.

Shapiro's stance shows a preference for pragmatic, low-intensity responses to climate challenges, emphasizing human adaptability and showing skepticism towards what he perceives as overly alarmist or economically burdensome policies. As stated by Bjorn Lomborg, a prominent critic of stringent climate policies, "We will see that even if we went all-in and spent hundreds of trillions on climate policies, sea levels would still rise, only slightly less than if we did nothing" (Lomborg, 2020, p. 36).

There is also a long-standing argument at the Daily Wire and other right-wing platforms about the lack of effectiveness of Western lead efforts to combat climate change whilst China in particular, but other developing nations as well, don't take on the same

³⁴ ESSENTIAL VIEWING:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0-w-pdqwiBw> - Ben Shapiro's viral Aquaman clip

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vOblAlOifpo> - Ben Shapiro on climate change on the Lex Fridman podcast

measures, which would make a dent in western economies but not in theirs resulting in competitors having more economic freedom and competitive prices because of it, aligning with the assessment by Roger Pielke Jr., who argues that progress on climate change mitigation might be more effective if we learned the right lessons about how innovation and policy actually work (Pielke, 2010).

Deconstruction

Shapiro widely undermines the urgency of climate change in various ways throughout his conversation with Lex Fridman. He advocates for adaptation strategies like building sea walls and geoengineering whilst appearing to overlook the pressing need for mitigation measures aimed at curbing greenhouse gas emissions. As stated by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "(...) limiting global warming to 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot would require rapid and far-reaching transitions in energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems (high confidence)." (IPCC, 2018) The scientific community agrees that aggressive emission reductions are necessary to avoid catastrophic climate impacts.

While Shapiro's critique that policies like the Paris Agreement and the Green New Deal are economically disruptive is not unfounded, his view ignores the economic costs associated with climate change itself. According to the World Bank, "Climate Change could drag more than 100 million people into poverty by 2030." (Hallegatte et al., 2015, p.179). He also places an unfounded amount of trust in scientific development, which is not likely to catch up to the dire short-term effects of climate change.

The Daily Wire's host critique of fear-mongering in climate discourse overlooks the role of urgency in compelling timely action: "The climate emergency is a race we are losing, but it is a race we can win" (United Nations, 2019). Proactive measures are necessary to mitigate risks and deal with the crisis at hand. The moderate language he uses serves the purpose of painting the other side as hysterics and alarmists, distinguishing himself as level-headed when, in fact, given the state of emergency posed by the climate crisis, the hysterics have the more adequate response.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1. Case Study 1- The Trans Panic in Sports- USA, UK and France

5.1.1. How finding the right angle helps a Culture War take hold

Understanding the deliberateness of the strategies behind how political and social issues become Culture War issues is essential for comprehending the current political landscape and the resulting impacts on marginalized communities.

Investigative journalism – like the reports from the New York Times I will now and in section 5.2.2 rely on – provide important accounts of the issues discussed. While I draw on them for factual description of events, my work adds academic value by synthesizing these reports into a structured analysis of how conservative media and political networks have strategically reframed discourse. The New York Times and other sources provide raw reporting, but my role is to analyze the ideological convergence, tactical messaging, and broader political significance of these developments.

The "trans panic" - which is a colloquial concept that describes the acceleration and intensification of discourse vilifying transgender people– has undergone an evolution that is particularly interesting in this regard. When incorporated within the broader context of Culture Wars in the United States, it reflects a complex network of political think tank strategies and media narratives that interact to result in shifting public sentiment.

Going back as far as 2016, it can be noted when then-presidential candidate Donald Trump, in an NBC Today show town hall, expressed the belief that transgender individuals should "use the bathroom they feel is appropriate"- including at his own Trump Tower. In an unexpected break from the Republican orthodoxy, Donald Trump took a relatively progressive stance. "You leave it the way it is," Trump then said, arguing against creating separate bathrooms for transgender people, which he called both "discriminatory" and "unbelievably expensive." (Dann & Rafferty, 2016).

The issue wasn't a political winner at the time. Since then, the GOP has narrowed in on vitriol for the transgender community and successfully shifted public opinion against these individuals. How did this happen? Through strategic framing.

The 2019 New York Times article "A Conservative Push to Make Trans Kids and School Sports the Next Battleground in the Culture War" details the evolving strategy around transgender rights, specifically highlighting how they've shifted tactics after repeated electoral failures.

The article explains how, since 2013, Republican legislators across various states have attempted to introduce bills limiting transgender rights. Examples of these efforts – such as bathroom usage restrictions, blocking of funding for gender-related medical treatments, and reversals of all sorts of local transgender protections – proved to be spectacular failures electorally. Some of these notable failures in this earlier period include how the South Dakota governorship vetoed the anti-trans "bathroom bill" that was introduced and immediately following that event Texas Governor Greg Abbott backed away from voicing support for similar legislation in his state. Similarly, in North Carolina, a controversial "bathroom bill" led to a nationwide backlash, including the NCAA refusing to host basketball games in the state and ultimately leading to the defeat of gubernatorial candidate Pat McCrory, with 57% of voters pointing to the bill as a reason for voting against him.

Transgender sports became a new strategic messaging focus after previous attempts to block trans rights proved political losers.

The same NYT article details how an organization directly involved in conservative electoral campaigns called American Principles Project started testing the association of democrats with the matter of transgender athletes competing against women in Kentucky's 2020 gubernatorial race. "This scenario, presented in a pair of ads that are appearing on computer screens and smartphones across Kentucky, is the work of a little-known group funded by anonymous donors called the American Principles Project" (Peters, 2019)

"The group is limiting its work to Kentucky for now, but strategists say it has bigger ambitions. It is effectively running a pilot program for the 2020 election that will help it determine how it could use the debate over transgender rights to rally conservative voters in support of President Trump." Despite losing the governor race and the 2020 presidential election, the animus that audiences showed at these ads hinted at a political winner in terms

of messaging and media figureheads. "Terry Schilling, executive director of the American Principles Project (..) "What we're doing is trying to show Republicans how to win on these key issues," he said." (Peters, 2019).

In the same gubernatorial campaign, one of the first of many ads on this matter circulated. It showcased two high-school girls wrestling and the line, "All any athlete wants is a fair shot in a competition, but what if the rules change?" A young boy enters the frame, and the referee announces him as the winner of the match. A voice urges, "Beshear [democratic candidate] calls this equality. But is it **fair**?"

That notion of fairness would come to prove to be a political messaging gold mine. As established, voters did not favor hatred against transgender individuals and punished candidates for it in the voting booth, even in red states. "Look at the bathroom issue (...) It is the weakest ground we can fight on — on this slate of issues. And conservatives have been fighting on that almost solely over the last several years." (Peters, 2019).

What changed was the careful crafting of a narrative that eventually proved very successful. Sports have long been heralded as the ultimate level playing field, where talent and determination can propel anyone to greatness, irrespective of their background. Sunday football games are part of the americana fantasy because they are often seen as a microcosm of America itself. This meritocratic ideal reinforces the core belief in fairness that also encapsulates a uniquely American exceptionalism narrative: that the nation itself is a land of opportunity, where hard work and skill are the pathways to success. "This is where they had to land because none of the rest of it worked" (Peters, 2019).

In 2021, the New York Times details, "The last time Republicans in South Dakota made a serious push to bar transgender girls from school sports (...) it died without ever getting out of committee, just 10 days after it was introduced. But when Republicans decided to try again in January, they were far more strategic in their approach. The sponsors this time were two women who modeled their bill after a template provided by a conservative legal organization. They gave the bill a name that suggested noble intent: the "act to promote continued fairness in women's sports." South Dakota is just one of a growing number of states where Republicans are diving into a Culture War clash that seems to have come out of nowhere. It has been brought about by a coordinated and poll-tested campaign by social

conservative organizations like the American Principles Project and Concerned Women for America" (Peters, 2021).

It very evidently paints a picture of a coordinated political strategy targeting transgender rights, with a shift from bathroom bills to sports participation as a more palatable outrage-baiting messaging effort for audiences.

Conservative Media organizations understood how effective this messaging would become earlier than most. "The issue is much more widely covered in conservative media — and often presented with a heavy dose of sarcasm. According to a review of social media content conducted for The New York Times by Media Matters, a left-leaning watchdog, seven of the 10 most popular stories about the proposed laws targeting transgender people so far this year were from the Daily Wire." Over six million views were amassed on the 10 stories. (Peters, 2021)

This concerted effort produced glowing results. A 2023 Summit poll (Annex 6) concluded that 77% of respondents deemed the alterations to Title IX³⁵ harmful, an exceedingly large shift from the unpopularity of the "bathroom bills" just a few years ago.

After decades on the rise, acceptability for LGBT+ individuals experienced a decline for the first time in years. PBS notes, "Throughout 2023, the Public Religion Research Institute, or PRRI, interviewed over 22,000 adults for what it calls its American Values Atlas. Last week, the Organization released its findings on views about LGBTQ rights in the US. The survey showed for the first time support fell for key policies regarding LGBTQ rights" (Brangham & Lane, 2024). PRRI CEO Melissa Deckman attributes this decline primarily to increasing political polarization, noting that Republican leaders in certain states are intensifying rhetoric against LGBTQ+ rights, which influences public opinion within their party. The surprising results show that even amongst younger Americans, the support for LGBT+ causes has gone down.

Despite a multifactorial decline in support, the data supports the notion that Republican and conservative media efforts have been instrumental in reducing support for

³⁵ Title IX is a landmark federal civil rights law in the United States, enacted as part of the Education Amendments of 1972. The core provision of Title IX states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." Recent changes in 2023 included transgender athletes in this protection.

LGBT+ causes. There is enough evidence to support that the honing of the messaging on transgender athletes had an impact.

