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Melanie Kreitler, Greta Olson (eds.)
Diversity Issues in the USA

[diversity, media, and law] | Volume 1

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Editorial

Diversity is never a given but results out of constant negotiation. The dynamic nature of diversity arises from conflictual cultural-legal and political forces that compel societies to continually (re)think, (re)evaluate, and (re)define what diversity means. Media and law factor into these processes, calling for informed media use and legal education. The series diversity, media, and law focusses on promoting critical media literacy and examining how legal norms are mediated through popular media exchanges.

The series is edited by Prof. Dr. Greta Olson, Dr. Jutta Hergenhan, Prof. Dr. Julian Ernst and Prof. Dr. Malte-C. Gruber.

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Diversity Issues in the USA

Transnational Perspectives on the 2024 Presidential Elections

[transcript]

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Introduction

How Will the 2024 U.S. Presidential Elections Affect Diversity Issues Transnationally?

Greta Olson and Melanie Kreitler (University of Giessen, Germany)

> When the U.S. sneezes, the world catches a cold.
> – Khanyisile Phillips[1]

South African activist Khanyisile Phillips uses these words to describe the effects of U.S. American politics on the rest of the world. Similarly, Ingrid, a friend's daughter in Sweden, posed the urgent question to her parents in 2016 of how could they not be voting in the U.S. American elections when so much was at stake, for Sweden included? It is in the spirit of Khanyisile Phillips's insight and Ingrid's question that we write this Introduction and send the accompanying book out into the world.

Whether we like it or not, the U.S. elections affect all of us. The United States' political climate and rhetoric act as bell weathers for political discourse elsewhere, particularly at this moment regarding right-wing hostility towards immigrants, anti-feminism, and anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments. A victory for Trump is regarded as a victory for all right-wing national populist movements and fuels aligned developments elsewhere. Trumpism has become a template for autocratic populist candidates around the world. The political symbolism of the U.S. presidency extends far beyond the scope of what any one president can actually do, given Constitutional term limits, even if the United States has

1 Khanyisile Phillips, Interview with Khanyisile Phillips, quoted in Mariel Reiss's contribution in this volume, "U.S. Presidential Elections and their Impact on LGBTQIA+ Communities and Activism across the African Continent."

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experienced several attempts to extend presidential power since the beginning of the twentieth century. It seems that such a moment could be upon us. Concerns arise about how a right-wing expansion of U.S. presidential power will harm diversity efforts around the world.

On a recent cover featuring an image of a statue of Caesar, the *Economist* asked: "Is America Dictator-Proof?"[2] Similar questions have become more pressing after the Supreme Court ruling in *Trump v. United States* (2024) granted former president Donald Trump immunity from prosecution for "official acts" with respect to his efforts to subvert the 2020 election.[3] The expansion of the Republican candidate's potential influence, for which this ruling allows, has raised fears of an imperial presidency if Donald Trump is elected to a second term. These fears are not ungrounded. Trump has publicly threatened to be a dictator from day one and has repeatedly announced that he will seek revenge on his adversaries.[4]

As American Studies scholars based in Germany, the comparison of ethnonationalistic movements to fascism can appear historically problematic. Part of Germany's self-reflexive debate about how to adequately address traumatic events from its recent history is to firmly hold in mind the uniqueness of the crimes against humanity committed during the National Socialist period. Germany's *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) stands next to frequent, sometimes too facile comparisons between the rise of fascism in the 1930s in Europe and the apparent increase in a desire for authoritarian control among voters in the United States. For instance, Henk de Berg's *Trump and Hitler* (2024) explicates parallels that many see between the two political leaders, identifying both as "political performance artists."[5] For many, current right-wing populist political rhetoric and mobilizations in the United States

2 The Economist, "Is America Dictator-Proof?" May 16, 2024, https://www.economist.com/leaders/2024/05/16/is-america-dictator-proof.

3 John Kruzel and Andrew Chung, "US Supreme Court rules Trump has broad immunity from prosecution," Reuters, July 2, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/legal/us-supreme-court-due-rule-trumps-immunity-bid-blockbuster-case-2024-07-01/.

4 Chris Michael and agencies, "Trump says he will be a dictator only on 'day one' if elected president," The Guardian, December 6, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/dec/06/donald-trump-sean-hannity-dictator-day-one-response-iowa-town-hall.

5 Henk de Berg, *Trump and Hitler: A Comparative Study in Lying* (Springer Link, 2024), x, 215, 223.

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evoke an uneasy sense of history repeating itself. Yet it is imperative to remember that the political realities of the 1930s and 2024 differ.

In this book, we wish to strike a balance between the genuine sense of acute alarm about current political developments that in some ways resemble aspects of 1930s Italian and German fascisms, while also wishing to be cognizant that events in the United States have their own history and context. Facets of the history that have led to the new prominence of far-right positions include the cultural wars after the 1970s, the discontentment that was caused by economic changes such as deindustrialization, finance deregulation, globalization, and the accompanying precarization of formally secure industry jobs. These economic changes led to the scapegoating of affirmative action programs, feminism, and migration, all of which were posited as blame objects for men's no longer being able to earn a family wage. Further, the Republican Party's huge shift to the right and its recent affinity for authoritarianism have to be understood as responses to Barack Obama's election in 2008 and the Civil Rights Movement before it. The rise of the Tea Party soon after Obama's election and the formation of the Birther movement constituted pushbacks against a Black man having become 'the most powerful man in the world' and the figurehead of the United States.

Efforts to subvert greater diversity in politics are then not new to 2024. Yet to arrive at this conclusion, it is important to define what diversity means.

Defining Diversity

> Diversity is "going to become a hot-button issue this year."
> – Lauren Aratani[6]

The concept of diversity in itself is controversial, and its meanings have become highly politicized. The editors of this book understand *doing diversity* as active resistance to forms of discrimination and subordination based on identity characteristics and categories related to class, ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation, religious affiliation, immigration and citizenship status, and

6 Lauren Aratani, "Diversity policies face 'full-out attack' in 2024, leading HR boss warns," The Guardian, December 16, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/business/2023/dec/16/diversity-dei-us-companies-backlash. .

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ability. Promoting diversity involves reducing inequality between persons and increasing previously underrepresented groups' political and economic power.

Progressive critics cite promoting diversity as a platform for depoliticized mainstreaming. When institutions and businesses perform 'diversity washing,' they project a façade of supporting racial and gender inclusion through token hirings or liberal campaigns, such as the prominent display of Pride flags during LGBTQIA+ events. Social conservatives, by contrast, criticize diversity programs as the faulty consequences of identity politics, and present D.E.I. (diversity, equality, and integration) policies as vehicles for reverse discrimination. Concepts such as reverse and anti-white racism depart from an ahistorical standpoint that "racism is a meta-concept that is the same no matter the social context or intended purpose."[7] They can only be posited if historical realities such as slavery, Jim Crow, the new Jim Crow of mass incarceration, and long lineages of systematic discrimination are ignored. Despite the logical fallacies intrinsic to terms like anti-Whiteness, such concepts are nonetheless deployed to support victimization discourse and to frame cultural debates for political advantage.[8] One of the ways Vice-President Kamala Harris has been discredited since she became the presidential nominee for the Democratic Party has been to suggest that she was a 'diversity hire,' in other words, that she is not qualified to be president and only received the nomination due to her gender and ethnicity.[9]

In the United States, diversity issues such as racial justice, immigration, reproductive, and LGBTQIA+ rights will be hugely affected by the outcome of the 2024 elections. During his presidency, Trump defunded federal D.E.I. training programs and the teaching of systemic racism. At the time of writing, Texas, Alabama, Iowa, and Utah Republican legislators have passed bills banning D.E.I. programs at publicly funded schools and universities and prohibiting discussions of concepts such as white supremacy, implicit bias, and intersectionality. These bills resemble the 2022 "Stop Woke Act" and are aligned with the rise of so-called parental rights and efforts by parents to limit what subjects their children can be introduced to in schools and public

7 Amy E. Ansell, *Race and Ethnicity: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 2013), 137.

8 Amy E. Ansell, "Introduction," in *Unraveling the Right: The New Conservatism in American Thought and Politics*, ed. Amy E. Ansell (London: Routledge, 1998), 7.

9 Joanna Walters, "Kamala Harris switch scrambles Republicans as Trump resorts to insults," The Guardian, July 27, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/jul/27/trump-campaign-insults-extremism-kamala-harris.

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libraries. This development has been echoed in local school boards' banning of books relating to racial awareness and non-normative gender identities and sexual orientation.[10]

The contributors to this book understand the 2024 U.S. elections to be a watershed moment for diversity topics in the United States and the world. Diversity issues stand at the heart of the primary and general elections in the United States, with conservatives threatening "to kill" D.E.I. initiatives in government and academia,[11] and others insisting that the inclusion of marginalized groups and viewpoints in the election process constitutes the essence of democracy itself.

Offering a possible blueprint for a second Trump presidency, the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 (2022) outlines prominent conservatives' policy proposals. They include a detailed program for how a conservative administration will expunge diversity issues from public consciousness. This begins with prohibitions about speech, as Heritage Foundation president Kevin D. Roberts writes in the Foreword to the detailed plan:

> The next conservative President must make the institutions of American civil society hard targets for woke culture warriors. This starts with deleting the terms sexual orientation and gender identity ("SOGI"), diversity, equity, and inclusion ("DEI"), gender, gender equality, gender equity, gender awareness, gender-sensitive, abortion, reproductive health, reproductive rights, and any other term used to deprive Americans of their First Amendment rights out of every federal rule, agency regulation, contract, grant, regulation, and piece of legislation that exists.[12]

Decrying the supposed dangers of 'woke culture' or 'wokeism' is not new. The term dates back to the 1930s and racial justice movements, and has resurfaced repeatedly, most prominently during the Black Lives Matters movements of

10 Kasey Meehan et al., "Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censure," PEN America, n.d., https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/.

11 Julian Mark and Taylor Telford, "Conservative anti-DEI activists claim victory in Harvard leader's fall," The Washington Post, January 5, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/01/05/harvard-claudine-gay-resignation-dei/.