In the 2024 presidential election, a Trump campaign ad focused on the transgender topic, echoing the infamous line "Kamala is for they/them, Trump is for you." The ad and its reverberation stunned and surprised even the aides who held faith in its success, the New York Times reports. "It shifted the race 2.7 percentage points in Mr. Trump's favor after viewers watched it." (Goldmacher et al, 2024). It's noteworthy that 2.7 percentage points would have been enough for Harris to win the popular vote, which was lost by just below 1.5%.

The talking points about transgender people that marked the 2024 election reverberated effects "A national exit poll conducted by the Concerned Women for America (CWA) legislative action committee found that 70% of moderate voters saw the issue of ["Donald Trump's opposition to transgender boys and men playing girls and women's sports and of transgender boys and men using girls and women's bathrooms,"] as important to them." (Thompson, 2024)

In a complete 180° from when, at the beginning of his first presidential campaign in 2016, Trump had welcomed transgender women into whatever bathroom they'd like, in 2024, the winds have certainly shifted. "Trump said on "day one" he would reverse the Biden administration's expansion of Title IX that prohibits federally funded schools from preventing transgender students from using bathrooms, locker rooms and pronouns that align with their gender identities." (Dorn, 2024). It's not unusual for Donald Trump to shift opinions on matters; however, he tends to do it in the direction of what's popular and energizes his base.

The message that claims transgender women are making sports unfair contributes to good electoral results for Republicans, and its prominence in the discourse animates the base against other matters regarding transgender individuals.

5.1.2. The Daily Wire's Contributions

As discussed in Chapter four, one of the main pillars of thought at the Daily Wire is the advocacy for conservative social values. They have played a big part in influencing the conversation on the side of traditional views of gender. Particularly, Matt Walsh has made it

his mission to focus on the transgender issue, producing the popular documentary "What is a Woman?" for the platform. The documentary, directed by Justin Folk, became a significant cultural phenomenon, particularly after its release on social media platforms, where it accumulated more than 177 million views in less than a week on Twitter alone (Arnold, 2023). The film followed Walsh as he traveled across the country, asking various individuals, including medical professionals, academics, and activists, to define what a woman is. The documentary achieved substantial audience engagement, maintaining a 96% audience score before facing what Daily Wire described as an organized campaign of negative reviews. (Chaitin, 2023).

In 2023, the aforementioned comedy movie "Lady Ballers" was released on the Daily Wire platform as well. The movie's primary purpose serves to satirize transgender athletes. The film follows a struggling basketball coach who convinces his former players (male) to compete in women's sports in order to win.

The film features notable appearances from conservative media figures and politicians, including cameos from Senator Ted Cruz, former competitive swimmer Riley Gaines, and Daily Wire personalities such as Ben Shapiro and Matt Walsh. Ironically, the project initially began as a potential documentary where men would attempt to integrate into women's sports but was reimaged as a fictional comedy when no participants could be found willing to undergo the actual requirements for transgender athletes. (Shapiro, 2024, 3:39–4:11).

As was previously analyzed in Chapter four, the Daily Wire's anti-transgender crusade has an argumentative basis that relies heavily on anecdotal evidence and fallacious reasoning. For example, host Matt Walsh used individual cases of detransitioners to generalize about the transgender community, employing anecdotal and carefully cherry-picked evidence to support broad claims about the lack of success of gender-affirming medical care that does not match the scientific data. The framing employed pathologizes transgender identity despite the overwhelming consensus of major medical organizations that says otherwise. The critical examination of the narratives and rhetorical strategies deployed by the Daily Wire team aids the understanding of their impact on public discourse.

"Lady Ballers" is not an isolated endeavor; it's more so a culmination of the broader pattern of content specifically targeted at vilifying transgender athletes. Through the use of

satire, the Daily Wire seeks to influence public perception and policy discussions surrounding transgender issues.

5.1.3. Aftermath

The Daily Wire has pursued some level of direct political action on the matters discussed. In 2022, Vanderbilt University's transgender clinic was called into question by host Matt Walsh, who appealed for a protest in Nashville, where both the Daily Wire headquarters and Vanderbilt are located. It was named the Rally Against Child Mutilation. (Herner, 2022). "Conservatives called for an investigation into the clinic, and Republican leaders spoke at a rally Mr. Walsh organized in Nashville in October 2022 in opposition to gender-affirming care for children. When Tennessee legislators convened in January 2023, lawmakers designated a proposed ban on gender-affirming care as Senate Bill 1. The bill passed over objections from transgender people and most Democrats." (Cochrane, 2024). This means Matt Walsh has been directly involved through the Daily Wire in enacting anti-transgender bills.

Despite being outside the scope of the dissertation's timeline, it is particularly relevant to mention the culmination of the transgender athlete debate. The newly sworn-in United States Congress passed significant legislation this January 2025 aimed at barring transgender athletes from women's sports at any and all federally funded institutions. This legislative action by the House of Representatives represents the culmination of the escalation of the transgender sports Culture War past the state-level policy debate. At the same time, being also one of the first decisions of the new Republican Congress during the early 2025 Trump administration, showcasing its prevalence in the discourse.

The controversy has moved beyond simple policy disagreements to become a defining feature of contemporary American cultural discourse. If the passing vote in the House of Representatives means anything, it means this issue has become tantamount to a priority for lawmakers. Its significance in the world of athletics and the determination of its future policy, as well as its impact in the current debate about gender identity in American society, is undeniable.

This moment in American cultural debate reflects more than just a quibble about sports; it represents fundamental questions about fairness and identity. As these discussions

continue to metastasize, they will likely remain at the forefront of policy debates. Works like the Daily Wire's "Lady Ballers" serve as artifacts of this particular historical moment in the ongoing negotiation of gender and sport.

5.1.4. Strategic Framing: Summary Guide

Certain key elements were involved in crafting a narrative when strategically framing transgender issues as a Culture War topic.

First, the creation of a moral panic. The portrayal of transgender rights as a threat to norms and particularly as a threat to children serves to incite fear and resistance.

Second, conservative media amplification plays a role in disseminating anti-transgender narratives both with commentary and productions.

Finally, legislative action takes place in order to introduce bills that restrict transgender rights, especially when it comes to sports and healthcare.

The consequences of this success are, of course, polarization, deepening social divides, policy impact when bills become law, and the inflammation of the social climate contributing to an environment where LGBT+ individuals can face increased discriminatory practices and violence. "Hate crimes motivated by gender identity and sexual orientation rose from 2022 to 2023, according to FBI data, sparking concern among LGBTQ advocates about the potential impact of anti-LGBTQ rhetoric and legislation." (Alfonseca 2024).

5.1.5. European Continuity and Relevant Figureheads

Paris Olympics 2024 Gender Controversy

The recent 2024 Paris Olympics became center stage for the gender debate in Europe, with cross-culture contact from American opinion-makers chiming in.

Controversy surrounded the opening ceremony's artistic direction and participation by Algerian boxer Imane Khelif. The Games, which promised to be the most inclusive in Olympic history, have instead highlighted the ongoing tensions surrounding gender in elite athletics.

The Opening Ceremony

The Olympic's opening ceremony included a scene that launched a barrage of global debate. The inclusion of drag queens and transgender individuals in what many voracious critics interpreted as a parody of Leonardo da Vinci's painting "The Last Supper" was particularly criticized. The performance prompted major backlash from religious groups, media personalities, and conservative politicians across the global stage.

Italian deputy prime minister Matteo Salvini criticized the event on Twitter: "Opening the Olympics by insulting billions of Christians around the world was a really bad start, dear French people (...) Sordid." Hungarian minister Viktor Orban spoke against "the weakness and disintegration of the Western world," showcased in the Olympics opening. (Agence France-Presse, 2024)

The backlash reverberated even across the Atlantic. Media mogul and entrepreneur Elon Musk described the ceremony as "Extremely disrespectful to Christians" (Agence France-Presse, 2024). The Daily Wire's Michael Knowles described the event as "Celebrating tolerance by mocking Christ" (Knowles, 2024).

Imane Khelif

Algerian boxer Imane Khelif was the focus of the most significant Olympic controversy. Her victory against Italy's Angela Carini put her front and center of the transgender sports debate. The controversy stemmed from claims by a Russia-linked boxing organization that she had failed a "gender eligibility" test, allegations that Olympic officials firmly rejected as illegitimate. The situation escalated when Khelif took legal action over reports in French media about alleged male chromosomes, "Khelif filed a legal complaint with the French authorities over the online abuse and harassment she was subjected to during the Games" (The Guardian, 2024).

The Olympics community came under scrutiny, having recently moved away from sex testing, acknowledging past harms to female athletes. "Mandatory sex testing for women athletes was abandoned by the IAAF in 1992 and the IOC in 2000, but selective testing of "suspicious" athletes continued. Selective sex testing and medical interventions

disproportionately affect racialized women from the Global South." (Travers, 2024). Cis-women have been affected by this scrutiny before Khelif. For example, the South-African runner Caster Semenya in 2019 was required to lower her natural testosterone levels in order to compete.

Sports federations still maintain different policies often creating confusion and a complex landscape to navigate for the athletes competing. Some like World Athletics have effectively banned transgender women athletes from participating in their events as of March 2023 (Zirin & Boykoff, 2024). There is an ongoing policy tension between more strict and lax regulatory agents in sports on gender.

The IOC's determination that Khelif and fellow athlete Lin Yu-ting were eligible for competition - as they were both assigned female at birth and identified as women - has not prevented ongoing speculation and debate. These discussions often overlook intersex individuals as well as inevitably lead to conversations revolving around the athletes' appearances when they are deemed by the public not to fit their assigned gender expression.

The Imane Khelif situation shows that the rise of the transgender sports debate also disturbs the peace of cis-women athletes who have to worry about being perceived as female or they might face online bullying and speculation about their genitals on social media. This sort of controversy is representative of the broader international debate on the issue of transgender athletes and how it affects even cis-women. It also demonstrates how major sporting events have suffered with the added scrutiny and have become battlegrounds for the debate of gender identity. The Olympics strives to be a unifying force in global sport, but they have become captured by the social tensions at play.