12 Kevin D. Roberts, "Foreword: A Promise to America," in *Mandate for Leadership. The Conservative Promise*, ed. Paul Dans and Steven Groves (The Heritage Foundation and Project 2025, 2023), https://static.project2025.org/2025_MandateForLeadership_FULL.pdf, 1–17, 4–5,

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the 2010s and 2020s. Activists view wokeism as the acknowledgement of racial and social inequalities, while critics disparage "woke fascism"[13] as a derivative of the cancel culture that supposedly runs rampant on social media.

Project 2025 identifies the censure of words as the way to protect First Amendment rights, a reversal of historical efforts to interpret rights expansively. This effort constitutes part of an attempt to hierarchize existing catalogs of rights in order to privilege some rights as more fundamental than others. Jayne Huckerby and Sarah Knuckey diagnose what they call an "appropriation of rights discourse" during the Trump era that was performed in order to curtail the scope of human rights protections.[14] This occurred through an insistence that rights are in 'crisis' and that certain rights such as property and (Christian) religious freedoms are more fundamental than others.[15] We identify the instrumentalization of human rights discourse to restrict civil rights and the expansion of socially permissible forms of hate speech as two components of the current onslaught against diversity.

Efforts to restrict speech relating to diversity, race, gender, and sexual orientation or to prohibit teaching critical race theory on the basis of so-called First Amendment freedom of speech claims have to be viewed in relation to an expansion of the sayable. We mean by this the racist, xenophobic, misogynistic, and fearmongering rhetoric that characterizes Trumpism. Trump has continued to test the boundaries of the sayable since calling Mexican immigrants "rapists" and criminals during the 2015 announcement of his candidacy.[16] Trump's anti-immigration rhetoric has led not only to an expansion of the sayable but also to an increase in hate crimes against minoritized persons. Violent attacks on Asian Americans during the pandemic were abetted by Trump's racist references to the "Chinese virus" and "kung flu."[17] His dehumanizing rhetoric about immigrants also spurred on hate crimes against Hispanic and

13 Alistair Dawber, "Trump rails against tax rises and 'woke fascism' in rally for true believers," The Times, October 10, 2021, https://www.thetimes.com/world/us-world/article/trump-rails-against-tax-rises-and-woke-fascism-in-rally-for-true-believers-jxfvkjj69.

14 Huckerby and Knuckey, "Appropriation and the Rewriting of Rights," 245.

15 Ibid.

16 Amber Phillips, "'They're Rapists.' President Trump's Campaign Launch Speech Two Years Later, Annotated," The Washington Post, June 16, 2017, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/16/theyre-rapists-presidents-trump-campaign-launch-speech-two-years-later-annotated/.

17 "President Trump calls coronavirus 'kung flu,'" BBC, June 24, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-us-canada-53173436.

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Latinx Americans.[18] We hold this violently marginalizing rhetoric to be central to the affectively powerful sense of resentment that Trump deploys, as do the many right-wing populists who mimic his articulations.

The 2024 elections will affect much more than the international political order, for instance, the status of NATO and the security of the European Union. The elections will also impact topics relating to diversity and inclusion outside of the United States due to the outreach of U.S. policies and the power of U.S. media instantiations. We witness the mimicry of Trump and MAGA supporters' rhetoric of beleaguered victimization, coupled with anti-immigration, anti-feminist, and anti-LGBTQIA+ sentiments, by candidates for right-wing populist parties in the Netherlands, Hungary, Finland, Italy, Slovakia, Sweden, Germany, and France. When Trump utters "They're not after me, they're after you," the same phrase is used by the German far-right Alternative for Germany politician Björn Höcke shortly thereafter.[19] With its successful deployment of a sense of imperiled rights, Trumpism extends far beyond the historical person of Donald Trump and has a major impact on transnational diversity issues.

Transnational Perspectives on Diversity

The essays assembled in *Diversity Issues in the U.S.A.* speak to the political and symbolic moment of the 2024 U.S. elections by reflecting on how these elections will resonate in the future, with a focus on how diversity issues within and without the United States will be impacted by the election campaigns and results. In their discussions of racial politics and policies, immigration politics and anti-immigrant rhetoric, planetary justice, and epistemic and physical violence against LGBTQIA+ persons, the authors of this book understand the U.S. presidential elections to have enormous symbolic and political weight for citizens of the world.

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18 Russell Conteras, "Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric Sparks Fears of More Hate Crimes against Latinos," Axios, March 7, 2024, https://www.axios.com/2024/03/07/latinos-immigration-rhetoric-fears-hate-crimes?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=newsletter_axioslatino&stream=science.

19 @mlewandowsky (2024), "Wenn eine Strategie funktioniert, wird sie kopiert," X, January 18, 2024, https://x.com/mlewandowsky/status/1747935381390000531.

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The "transnational perspectives" taken in this book can be understood in three different ways. First, in the following chapters, scholars and activists based in Botswana, Cameroon, Germany, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, the Netherlands, South Africa, Uganda, the United States as well as in several Native American nations and tribal communities come to word about how the U.S. elections affect issues important to them. With our contributors, we approach these topics with a bifurcated view that attempts, simultaneously, to see the specificity of U.S. topics and their non-applicability to other contexts, while also appreciating the global influence of U.S. American politics.