5.1.5.1. French Reaction

With a closer look at French society, we can determine that the opening ceremony sparked intense debate locally as well. The director Thomas Jolly defended himself, stating that religious subversion was not his intention and denied that the performance meant to ridicule "The Last Supper" painting by Leonardo da Vinci.

"Our subject was not to be subversive. We never wanted to be subversive. We wanted to talk about diversity. Diversity means being together. We wanted to include everyone, as

simple as that." (Thomas, 2024). President Macron defended the artistic direction of Thomas Jolly and lamented the online attacks he and the performers suffered, adding, "The French were very proud of this ceremony." (DW, 2024).

Far-right French politicians took an aggressive stance. Julien Odoul of France's far-right National Rally party described the display as "a ransacking of French culture." (Agence France-Presse, 2024). Far-right figure Marion Maréchal tweeted, "To all the Christians of the world who are watching the Paris 2024 ceremony and felt insulted by this drag queen parody of the Last Supper, know that it is not France that is speaking but a left-wing minority ready for any provocation." (Thomas, 2024).

The right-leaning newspaper Le Figaro also criticized the ceremony with articles like Paul Sugy's "These images that the opening ceremony of the Paris 2024 Olympics could have spared us." (Translated from Sugy, Le Figaro, 2024)

Regarding Khelif, she was fiercely criticized in the French press as much as anywhere else. The athlete eventually also pressed legal charges against the leaked medical reports. "Imane Khelif, the Algerian boxer who defied a row over her gender eligibility to win Olympic gold, is taking legal action over media reports about leaked medical records, the International Olympic Committee said on Wednesday, November 6. Reports published in France this week claimed Khelif, 25, has XY, or male, chromosomes." (Le Monde, 2024). Despite that, many stepped in her defense, such as Olympic Committee chief Thomas Bach, who described the hate speech she received as "totally unacceptable" (DW, 2024) and even blamed a Russian-led campaign against the IOC.

5.1.5.2. The UK's Transgender Obsession- JK Rowling and Piers Morgan

One of the UK's prominent transgender charities, Gendered Intelligence, has pointed out, "There is a self-sustaining media narrative right now, with 7,500 articles published about trans issues in mainstream press in the UK last year (...) The vast majority of those are hostile." (Chappet, 2023)

The United Kingdom's obsession with transgender issues seems reflective of a broader trend in the internationalization of Culture War topics, as well as localized discourse

powered by the influence of the figureheads who lead the opposition against transgender rights.

Piers Morgan is an example of a media figurehead from the UK who has inflamed the conversation. His prominence in the global discourse has skyrocketed after his online show “Piers Morgan Uncensored” has been able to garner millions of views on most of his videos as well as a revolving door of commentators from the halls of American political life and prominent American political commentary personalities. He has truly become a bridge between the two nations, and the issues he discusses on his show reflect that commonality.

Despite calling himself a moderate and admittedly favoring transgender rights to transition, one topic remains too bombastic to pass. He has made dozens of dedicated videos to discuss the transgender athlete issue while also constantly bringing it up under the framing of a fundamental women’s rights issue. In light of the Olympics controversy, he stated, “You literally are destroying the Olympics for anyone who is not a man” (Piers Morgan Uncensored, 2024).

Ex-Prime Minister Rishi Sunak used his spotlight during the Conservative Party annual conference in October 2023 to state, “We shouldn’t get bullied into believing that people can be any sex they want to be. They can’t. A man is a man, a woman is a woman.” During the parliamentary election in 2024, The Guardian reported, “The sense of a disproportionate focus by politicians and the media on trans issues during this election is something that campaigners, support organisations and individuals raise time and again.” (Brooks, 2024).

Increasingly, the UK political scene has used transgender rights as a political football with real consequences. Stonewall reports on a 2023 ONS study, “The increase in hate crimes against trans people by 11% in a year, and by 186% in the last five years, comes against a backdrop of UK Government drawing back its support for trans people and the growth of divisive and demonizing rhetoric about trans people in society.” (Stonewall, 2023).

This data follows a similar trend in America as previously expanded upon and in Europe. The European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights indicates in a 2024 press release that LGBT harassment and violence are on the rise with the following data: “Over 1 in 10 experienced violence in the 5 years before the survey, slightly more than in 2019. Over 1 in 3 intersex people were attacked. Over 1 in 2 were victims of hate-motivated harassment,

up from 1 in 3 in 2019. 2 in 3 intersex and trans people were harassed. Over 2 in 3 say they were bullied at school, across all generations, and in all EU countries. This is a steep increase compared to 1 in 2 in 2019.” (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2024).

The Fall of J.K. Rowling: From Beloved Author to Controversial Figure

There is hardly a starker public example of anti-transgender radicalization than author JK Rowling's. The highly influential creator of Harry Potter was once celebrated for her tolerant views and message of acceptance in her novels. However, she has progressively found herself front and center of an escalating controversy that many believe has permanently marred her legacy.

The controversy took shape in 2018 when Rowling faced criticism for liking a tweet that referred to trans women in derogatory terms. However, the true catalyst came in December 2019, when she publicly supported Maya Forstater, a researcher whose contract was not renewed after expressing views about transgender people that a judge later ruled created a "hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment" (Ivy, 2019). She progressively hardened her stance and, in June 2020, published a series of tweets and a lengthy essay expressing her views on gender with swift backlash.

In 2022, Rowling opposed Scottish legislation that would facilitate transgender individuals legally changing their gender. By 2023, most of her social media presence revolved around these topics: "diatribes about trans people on Twitter have completely taken over her timeline." (Klee, 2024).

Rowling's fall from grace is particularly striking because of its contrast with her earlier image. She had once been known to write about the dangers of prejudice and the importance of standing up for marginalized groups. This transformation has left many fans grappling with complex questions about separating art from artists and whether childhood heroes can survive the harsh light of adult discourse.

In the summer of 2024, Rowling publicly criticized Khelif, joining the chorus of high-profile figures questioning her eligibility. "Could any picture summarize our new men's rights movement better?" Rowling wrote on Twitter while sharing a picture of Carini in tears and Khelif trying to comfort her after the match was cut short. "The smirk of a male who

knows he's protected by a misogynist sporting establishment enjoying the distress of a woman he's just punched in the head, and whose life's ambition he's just shattered." (Sharf, 2024).

Rowling was considered in Khelif's legal pursuits when the aforementioned lawsuit mentioned JK Rowling directly. The conclusion of these lawsuits has not transpired yet.³⁶

5.1.6. Case Study Conclusion - Application of the Culture War Features (1.2.1) and CDA model

Through analysis of media coverage, political statements, and social media narratives across the US, UK, and France, this case study reveals how the transgender sports debate emerged as a strategically crafted Culture War issue—hopefully demonstrating how political organizations and media figures successfully reframed anti-transgender sentiment from unpopular "bathroom bills" to more palatable arguments about "fairness in sports," leading to measurable shifts in public opinion and policy outcomes.

How the case study translates to the outlined features of a Culture War:

1. Moral Absolutism - The conservative positioning of transgender rights as a threat to children that ought to be eradicated. One side is self-proclaimed the morally righteous arbiter of truth.
2. Media Megaphone- The role of conservative media, particularly the Daily Wire in amplifying anti-trans narratives aligns with the media megaphone effect, both “independent” and traditional outlets fuel ideological segregation and polarization.
3. Political Influence- The result of the trans-sports Culture War is the transformation of an unimportant marginal issue (2016) into a +70% negative polling issue in which the Republicans can rely on for campaigning and manufacturing outrage (2024). The result is also the weaponizing of the Culture War in order to craft restrictive legislation.

³⁶ See also(Keslassy & Ritman, 2024)

4. Frequent Financial Interest- Lobby groups, think tanks, and right-wing media corporations benefit from sustaining these debates to push broader conservative agendas as well as profit.

Application of the CDA model:

1. **Description** (Text Analysis)

The text analysis of transgender discourse across the United States and their European counterparts (UK and France, in this case) reveal how language contributes to the creation of a Culture War.

In the US conservative politicians and media figureheads use words like “fairness” and “protection” in order to create an enemy out of transgender inclusion in sports and frame it as a violation of meritocratic principles. Meanwhile, in France the same exclusionary rhetoric used by right-wing figures takes on a cultural preservationist flavor with far-right politicians framing LGBTQ+ inclusion as an attack on national and religious identity, using expressions like “cultural ransacking” to that effect. The Imane Khelif situation also shows how biomedical language like “XY chromosomes” can be selectively weaponized to reinforce exclusion in sports. These realities are connected through intertextuality since the local political actors adopt and apply each other's language to their national context with the same objective of sustaining the Culture War apparatus for political motives.

2. **Interpretation** (Discursive Practice)

The analysis of how the narrative on trans-sports evolved and was promulgated shows how conservative think tanks and media outlets worked in concert to amplify specific framing devices, while organizations like the Daily Wire and figures like J.K. Rowling and Piers Morgan serve as amplifiers of these messages across international borders.

An organization like the Daily Wire is politically motivated to mock transgender athletes in the movies they produce like “Lady Ballers” in order to create negative animus

towards this minority. The choice of ridiculing transgender athletes instead of interviewing them and hearing their perspective is a measured ideological choice.

3. **Explanation** (Social Practice)

The US “fairness” narrative aligns with of neoliberal meritocracy and the American sports ideal as was explained previously. In France the “cultural ransacking” framing aligns with far-right nationalist politics by using transgender visibility as a symbol of moral and national decline. It becomes a justification for reactionary policies.

These narratives produce material consequences in the form of legislative actions, institutional discrimination and rising violence.