Second, the outside perspectives on U.S. American diversity issues collected here invite us to reflect critically on our positions as non-U.S. based scholars. On the one hand, outside perspectives on U.S. American diversity topics allow for new takes on familiar issues. On the other hand, these perspectives encourage us to reflect on how our settings influence how we view the United States. To give an example, Germany has a long history of treating U.S. American racist and anti-immigration policies in ways that speak more to Germany's own reluctant recognition of itself as a target migration country[20] and post-migrant society than to U.S. American issues. In German media, the U.S. is often framed in ways that deflect misgivings about rampant anti-Muslim racism in Germany.[21]

Third, transnational perspectives comprise discussions of how U.S. American developments impact diversity topics outside of the U.S. Right-wing ethno-nationalistic, anti-immigration, anti-Muslim, anti-feminist, and anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric in the United States and Europe draw on similar repertoires of scapegoating tropes and narratives. Yet it bears keeping in mind that every diversity topic dealt with in this book has its own setting, involving particular material and political conditions, a local history, and language use. For instance, the positively connoted umbrella acronym "LGBTQIA+," used

20 Greta Olson and Janna Wessels, "Imag(in)ing Human Rights: Deindividualizing, Victimizing, and Universalizing Images of Refugees in the United States and Germany," in *The State of Human Rights: Historical Genealogies, Historical Controversies, and Cultural Imaginaries*, ed. Kerstin Schmidt (Heidelberg: Winter, 2020), 249–64.

21 Georg Kreis, "Überlegungen zum Antiamerikanismus," in *Antiamerikanismus: Zum europäisch-amerikanischen Verhältnis zwischen Ablehnung und Faszination*, ed. Georg Kreis (Basel: Schwabe, 2007), 9–28; Birte Christ, "Michelle Obama, the Good American and Icon of Global Power Femininity: Gender Politics and National Boundary-Making in German News Coverage," in *Obama and the Paradigm Shift: Measuring Change*, ed. Birte Christ and Greta Olson, (Heidelberg: Winter, 2012), 169–97.

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to denote an inclusivity of interests in North America and Europe, does not necessarily cohere with local and specific notions of belonging in African nations, as Mariel Reiss points out.[22]

Some of the essays assembled here analyze U.S. developments in fine-grained detail, for instance, in a long history of anti-immigration rhetoric and imagery, or in a discussion of Native American election topics. Others, by contrast, observe the spillover of U.S. American anti-diversity politics on other localities. Indeed, the trope of spillover from U.S. American-centered rhetoric is a major topic in this book. In the following, we will walk the reader through the topics brought up by the contributors to this volume in terms of how they relate to diversity. These topics then structure the order of the essays.

Diversity in Relation to Ethnicity and Racial Politics

> One is never too far from elections.
> And when one is close to elections, one is never too far from racism.
> – Marzia Milazzo[23]

Marzia Milazzo provides a powerful indictment of the U.S. elections in relation to racial relations. She argues that racism and anti-Blackness are so central to the United States that the outcome of the 2024 elections hardly matters:

> While Joe Biden and Donald Trump [were] calling each other "racist" during the 2024 campaign, these mutual accusations obscure the fact that racism is institutionalized in the United States and will remain a structural feature of the U.S. American state no matter who wins the presidential elections.[24]

Milazzo proceeds to diagnose the central role that racism and anti-Blackness play globally by examining current political configurations in Italy, the United States, and South Africa. She notes variations of racism and anti-Blackness,

22 Sylvia Tamale, *African Sexualities: A Reader* (Cape Town: Pambazuka Press, 2011).

23 Marzia Milazzo, "Elections and Racial Power," in this volume.

24 Milazzo, "Elections"; Brakkton Booker, "Biden and Trump campaigns call each other 'racist' as they seek to court Black voters," Politico, May 23, 2024, https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/23/biden-trump-racism-television-ads-black-voters-00159745.

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such as the "Afrophobia" that pits Black South African voters against Black immigrants, who are supposedly competing with them for jobs. This trope is used by Black leaders to further their own interests as well as those of the white economic elite. Elections can then be readily won with racism, which is frequently deployed in colorblind terms. By colorblind, Milazzo means a "language that is not explicitly racialized, while it seeks to achieve racist effects;" it is used by politicians to create a sense of cohesion amongst voting groups while pitting them against racialized immigrants or other minorities.[25]

The central role of race that brought Trump to power in the 2016 elections was described at the time as a "whitelash against a changing country."[26] Trump's deployment of racially-charged rhetoric was accredited with being one of the main reasons for his appeal amongst white voters. It became a model for ethno-nationalistic politicians around the world.[27] Trump has targeted most minorities, including Muslim Americans, Asian Americans, Latinx individuals, Black Americans, Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans.[28] After the police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, the year 2020 then marked what many hoped would augur in a racial reckoning in the United States. In 2024, we know that that this reckoning never occurred.

Given Trump's history of race baiting and incursions on civil rights, one might expect that racially minoritized voting groups would overwhelmingly support another Democratic administration. Yet one of the lessons learnt from

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25 Milazzo, "Elections"; on colorblind racism as a global phenomenon, see Marzia Milazzo, *Colorblind Tools: Global Technologies of Racial Power* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2022).

26 Josiah Ryan, "'This was a Whitelash': Van Jones' Take on the Election Results," CNN Politics, November 9, 2016, https://edition.cnn.com/2016/11/09/politics/van-jones-results-disappointment-cnntv/index.html#:~:text=Acknowledging%20many%20voters%20were%20rebelling,a%20black%20president%20in%20part.

27 Zack Beauchamp, "Donald Trump's Victory is Part of a Global White Blacklash," Vox, November 9, 2016, https://www.vox.com/world/2016/11/9/13572174/president-elect-donald-trump-2016-victory-racism-xenophobia.

28 Bustillo, Ximena, "Native Voters Could Decide Major Elections in 2024," The Circle, December 5, 2023, https://thecirclenews.org/news/native-voters-could-decide-major-elections-in-2024/; Grace Panetta, "What the Fight to Expand Access to the Ballot for Native Americans Looks Like Now," The 19th News, November 28, 2023, https://19thnews.org/2023/11/native-american-voters-political-power-jacqueline-de-leon/; Pauly Denetclaw, "Where the 2024 Presidential Candidates Stand on Indigenous Issues," Oklahoma Voice, November 28, 2023, https://oklahomavoice.com/2023/11/28/where-the-2024-presidential-candidates-stand-on-indigenous-issues/.

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the Democratic loss of the White House in 2016 is that voter blocs based in demographics have to be regarded with nuance. Such is the premise of Sabine N. Meyer's wide-ranging text on IndigiPolitics in this volume. Adopting this term from Pauly Denetclaw, a Navajo Nation citizen and political correspondent, IndigiPolitics denotes Native American "political interests, concerns, and voting practices."[29] Meyer's text counters a general failure to notice "Native political participation … by non-Native media and political analysts."[30]

Giving the voices of Native Americans center stage, she quotes statements by individuals from a great variety of tribal communities across the United States. Noting distinctions, for instance, between younger and older voter interests, Meyer traces political and cultural developments for Native Americans since 2016. She emphasizes the power of the Native vote to decide elections particularly in swing states such as Arizona, Montana, Nevada, Wisconsin, and Michigan. As Meyer writes, "in times of political polarization and close elections, Native voters are able to make a difference."[31]

As with the Native populations, other voting groups cannot be regarded monolithically. Often seen as the bedrock of the Democratic Party, Black voters are anticipated to vote anything but monolithically in November 2024. At the moment of writing, seventeen percent of Black voters are likely to vote for Trump;[32] men, especially young men, are disproportionately represented among putative Trump voters, a trend that also holds true for Hispanic men as well.

Dissatisfaction with the status quo number as reasons for this trend as well as Trump's successful touting of the idea that Black unemployment decreased due to his administration's policies between 2017 until 2021.[33] At the same time,

29 Sabine N. Meyer, "IndigiPolitics: Native American Voters and the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election," in this volume.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid.

32 David Leonhardt, "Race and Politics," The New York Times, March 21, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/03/21/briefing/race-and-politics.html; Brandon Drenon and John Sudworth, "Trump Makes Pitch to Black and Latino Voters in New York," BBC, May 25, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckddx1lgnr4o; Kiana Cox, "An Early Look at Black Voter's Views on Biden, Trump and Election 2024," Pew Research Center, May 20, 2024, https://www.pewresearch.org/race-and-ethnicity/2024/05/20/an-early-look-at-black-voters-views-on-biden-trump-and-election-2024/.

33 Dwayne Oxford, "Why are Black Voters Backing Donald Trump in Record Numbers?", ALJAZEERA, March 18, 2024, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/18/why-are-black-voters-backing-donald-trump-in-record-numbers; David J. Dent, "Why Are More

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Black voters, like many other traditionally Democratic-voting cohorts, are disgruntled by the Biden administration's unwavering financial and military support of Israel's war in Gaza.[34] Other issues include, as for all voters, higher food prices and housing costs. Black communities suffered disproportionately from the effects of the pandemic and resultant inflation.

One can readily critique Trump's record of race-baiting, covert support of white supremacy, and incitement of violence against Asian Americans, Black and Indigenous communities and People of Color. Yet the Biden administration has failed to win over many minority voters, giving rise to a sense that the administration's attention is turned towards Ukraine and the Middle East and not domestic struggles.[35] Further, Biden's having created a more diverse administration is sometimes decried as Blackwashing rather than a real commitment to greater equity.

Should Trump win the 2024 elections, we anticipate a demographic reckoning that may have similar qualities to the one that occurred in 2016. After those elections, a concerted sense of critical shock was voiced that the majority of white women voters had voted for Trump despite his misogynistic invective, including the then recently disclosed "pussy" remarks, and Trump's track record of vitriol against women who publicly opposed him.[36]

The equation has now changed with the nomination of a Black, South Asian American woman as presidential candidate for the Democratic Party, a change that occurred while we were preparing this book for publication. As we enter the general election period, we note that Trump's frequent personal attacks on

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Black Men Voting Republican?", Rolling Stone, December 4, 2022, https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-features/black-men-voting-republican-obama-trump-romney-1234641210/.