A means-tested political strategy play in inner state politics has evolved into a global phenomenon. It has influenced policy decisions, media focus, and public sentiment across Western democracies. This showcases the importance of strategic framing in creating Culture War issues.

5.2. Case Study 2 - Conservative Political Commentary in the Portuguese Context and its Alignment with the Daily Wire on Race and Immigration

The following case study aims to showcase the commonality between the Culture War stories the Daily Wire promotes and how they echo in Portuguese media both by way of politicians and prominent political commentators. It does not mean to show causality. Instead, it aims to relay the continuity between the American and European right-wing spaces and how viral stories in the social media sphere contribute to a right-wing discourse united by Culture War topics across the Atlantic.

5.2.1. How The Immigration debate and Race Discourse Intersect at the The Daily Wire

There is a notable commonality between the narrative around immigration that the Daily Wire promulgates and the conversation they regularly have about race. These topics share an argumentative framework and the same underlying assumptions about American

identity and reluctance regarding social change.

The outline of the Immigration and National Security Pillar of thought (4.4) indicated a protectionist ideology that centers on four tenets: The advocacy of stringent border control as a safeguard against economic scarcity; the necessity of controlled and reduced immigration as a guarantee of cultural identity preservation; the idea of border security deeply connected to national defense and finally the prioritization of immigrants deemed capable of full assimilation.

Philosopher Charles Taylor described the social imaginary as a collective vision of how society should function. "By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (Taylor, 2003, p. 23). It's possible to say that what the Daily Wire constructs in their immigration coverage is a social imaginary where ideals like "cultural cohesion" and "economic stability" are deemed fundamental for collective peaceful living and at the same time positioning these as fundamentally threatened by unrestricted immigration.

In the host's view, immigration is a factor that brings chaos into the homeostasis of the American social system; according to them, it increases rather than decreases social hostility.

Similarly, racial debates like those over DEI (Diversity Equity and Inclusion) initiatives and CRT (Critical Race Theory) have been accused of the same.

Before those are analyzed, however, it's imperative to further point out the parallels between the discourse about immigrants and about race. The Daily Wire's Matt Walsh makes the following argument:

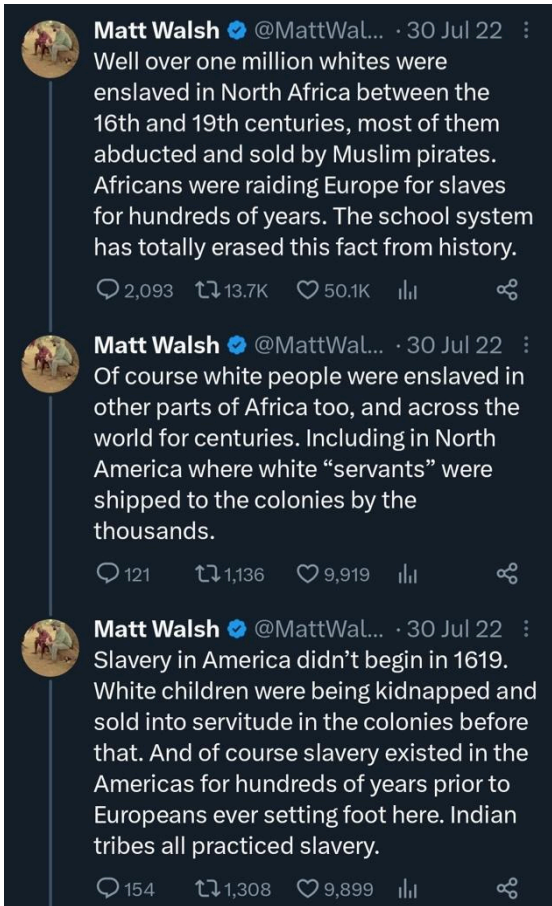


Image 2: Matt Walsh, July 30th Twitter thread (part 1 of 2).



Image 3: Matt Walsh, July 30th Twitter thread (part 2 of 2).

In this Twitter sequence, Matt Walsh attempts to make the argument that slavery is historically independent from race. The argument presented is that the concept of slavery precedes that of the modern conceptual network involving racism in the intersectional perception of the concept. Intersectional racism is the way in which racism and other forms of oppression intersect and mutually reinforce each other, creating unique forms of disadvantage for those who experience multiple forms of oppression.

“I have stated earlier that the failure to embrace the complexities of compoundedness is not simply a matter of political will, but is also due to the influence of a way of thinking about discrimination which structures politics so that struggles are categorized as singular issues. Moreover, this structure imports a descriptive and normative view of society that reinforces the status quo.” (Crenshaw, 1989, pp. 166-167).

Walsh claims correctly that slavery was an ancient practice and not always strictly race-based. Often, throughout history, people enslaved their equals, fellow men, as well as foreigners. What this argument fails to consider is the particular intricacies of the transatlantic European slave trade, which was race-based in conception and from which developed a complex network of racist faux sciences such as phrenology that, to some extent, persist in today's racial discourse. The transport of Africans to the "new world" was foundational to the construction of the United States, and the generational effects of it are felt today by black Americans in many forms, such as lower credit scores and housing discrimination, as well as a large racial wealth gap and gerrymandering amongst other examples.

Matt Walsh often strawmans the intersectional argument by implying that it fails to consider slavery in all its non race specific forms. However, what the intersectional argument claims is not that black people are the only group that has been impacted by slavery but that the effects of the specific form of enslavement that was the transatlantic slave trade are still felt by black American citizens. Walsh's argument is not a disinterested historical look into slavery but an attempt to trivialize the liberation of black Americans by putting into question the activist's claim to this particular historical relationship with slavery.

Ultimately, in this guilt-free version of history, the narrative Walsh promulgates invites us to disregard race and its effect on institutions today, an effect which he denies. The parallel with immigration becomes evident in the way he attempts to decouple historical institutions and their racial components, in the same way anti-immigration discourse seeks to separate contemporary border policies from their racial implications. At the same time, both the discussion of race in America and the introduction of immigrants are recurrently framed as an element that augments social hostility.

The way these narratives interact is representative of a consistent worldview in which immigration-aiding policies and racial equity initiatives are poised as impositions on an ideal of social order that demands silence on matters of race and diversity to maintain itself. This allows the Daily Wire hosts to present their positions as defensive rather than reactionary.

In the following section, I will explore the ways in which language and rhetoric contribute to the construction and dissemination of these beliefs and how, once again, the creation of a Culture War aids the narrative espoused.

5.2.2. How A Conservative Ideal of Silence on Race Created a Culture War Against CRT and DEI

The Daily Wire's convergence of anti-immigration and minimizing of racial politics rhetoric reflects a broader conservative media strategy. Its emergence can be traced back to the George Floyd protests in 2020 and the Republicans' election loss that followed. A climate of great anxiety over the popularity of anti-racist rhetoric at the time led to the development of a carefully crafted strategy of reframing the complex social issue of race into politically actionable narratives for Republican lawmakers.

The narrative convergence is not merely coincidental but instead represents a coordinated effort to reframe discussions of race and immigration within an ideological framework that posits leftist reforms or initiatives on race as threats to an idealized status quo.

The first target was an academic and legal framework called CRT or Critical Race Theory. CRT is an academic and legal framework that emphasizes that systemic racism is part of American society and that racism goes beyond individual bias and prejudice. Law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw came up with the term (CRT) to describe rejection of a colorblind approach to race relations "It is a way of seeing, attending to, accounting for, tracing and analyzing the ways that race is produced," she [Crenshaw] said, "the ways that racial inequality is facilitated, and the ways that our history has created these inequalities that now can be almost effortlessly reproduced unless we attend to the existence of these inequalities." (Fortin, 2021).

In 2020, this concept (CRT) was in no one's lexicon unless they happened to be a scholar of the subject. "Culture wars over critical race theory have turned school boards into battlegrounds, and in higher education, the term has been tangled up in tenure battles." (Fortin, 2021). Suddenly, it became a hot-button issue discussed amongst pundits and animating school board meetings across the United States. How did this phenomenon occur?

Crenshaw claims it was a mobilized effort by conservative organizations and pundits that once again deployed the outrage machine in order to win on the political issue of race. "It's only prompted interest now that the conservative right wing has claimed it as a subversive set of ideas," she [Crenshaw] said, adding that news outlets, including The New

York Times, were covering critical race theory because it has been "made the problem by a well-resourced, highly mobilized coalition of forces." (Fortin, 2021).

Conservative think tank scholar Christopher Rufo from the Manhattan Institute was interviewed by Tucker Carlson on Fox News in September 2020 and mentioned "the cult indoctrination of CRT." (The Heritage Foundation, 2020) In the following weeks, then-President Donald Trump issued a memo to federal agencies warning against the malign and divisive CRT. He then went on to sign an executive order barring training that suggested the United States had any underlying racist problems³⁷ (Federal Register, 2020). President Biden later rescinded the order, but by then, it was already a deeply enshrined Culture War issue.

The usage of the term exploded since. "The term "critical race theory" was mentioned just 132 times on Fox News shows in 2020. In 2021, it has been mentioned 1,860 times, according to a tally using the media monitoring service Critical Mention." (Barr, 2021).

Republican state legislatures embarrassed the strategic term, choosing public schools as the primary battleground. The idea that teachers in schools were making an enemy out of white students and teaching the turbulent racial past of the United States in a guilt-ridden way became widespread.

Governor Ron DeSantis, in particular, made this issue central to his winning gubernatorial reelection campaign (2022). "The woke class wants to teach kids to hate each other, rather than teaching them how to read," Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida said to the state's board of education in June, shortly before it moved to ban critical race theory. He has also called critical race theory "state-sanctioned racism." (Fortin, 2021).

Insufficient in its success, a strategic campaign was launched, approaching the matter from a slightly different angle.

DEI – or diversity, equity and inclusion – is a hiring practice akin to affirmative action; it describes initiatives that promote equal access, opportunity, and employment for underrepresented groups in a given workplace. "Gathering strength from a backlash against Black Lives Matter, and fueled by criticism that doctrines such as critical race theory had made colleges engines of progressive indoctrination, the eradication of DEI programs has

³⁷ [Executive Order 13950](#) of September 22, 2020

become both a cause and a message suffusing the American right. In 2023, more than 20 states considered or approved new laws aiming (for) DEI, even as polling has shown that diversity initiatives remain popular." (Confessore et. al, 2024).

The Claremont Institute conservative think tank, linked to both the Trump and DeSantis campaigns, was determined to make this issue stick, and DEI was the next angle explored in the fight against race-focused discussions and hiring practices. "Centered at the Claremont Institute, a California-based think tank with close ties to the Trump movement and to Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida, the group coalesced roughly three years ago around a sweeping ambition: to strike a killing blow against "the leftist social justice revolution" by eliminating "social justice education" from American schools." (Confessore et al, 2024).

A project was launched in order to make this happen. "Our project will give legislators the knowledge and tools they need to stop funding the suicide of their own country and civilization," Claremont pledged in an August 2021 draft proposal to the Taube Family Foundation." (Confessore et al, 2024).

Both a wide net of conservative activists and commentary space voices, political operatives across multiple states, and key funding from conservative philanthropies and family foundations participated in this half-decade-long strategy. "Grant proposals, budgets, draft reports, and correspondence, obtained through public-records requests — show how the activists formed a loose network of think tanks, political groups, and Republican operatives in at least a dozen states. They sought funding from a range of right-leaning philanthropies and family foundations, and from one of the largest individual donors to Republican campaigns in the country [Thomas Klingenstein]." (Confessore et al, 2024) (Thomas Klingenstein scoop- Wilson for The Guardian, 2023)

The project mainly focused on shifting the initial angle on "social justice education" in schools and universities and CRT to the broader anti-DEI stance as part of an effort to counter perceived progressive indoctrination in education. "(...) fueled by criticism that doctrines such as critical race theory had made colleges engines of progressive indoctrination, the eradication of D.E.I. programs has become both a cause and a message suffusing the American right." (Confessore et al, 2024). The coordinated effort of these key players and Republican legislators led to the successful passage of anti-DEI legislation in Texas and Florida, most prominently, but also in other states.

The New York Times reports this was accomplished by the following means:

First, careful cataloging of DEI programs and personnel at public universities, posting of reports targeting specific key people and institutions, and manipulation of donor influence on university administrators.

At the same time, political pressure was applied directly to state legislators, who, in coordination with Republican governors, modeled legislation for different states to follow.

Finally, and most interestingly for this dissertation, the carefully curated messaging strategy involved the selection of terminology to maximize impact and outrage with a public framing around academic freedom and merit and a private acknowledgment of broader ideological goals. The group's private communications reveal blunt views on race, gender, and sexuality “In candid private conversations, some wrote favorably of laws criminalizing homosexuality, mocked the appearance of a female college student as overly masculine and criticized Peter Thiel, the prominent gay conservative donor, over his sex life.” (Confessore et al, 2024) as well as strategies to politicize terms like "diversity" to rally conservative support. “Terms like “diversity,” he argued, needed to be saddled with more negative connotations.” (Confessore et al, 2024)

The most impactful legislative victories of this concerted campaign were Senate Bill 17³⁸, a Texas comprehensive ban on DEI programs in public institutions; the wide-ranging Florida restriction of DEI under Governor Ron DeSantis³⁹, for example, General Bill 266⁴⁰; and other various DEI limitations in Arkansas, Oklahoma, and North Carolina.

The biggest challenge faced by the political operatives involved the still-wide acceptance and approval of diversity initiatives by the public, as shown by focus group results. (Annex 7) "For all the conservative attacks on diversity programs, the group found, the idea of woke or DEI received generally positive scores." (Confessore et al, 2024)

³⁸ In 2023, Governor Greg Abbott signed Senate Bill 17 into law, “Responsibility of Governing Boards Regarding Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives,” which amends Texas Education Code § 51.3525 effective January 1, 2024. Under this law, public institutions of higher education cannot engage in certain specified diversity, equity, and inclusion activities as defined in the statute. (University of Texas at Austin).

³⁹See also (Diaz, 2023)

⁴⁰ The bill (Chapter 2023-82, L.O.F.) requires, rather than authorizes, the Board of Governors (BOG) to adopt a regulation regarding a five-year post-tenure review. The bill also requires the BOG to, following periodic academic program reviews, provide a directive to each university regarding any violation of the Florida Educational Equity Act (FEEA), or programs based on theories that systemic racism, sexism, oppression, and privilege are inherent in the institutions of the United States and were created to maintain social, political, and economic inequities.(The Florida Senate).

This Culture War wedge issue has had moderate success compared to the transgender sports issue because of exactly that. However, it certainly gained traction in the conservative base, which was carefully pundit-prepped to make this a high-investment issue. Donald Trump campaigned on his opposition to DEI, regularly mentioning it at his rallies.

Outside of the scope of this dissertation, it's relevant to mention Donald Trump's first few days in office after reelection and his immediate efforts to roll back diversity and inclusion measures like order 11246⁴¹ "In his first few days, President Donald Trump is undertaking a deliberate effort to obfuscate and weaponize civil rights laws that address discrimination and ensure everyone has a fair chance to compete, whether it's for a job, a promotion, or an education." (Moore, 2025).

5.2.3. The Daily Wire's involvement

As mentioned, The Daily Wire's conservative view of race involves the idea that the silencing of the matter maintains social order and meritocracy. The approach is consistent with conservative ideological tradition.

It's simple to trace a line between the Claremont Institute and The Daily Wire, as they are deeply intertwined. Ben Shapiro received The Publius Scholarship from them in 2006, and Michael Knowles was nominated as one of their Lincoln Fellows for 2020. Spencer Klavan, son of Andrew Klavan and producer at the Daily Wire, currently serves as an associate editor at Claremont.⁴²

As the national launch project of DEI as a wedge issue hoped to solve its audience-grabbing problem, the Daily Wire was certainly a part of the solution, with hundreds of mentions of CRT and DEI across all their communication channels. "One problem (...) was that many lawmakers were reluctant to take on anything called "diversity

⁴¹ Executive Order 11246 requires affirmative action and prohibits federal contractors from discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin. Contractors also are prohibited from discriminating against applicants or employees because they inquire about, discuss, or disclose their compensation or that of others, subject to certain limitations. (U.S. Department of Labor).

⁴²2020 Lincoln Fellows. <https://www.claremont.org/2020-lincoln-fellows/>

Publius Fellowship Alumni. <https://www.claremont.org/publius-fellowship-alumni/>

and inclusion.” Terms like “diversity,” he argued, needed to be saddled with more negative connotations.” (Confessore et al, 2024).

5.2.4. Portuguese Culture War Contagion

This section aims to showcase examples of the reverberation of both the backlash against immigration and the Culture War topics of CRT and DEI by conservative politicians and political commentators in Portugal. It aims to show no causality between the narratives espoused by either side. This dissertation is merely interested in showcasing the commonality and transversality of Culture Wars across the western right.

As explained, the approach to both issues reveals what critical theorist Stuart Hall would term an articulation—the connection of distinct elements into a coherent ideological framework (Hall, 2018). The Daily Wire’s coverage creates a narrative in which both immigration and racialized discussions threaten an established social order.

5.2.4.1. Example 1 - CRT/DEI - Sebastião Bugalho/ Michael Knowles

Member of the European Parliament Sebastião Bugalho represents the Portuguese majority party as of 2024, the AD (Alternativa Democrática). He expressed the following sentiment of worry about the overemphasis on race in schools on a debate and commentary show: "In San Francisco, California, there are public schools where 6,7,8,9-year-old children on the first day of school are split. On one side, the white children, African Americans on the other side, and these kids who just learned how to read and write have to apologize to the African Americans for the historical offense of being privileged because they're white. As I understand sociologically, for a group of people, this is at least excessive, so it could lead to grudges sociologically in relation to these hereditary politics". (Translated from Ferrão & Silva in *Expresso da Meia Noite*, 2024). There is no basis for this story. There is no trace of any similar story relating to San Francisco schools on any major or minor publication while similar claims have been debunked as we will now discuss.

Interestingly, a similar story was disseminated by the Daily Wire's Michael Knowles in 2022. The plot is identical, except the events allegedly occur in a school near Philadelphia instead, and this time, the narrative derives from a school board meeting recording where a

woman proclaims this happened to her children. There is no proof. "Parents (...) showed up to a school board meeting to report on something. If this mother had not had courage, we probably never would have heard of this (...) a fifth-grade teacher lined up students by their race, these are ten-year-olds, and made the white kids apologize to the black kids (...) I love it. I love her righteous anger, and I love the point that she's making that this is not okay. The teachers who do this need to be canceled, they need to be fired, they need to not work as teachers". (Knowles, 2022).

North Penn School Director Christine Liberaski later revealed the truth about the alleged activity to local news: "We acknowledge that a classroom activity involving cultural proficiency did occur last May; however, students were never lined up in a particular manner, and students were not asked to apologize to others for any reason" (Campisi, 2022).

A significant factor of the CRT panic that installed after the Black Lives Matter protests was the idea that public school teachers were instrumentalizing the classroom as a propaganda machine for "woke" intersectional theory sessions. It was largely fabricated or exacerbated. The curriculum of most public schools in America includes an historical look at slavery and its consequences and reverberations in the present time. Large swaths of conservative political operatives contest the matter.