34 Nate Cohn, "Trump Leads in 5 Key States, as Young and Nonwhite Voters Express Discontent with Biden," The New York Times, May 13, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/13/us/politics/biden-trump-battleground-poll.html.

35 Maya King and Katie Glueck, "In His Beloved Philadelphia, Biden Faces Wariness from Black Voters," The New York Times, May 18, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/18/us/politics/biden-philadelphia-black-voters.html.

36 Sarah Ruiz-Grossman, "Dear Fellow White Women: WE F**ked This Up," HUFFPOST, November 9, 2016, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dear-white-women-we-messed-this-up-election2016_n_582341c9e4b0aac62488970e; L.V. Anderson, "White Women Sold out the Sisterhood and the World by Voting for Trump," SLATE, November 9, 2016, https://slate.com/human-interest/2016/11/white-women-sold-out-the-sisterhood-and-the-world-by-voting-for-trump.html.

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Harris as a racial imposter because of supposed vacillations in how she has presented her identity face large-scale criticism.[37] Clearly, race and racism remain central to the elections.

Diversity in Relation to Migration Policies and Anti-Immigration Rhetoric

> Following the Eisenhower model, we will carry out the largest domestic deportation operation in American history.
> – Donald Trump[38]

These were Donald Trump's words at a rally in September 2023, in which he threatened the forced removal of millions of undocumented immigrants. Just as Trump invoked a historical tradition of connoting Blackness with criminality when he called himself the "President of Law and Order" in 2020 in response to protests after George Floyd's murder, he was now referencing the racist imagery of the Operation Wetback campaign. Trump's speech promised to renew the blatantly racist anti-immigration program from 1954 that forced many legal residents in the States to return to Mexico in order to deter further laborer immigration.

37 Catherine E. Shoichet, "When Trump attacks Harris' racial identity, these Americans say it's personal," CNN, August 11, 2024, https://edition.cnn.com/2024/08/11/us/racial-identity-trump-harris-multiracial-reaction/index.html; Marianne LeVine and Josh Dawsey, "Trump allies want to hit Harris's record. He keeps talking about her race and gender," The Washington Post, August 1, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/08/01/trump-harris-race-gender-record/.

38 Donald Trump to a crowd in Ankeny, Iowa in September 2023, see Adriana Gomez Licon, "Trump's Vow to Deport Millions is Undercut by History," PBS News, January 3, 2024, https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trumps-vow-to-deport-millions-is-undercut-by-history.

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This type of rhetoric won Trump many votes in 2016 and could do so again in 2024.[39] Trump's "Build the wall"[40] and "anchor babies" phrases encouraged hate speech and resentment along with nativist thinking not only within his constituency. His scapegoating of immigrants for violent crime, national security threats, and economic scarcity, has a historical tradition in U.S. American political rhetoric and has been copied by far-right populists elsewhere. The much repeated trope of a migration 'crisis' fuels right-wing successes at polls. Immigration appears to be the central unifying principle for right-wing parties in France, the Netherlands, Germany, and the United States. For example, once moderate Emmanuel Macron has called parties to the left of his "immagrationiste," – as encouraging of uncontrolled immigration. Immigrants are framed as not only the cause of social and economic woes, but also as threats to (white) Frenchness and Americanness.[41]

Biden was voted into power in 2020 with the promise of more humane migration policies than had been the case under the Trump administration's separation of parents from children under Title 42, and the zero-tolerance policy that further criminalized irregular immigration. The Biden presidency was subsequently faced with a surge of immigration on the southern border beginning in 2021. The administration responded with the Senate Border Act of 2024, which, although it adopted many draconian positions, was blocked by Republicans after Trump lobbied against it. Biden's counter move was then to sign an executive order that allows for the border to be shut down entirely.[42] The executive order bespeaks a general change in public sentiment, which has

39 Giovanni Campani et. al., "The Rise of Donald Trump Right-Wing Populism in the United States: Middle American Radicalism and Anti-Immigration Discourse," *Societies* 12, no. 6 (2022): art. 154.

40 The metaphor of the wall is analyzed in the context of transmisogyny by K. Allison Hammer in this volume.

41 Roger Cohen, "The Nation Resurgent, and Borders, Too," The New York Times, June 23, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/23/world/europe/the-nation-resurgent-and-borders-too.html.

42 Gabe Gutierrez et al., "Biden Expected to Take Executive Actions to Protect Undocumented Spouses of U.S. Citizens," NBC News, June 10, 2024, https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/biden-administration-considering-protecting-undocumented-immigrants-ar-rcna156425.

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become more protectionist, more anti-immigration, and more supportive of stricter border regimes.[43]

In this volume, contributors analyze diversity as related to immigration and anti-immigration sentiments in two distinct ways. The essay by Georgiana Banita traces nuances of current anti-immigration rhetoric by looking at the U.S. American past. The text by Maik Paap relates U.S. American anti-immigration narratives to ones in Germany centering on healthcare.