There have been multiple direct mentions of CRT or stories relating to the fear mongering around CRT in the political Portuguese commentary circuit. As an example Joana de Matos Monteiro "Those who defend CRT foment a culture of rivalry between groups." (Translated from Monteiro, J. in Observador, 2024) and Abel Tavares "This theory (CRT) is always cloaked in benevolent words, apparently full of good intentions: "equality", "inclusion", "diversity" and "representation"; From the outset, no one questions such ideals, however, the disposition of the narrative through such platitudes does not necessarily mean that one agrees with the interpretation of those who announce them. This strategy only serves as a means of intimidation, demonization and removal of any opposition, as it allows those who proclaim themselves as legitimate representatives of these values and oppressed minorities to dictate the agenda." (Translated from Tavares, A. in Observador, 2021).

5.2.4.2. Example 2- Immigration - Chega Party/ Matt Walsh

Chega is a nationalist, conservative, right-wing populist political party founded in 2019 by ex-social democratic party member (PSD) André Ventura. The party has evolved to become the third largest political force in Portugal making significant gains in recent elections (Nilsson-Julien, 2024). Their popularity is now often associated with their central platform's hardline stance on immigration, actively pushing for stringent restrictive laws and more policing against what they characterize as excessive immigration.

A frequent narrative from the Party leader is the idea that immigrants, besides disrupting the social fabric, are large contributors to an alleged crime epidemic making cities unsafe: He claims: "We are being devastated – not only Portugal but the whole of Europe – by a migratory wave with a tremendous impact on the European social fabric, Portuguese, Spanish, Italian, German, French, Belgian (...) even other countries further affected than us. And Europe has to create rules. Being a humanist is not letting everyone in (...) We are increasing crime; these people then have nothing; they go live on the street or in houses with 20 people (...)." (Leal, S., 2024). The Public Safety Police (PSP) registered in 2024 the most significant drop in crime of the decade, surpassed only by a historic low during the pandemic (Marcelino, V., 2025). This includes data that shows violent crime is down 10,4%.

A common strategy amongst far-right conservatives who wish to make immigrants a target is to exacerbate crime and associate them with it. When the statistics are incongruous with the narrative, they are rhetorically discredited. Despite the many attempts to fact-check André Ventura (Leal, S., 2024), the narrative around immigration and the lower perception of public safety persists regardless of the fact that crime is down. (Caetano, 2025) (Católica Lisbon Business & Economics, 2024).

Matt Walsh also frequently deploys this strategy in his Daily Show, as the following example shows: "The President of the United States said that he regretted using accurate terminology [illegal alien] to describe a man who tried to rape an American citizen and then killed her. I mean, this is cowardice and incompetence at its absolute worst. It's the total abdication of the role of the President of the United States, which is to prioritize the safety of American citizens over the feelings of foreign nationals who commit heinous crimes, and it's the kind of weakness that ultimately invites even more murders which is exactly what we're seeing. (...) They [legacy media] all trotted out the statistic that, in their minds, demonstrated

that American citizens are actually more dangerous than the millions of unknown foreigners who are illegally crossing the border every year (...) The claim defies common sense, but you're instructed to believe it anyway." (Matt Walsh, 2024).

Donald Trump infamously stated, "In Springfield, they're [Haitian migrants] eating the cats, they're eating the dogs, they're eating the pets of people that live there" during the debate with Kamala Harris in September 2024. (Atlanta News First, 2024) Quickly fact-checked by various media entities (Reinstein & Demissie 2024), this did not stop Chega deputy Pedro Frazão from repeating the falsehood (Annex 8).

He proceeded to post a three-minute video a few days later making various false or unverifiable claims about immigrants (Leal, S., 2024). Frazão included a story involving disappearing cats in a disadvantaged area of the Setúbal district that had reverberated through social media with suspicions of animals being harmed for fighting or ritualistic purposes. "The PSP, contacted by Polígrafo, clarifies that the district command of Setúbal opened an inquiry, which was communicated to the Public Prosecutor's Office, and made "investigative steps"; that is, several witnesses were heard. "However, we have not been able to prove, confirm, or disprove anything that was published on social networks and in the media," adds the same source. There is more: recently, the PSP learned, through the Veterinary Authority of the area, that there have been several cases of panleukopenia infection in felines, which may explain the death or disappearance of cats in that area". (Translated from Leal, S. Polígrafo, 2024).

Both the dehumanization and the false association with crime are strategies pursued regularly to stoke fear around immigration.

5.2.5. Case Study Conclusion - Application of the Culture War Features (1.2.1) and CDA model

Through the usage of discourse analysis of both U.S and Portuguese media and political commentary, as well as the exploration of the think tank strategies on this matter, this case study shows how right-wing narratives about race and immigration were crafted and exported effectively.

The Daily Wire, an influential organization and a true force in shaping public conservative discourse has been mirrored by Portuguese right-wing figures. Although this dissertation does not imply direct causality, the examples presented indicate a shared ideological ecosystem and a shared strategy.

How the case study translates to the outlined features of a Culture War:

1. Moral Absolutism – The conservative media apparatus and their contributors like Bugalho and Walsh frame anti-racist efforts as threats to an established order. A vision of history that ignores racial conflict and dynamics is hailed as the correct version of events.
2. Media Megaphone – Right-wing media amplifies the alarmism associated with CRT and DEI, often resorting to viral moments and even fabricated controversies. In the case of the Portuguese media and particularly the political commentators mentioned, there is also an adaptation effort to the local context.
3. Political Influence – Though less thorough and successful than the trans-sports Culture War, given the still remaining positive public opinion of diversity initiatives, the fear mongering around CRT and DEI has produced effects. Senate Bill 17 and General Bill 266 are examples of the application of this rhetoric into law. In the Portuguese context the growing over emphasis on immigration from the Chega party is also an indicator of the resonance of these strategies.
4. Frequent Financial Interest – Conservative think tanks such as Claremont Institute benefit from sustaining these Culture War debates, pushing broader ideological agendas while maintaining political and media relevance.

The Daily Wire’s approach maintains a consistent worldview of both immigration and racial justice, framing diversity as a threat to an idealized social status quo.

This case study showcases the remarkable similarity between right-wing narratives on race and immigration across the Atlantic. Through carefully coordinated conservative think

tank strategies, the Culture War angles on these topics have found resilience and adaptability in Europe. American Culture Wars are not merely exported but instead adapted to local contexts while maintaining their core.

Application of the CDA model:

1. **Description** (Text Analysis):

Language plays an important part in framing race and immigration as societal threats. In the realm of education referring to CRT as “indoctrination” for example is loaded language that implies pernicious ideologically charged intent in teaching children about race in age-appropriate ways.

When the Chega Party leader describes immigration as a devastating “wave” harming Europeans this is also coded language to make the number of immigrants seem overwhelming and unsustainable to the country.

The false school segregation narrative pushed by Sebastião Bugalho mirrors Michael Knowles’ fabricated U.S. school incident and shows intertextuality in the framing of anti-CRT panic across borders. Narratives like this one reinforce a sense of victimhood, portraying conservatives as protectors of children.

2. **Interpretation** (Discursive Practice):

When both the Daily Wire, the political operatives from the think tanks and the right-wing politicians and commentators in Portugal amplify these narratives they do so strategically and with ideological motivation. The advocacy for an education system that ignores race in the teaching of history is ideological in nature and not an absence of ideology like the right-wing pundits often claim.

Figures like Knowles, Walsh, Bugalho and Frazão perpetuate identical story structures, adjusting details to fit national audiences while emphasizing the same overarching narrative of social destabilization caused by diversity.

3. **Explanation** (Social Practice):

The Daily Wire's role in spreading anti-DEI rhetoric as well as Chega's focus on portraying immigration as an existential threat, reinforce the idea that cultural homogeneity equals stability.

The (false) association between increased immigration and increased crime is a common far-right strategy of using anti-immigration rhetoric to justify reactionary policies.

These framing strategies have real-world consequences, leading to legislative restrictions⁴³, normalized discrimination, and increased hostility toward marginalized groups.

⁴³ Such as the roll back of Executive Order 11246

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Conclusion

What a Right-Wing United by Culture Wars Means for International Relations

The transnational echo chamber⁴⁴ suggests modern conservative movements are increasingly united by a set of grievances that they instrumentalize for augmenting political capital.

Culture Wars serve the role of being the universal translator of right-wing movements allowing the easy export of hot-button market tested issues. The proliferation of social media has facilitated this new form of political organization where local issues can cross borders and take on a new dimension in the process.

As examined in the case studies– the transgender sports debate and race discourse/immigration narratives– these issues are selectively framed to maximize outrage, polarize electorates, and justify restrictive policies.

Because of its popularity, this dissertation chose to focus on The Daily Wire that (along with other US right-wing operatives) acts as an ideological hub, offering both a content model and rhetorical blueprint for European conservative figures and organizations.

The increased digitalization of the political sphere is essential for this phenomenon to occur. Castells's Network Society theory explains the manner in which digital networks enable the rapid spread of a political narrative, "While the networking form of social organization has existed in other times and spaces, the new information technology paradigm provides the material basis for its pervasive expansion throughout the entire social structure" (Castells, 1996, p. 500).

The mutable nature and adaptability potential of Culture Wars across contexts is a unique feature of modern political discourse. Despite local adaptation in order to resonate within a specific context, a key finding is that American right-wing media outlets like the Daily Wire can successfully export their narratives. Coordination efforts such as the ones

⁴⁴ "An echo chamber is a social epistemic structure from which other relevant voices have been actively excluded and discredited." (Nguyen, 2018)

conservative movements deploy in order to coordinate globally while preaching nationally are growing both in size and effectiveness. “Modern right-wing extremists do not live in a vacuum; they are also constantly being influenced by each other as well as politicians, online conspiracy theories, and a growing pool of disinformation and fake news.” (Liang, C.S. 2022, p.1001). To the existing literature on the coordination of right-wing movements this dissertation adds the Culture War dimension which is an indispensable layer to the mobilization strategies of these networks.