Georgiana Banita's visual and verbal analysis of the history of anti-immigration discourse speaks to Marzia Milazzo's trenchant analysis of racism and anti-Blackness in election contexts. Contrastingly, Banita proposes that "anti-immigrant U.S. election campaign rhetoric is not solely driven by racial animus and xenophobia."[44] In a vast historical study that moves from the mid-nineteenth century to the present and back again, Banita explores what she calls "xenopolarization," the incitement of an already highly polarized electorate to vote by promoting unfounded fears of immigrants as criminals, terrorists, and invaders of the body politic.

Banita reviews various phases of U.S. American anti-immigration rhetoric, including fears of elections being 'stolen' by immigrants that date back to the Know-Nothing-Party, racist rhetoric that was used against Irish and German immigrants during the 1860s, and the criminalization of immigration in itself, which she dates to the early twentieth century. All of these strategies are employed by Trump to create new fears of immigrants as criminal and economically destabilizing. Banita uses the trope of a moral panic to describe the rhetorical creation of threatening immigrants for populist electoral ends.

Returning to the subject of race and Whiteness, Banita highlights that Trumpist rhetoric is successful because it imaginatively creates a lost, all-white (and all cis, we would add) world of yesteryear that never actually existed. As she writes:

> Reactionary white U.S. Americans … respond enthusiastically to … demographic dystopia. This fiction encapsulates the ongoing national struggle to reconcile ideals of equality with the realities of racial and ethnic diversity. In this elaborate fantasy, immigrants illegally manipulate the electoral

43 Monmouth Poll Reports, "Majority Now Support Building a Border Wall," Monmouth University, February 26, 2024, https://www.monmouth.edu/polling-institute/reports/monmouthpoll_us_022624/.

44 Georgiana Banita, "Demographic Dystopias: Criminalizing Immigration in U.S. Election Campaigns," in this volume.

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> process to their advantage, attack democratic processes, go on crime sprees, and take jobs from U.S. Americans.[45]

Maik Paap's contribution to this volume considers a particularly prominent trope in anti-immigration sentiments in the U.S. and Germany, namely the rhetoric of healthcare exploitation. Adopting a human rights perspective, Paap's analysis traces policies and political actions taken to protect taxpaying citizens from the imagined threat of irregular immigrants. In doing so, Germany and the United States create a double bind for people seeking refuge by making access to the healthcare system increasingly difficult and scapegoating immigrants for the system's shortcomings. Importantly, Paap's essay highlights a pattern that can be seen in much of the particularly anti-trans and anti-immigration rhetoric that has marked 2024, and which K. Allison Hammer describes as "making an enemy" in this volume. Quoting Paap: "Restrictive healthcare policies targeting immigrants in both the United States and Germany serve as tools of governance that reinforce national identity and control immigration flows under the guise of economic and social protection."[46]

Diversity in Relation to Structural and Ideological Barriers

> But the Dobbs decision is just the beginning. Conservatives in the states and in Washington, including in the next conservative Administration, should push as hard as possible to protect the unborn in every jurisdiction in America. In particular, the next conservative President should work with Congress to enact the most robust protections for the unborn that Congress will support while deploying existing federal powers to protect innocent life and vigorously complying with statutory bans on the federal funding of abortion.
> – Kevin D. Roberts[47]

We quote the already mentioned Project 2025 Agenda. This blueprint for the next conservative president aims to further constrict reproductive rights and

45 Ibid.

46 Maik Paap, "Healthcare as Governance Technique: Anti-Immigration Politics Expressed in Access to Health," in this volume.

47 Roberts, "Foreword," 6.

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access to healthcare and could also limit access to contraception. After successfully nominating three highly conservative Supreme Court Justices who then overruled the right to abortion, Trump has attempted to rebrand ensuing abortion bans as assertions of state rights. Although Trump has recently soft peddled his stance on a federal ban on abortion, his supporters "can reasonably assume that he'll say whatever he thinks he needs to now, and then come through for them if he wins in November."[48]

The Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (2022), which overruled *Roe v. Wade* (1973) and fifty years of abortion rights in the United States, led to an unexpectedly large number of gains for the Democratic Party in 2022, when many voters pushed back against abortion bans, for instance, in Kansas. Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris acts as a powerful advocate for reproductive rights, just as she made reproductive choice a central issue during the midterm election campaigns. The threat of a further criminalization of abortion and restrictions on reproductive healthcare relates to anti-trans bills and legislative initiatives as central issues in the gender politics of the 2024 elections.[49]

We view abortion bans and legally condoned constrictions on women's bodies as connected to the current explosion of anti-trans and anti-nonbinary legislations.[50] In both cases, groups of people are allotted a status of legal personhood that differs significantly from that of the cis-man norm. This status allows for greater legal controls over these persons' embodiment and more interference in their bodily autonomy. Quoting then California

48 Margaret Talbot, "Comment: Abortion and the Election," The New Yorker, May 27, 2024, https://www.discountmags.com/magazine/the-new-yorker-may-27-2024-digital/in-this-issue/79439?srsltid=AfmBOoq-e2_Hkd4K1zgnspJNbwadBRe2C-4HLIelRxZitBV1B_lPclW9.

49 Mary Ziegler, "Democrats Are Missing Out on a Big Opportunity on Abortion Rights," The New York Times, August 15, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/08/15/opinion/abortion-harris-trump.html.