The modern right-wing, united around the Culture War phenomenon, espouses anti-globalist beliefs, even as it manifests their international web of coordination and mutual influence. What we're witnessing isn't merely the internationalization of right-wing movements, but a commonality of porous national stages where narrative can permeate and succeed by finding the right angle.

This dissertation traced the historical lineage of the deployed tactics of conservative media— from the Red Scare to Twitter spats— the narratives that succeed in today's media enterprise are not necessarily new inventions but iterations of a long-standing tradition of audience manipulation. The great difference is the monumental reach that digital platforms provide and, with it, the ability of carefully crafted political strategies to affect discourse on the other side of the world. This gives rise to what can be described as a transnational echo chamber — a digital ecosystem where narratives and effectively crafted framing devices can be quickly replicated around the world. Culture war issues are no longer contained and instead become features of global discourse.

In the 90s, Rush Limbaugh's talk radio rants might have affected a conversation around the water cooler during lunch break, but his successors tap right into the vein of public discourse. If Ben Shapiro posts a tweet detailing the new bombastic scandal, it's not uncommon to hear the President of the United States discuss it the next day. The immediacy of the new social sphere has an intimidating proportion, which presents consequences that are impossible to predict.

“Independent media” and infotainment present a real challenge to the legacy media's reign as the dominant force in public discourse. As the influence of traditional outlets wanes and the cultural battleground transfers to the digital medium, the demand for critical media literacy across generations is paramount. The urgency of understanding these new dynamics

is more than an academic exercise; it's a safeguard of democratic debate in an increasingly billionaire-owned and misinformation-ridden online space.

As stated, this study deliberately avoided drawing strict causal conclusions, instead ensuring the issues are framed as a broader trend of Culture War matters influenced by shared global digital media platforms. The study is ill-equipped to trace direct causal relations or quantify the extent of the influence between the two contexts. Further quantitative research relying on longitudinal analysis would be necessary to explore these aspects thoroughly.

While this dissertation established clear patterns of cultural and ideological continuity, it did not quantify the impact of American right-wing media on European political discourse. There is also the fact that causal relationship between media narratives and policy decisions remains difficult to measure. They are certainly a factor but not the only factor.

Future research could possibly delve into how the Culture War phenomenon is spread through algorithmic amplification, particularly among young male audiences, who are overrepresented in right-wing digital spaces. Another avenue could be the comparative examination of the few left-wing online ecosystems and figures that stand-out in the digital space and the evaluation of their capacity to counteract right-wing Culture War narratives. There could also be interest in researching the potential policy consequences of this phenomenon in order to trace how manufactured Culture War issues influence legislation, tracking policy outcomes in different national contexts over time.

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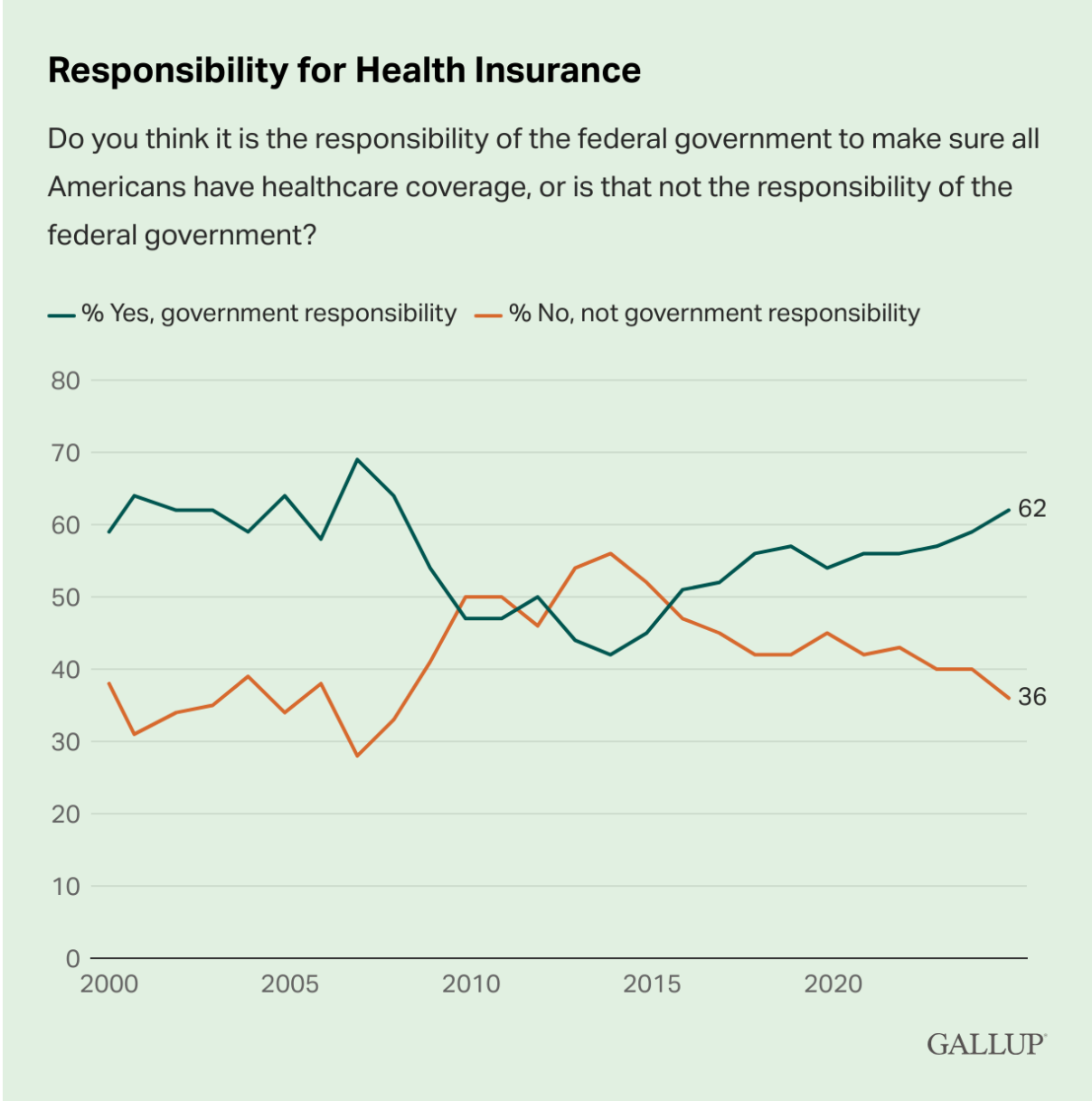
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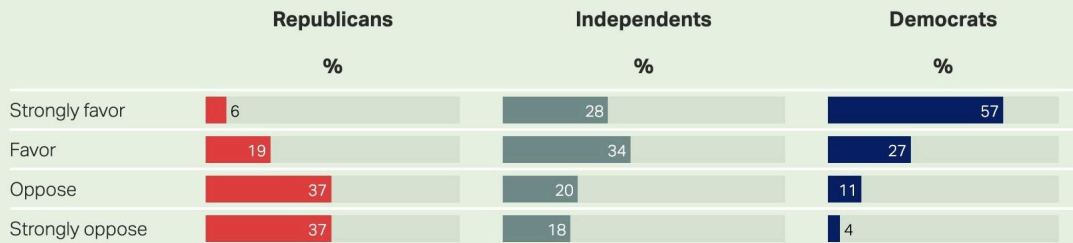
Annex:



Gallup Poll 2024 (1)

Americans' Support for Proposals to Reduce Use of Fossil Fuels

Next, we'd like to ask you about proposals to dramatically reduce the use of fossil fuels such as gas, oil and coal in the U.S. within the next 10 or 20 years, in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Would you strongly favor, favor, oppose or strongly oppose establishing policies aimed at achieving this?



March 1-23, 2023

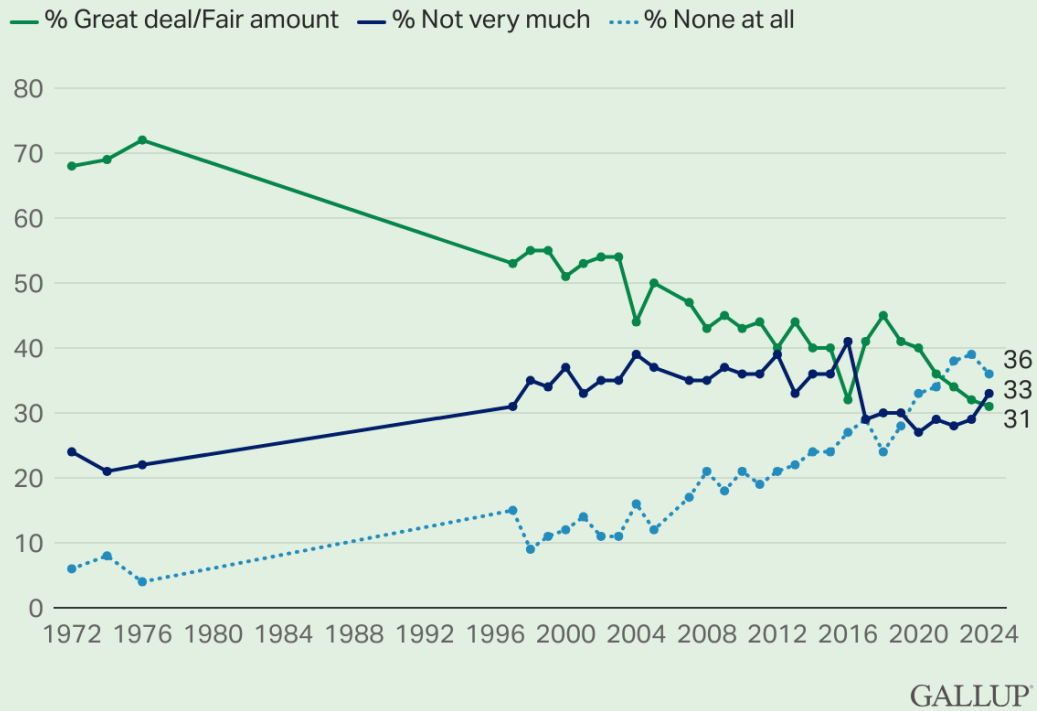
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GALLUP





Gallup Poll 2024 (2)

Americans' Trust in Mass Media, 1972-2024

In general, how much trust and confidence do you have in the mass media -- such as newspapers, TV and radio -- when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately and fairly -- a great deal, a fair amount, not very much or none at all?



Gallup Poll October 2024(3)






 **Candace Owens**  [@RealCandaceO](#) Subscribe  


Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake.





No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other.

You cannot serve both God and money.







3:57 PM · Nov 14, 2023 · **16.4M** Views

 5K  8.2K  64K  1.8K 

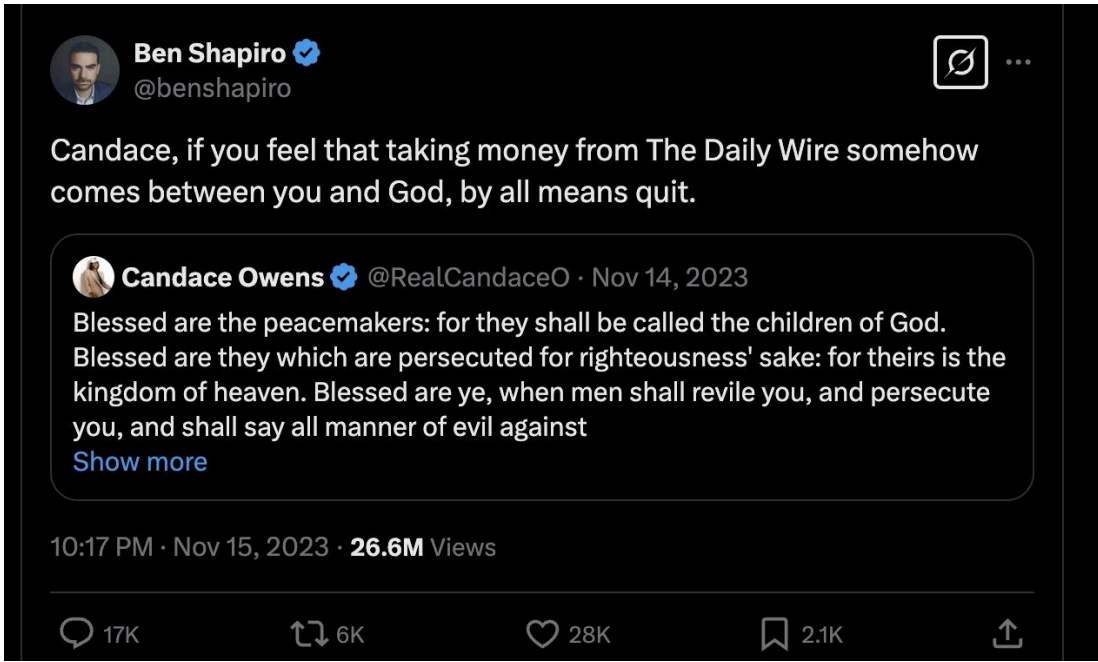
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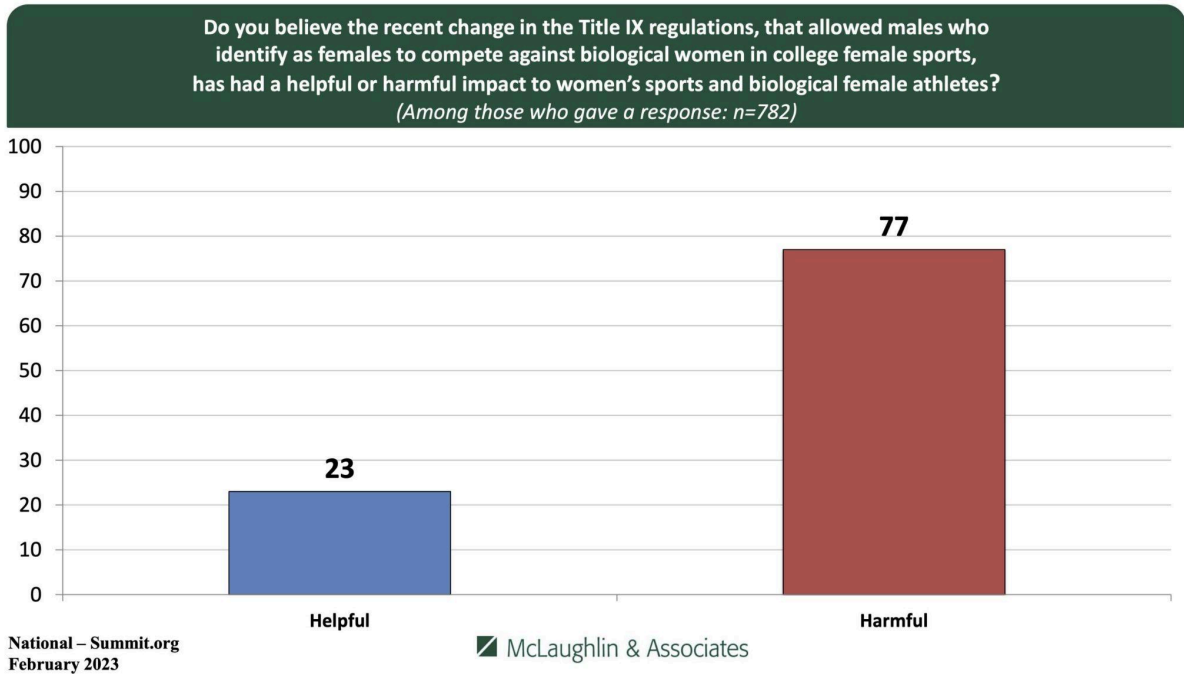
Christ is King.

 1.3K  3.7K  39K  2.5M  

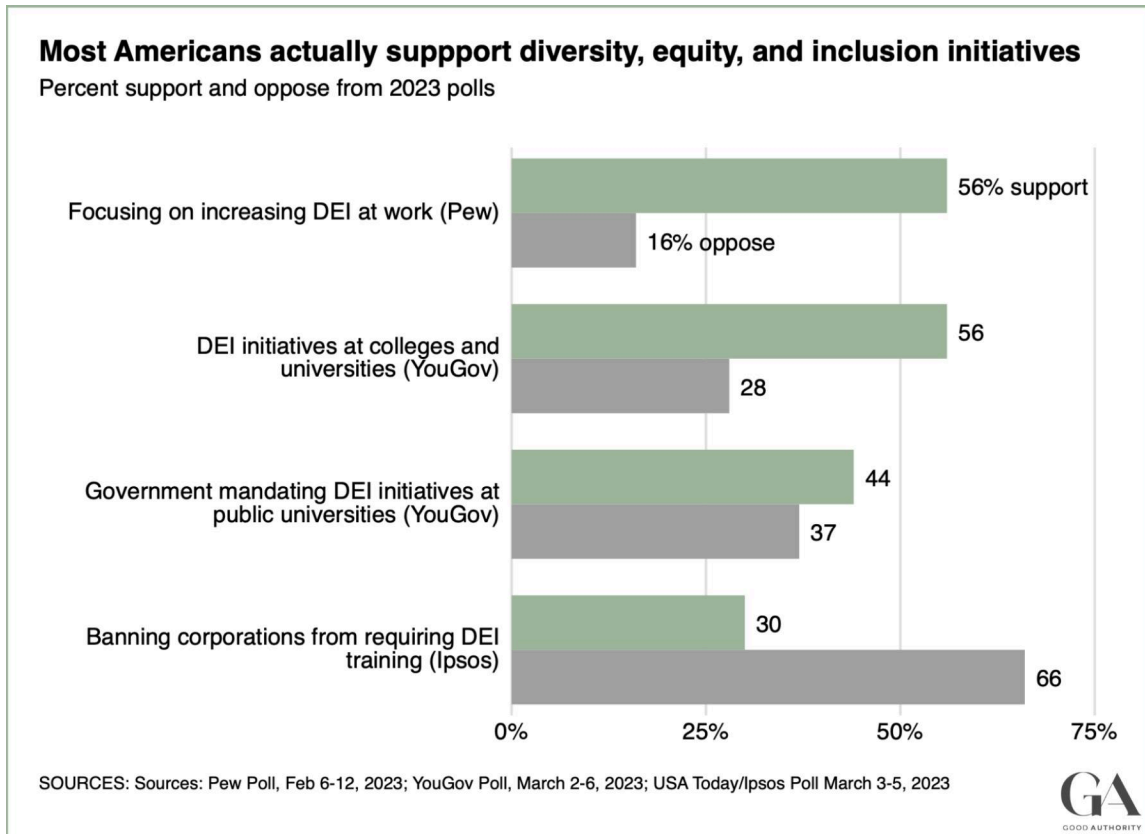
Candace Owens Tweet (4)



Ben Shapiro Tweet (5)



Summit and McLaughlin Poll 2023 (6)



Sources: Pew Poll, Feb 6-12, 2023; YouGov Poll, March 2-6, 2023; USA Today/Ipsos Poll March 3-5, 2023

2023 Pew Research/YouGov/Ipsos Poll on Americans support for DEI initiatives (7)



Postar



Pedro dos Santos Frazão ✓

@Pedro_Frazao_

Seguir



Os imigrantes andam mesmo a comer os
nossos animais de companhia! Aqui deixo as
provas para quem tiver estômago para ver!
NOJENTO!

.

Isto já foi longe demais!

Pedro Frazão Tweet (8)