50 On this point, see Greta Olson and Elisabeth Lechner, "#Feminist – Naming Controversies and Celebrating Points of Connection and Joy in Current Feminisms," *The European Journal of English Studies* 26, no. 2 (2022): 292–321; Greta Olson and Laura Borchert, "Narrative Authority, Affective Unreliability, and Transing Law," in *Research Handbook in Law and Literature*, ed. Daniela Gandorfer, Cecilia Gebruers, and Peter Goodrich (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2022), 378–400; Greta Olson, "Futures of Feminist Law and Literature — An Afterword," in *Feminist Perspectives on Law and Literature*, ed. Hanna Luise Kroll, Laura Schmitz-Justen, Laura Wittmann, and Laura Zander (De Gruyter, forthcoming).

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Senator Kamala Harris on this point, when she critically questioned Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh during his confirmation hearings in 2018, she asked: "Can you think of any laws that give the government the power to make decisions about the male body?"[51]

In this volume Birte Christ makes an argument for why we need to regard traditional binary gender politics as central to the current election. She suggests that Trump has successfully framed the elections as a contest of traditional masculinity and physical dominance in which President Biden would inevitably have had to lose. Her work confirms previous assessments of how Trump plays into his supporters' "nostalgic longing for a lost masculinity," in which the supposed "feminization" of the United States is countered.[52] As this book went to press, Christ redirected her argument to note that Kamala Harris cannot of course win in a contest of masculinity, hegemonic or not, but rather that she – with the voters who support her – must change the rules of Trump's game of invoking a rhetoric of aggrieved masculinity.

One aspect of what we define as *transnational Trumpism* is the steady testing of the sayable and doable at the expense of democratic institutions and non-violent speech. In these pages, Sara Polak analyzes this limit testing and limit crossing as a particularly perfidious form of political play that Trump has mastered and which involves a unique form of worldmaking. Trump's policy-through-Tweet practices while still president or his positing of alternative facts, which are then reiterated when fact-checked, constitute highly successful strategies for bringing an alternative political world into existence through inviting others to participate in it. Quoting Polak: "Belonging to Trump's world is about bluffing your way along in the game and then deciding with others collectively that this *is* the real world, that is, the world that matters."[53]

Trump's play appears attractive to those who wish to play with him, because his games fulfill prelapsarian longings for a world that was based on excluding unwanted others and protecting racial privilege. As Polak writes, "*playing* on social media reinstates the much older U.S. American institution of the

51 Monica Hesse, "Kamala Harris said 19 words in 2018 that taught us all we need to know," The Washington Post, July 22, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/style/power/2024/07/22/kamala-harris-brett-kavanaugh/.

52 Greta Olson, "Love and Hate Online – Affect Politics in the Era of Trump," in *Violence and Trolling on Social Media: History, Affect, and Effects of Online Vitriol*, ed. Sara Polak and Daniel Trottier (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP), 156–70, 169.

53 Sara Polak, "Donald Trump and Truth Social: Media Platforms Making Exclusionary Worlds," in this volume.

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whites-only country club."[54] Trump's use of his social media platform Truth-Social demonstrates how the former president avoids legal repercussions from his often defaming and libelous posts by deleting them before they become actionable.

Diversity in Relation to Planetary Justice and Democracy

> [W]henever the economic elite feels threatened by revolutionary mobilizations – and climate mitigation demands a revolution –, they relinquish their political power to authoritarian leaders in order to safeguard their profits and property.
> – Esther Edelmann and Frans-Willem Korsten[55]

As the quote above by Esther Edelmann and Frans-Willem Korsten points out, a central strategy in anti-diversity politics is to disguise economic issues with contentious debates about cultural values. The current backlash against social justice issues such as addressing police violence against Black life has also been accompanied by a violent backlash against environmental programs. Conservatives frame environmental protections as costly, hurtful to working- and middle-class people as well as to farmers, and therefore as elitist.

The Trump and Biden administrations could hardly have differed more on environmental issues, and the outcome of the 2024 elections will impact biodiversity in a very literal way. The diversity of life forms on earth will be diminished by the United States if Donald Trump wins another term as president. A United States that does not acknowledge global warming and abandons environmental controls that were instituted in the 1970s, expanded under President Obama, and renewed again after Biden gained the White House, represents a threat to the world.[56]

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54 Ibid.

55 Esther Edelmann and Frans-Willem Korsten, "A Politics of Shredding: The Far-Right's Ecocide Spectacle and the Battle against Fake Knowledge," in this volume.

56 Benjamin Plackett writes on this point: "On specific policy issues, the two US presidential candidates differ widely on the environment, with Trump arguing for weaker environmental regulations and Biden pushing renewable energy. Climate change is one of the most divisive topics in the United States; 93% of Democrats agree with the scientific consensus that human activity is warming the world's climate, compared with just 55% of Republicans, according to a poll carried out by researchers at the University

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The major reversal of environmental protections that occurred between 2017 and 2021 will be advanced by a second Trump administration to include the further dismantling of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Environmental Justice and Civil Rights office, and a second withdrawal from the Paris Accord. As discussed above, a part of the Trumpist strategy is to create new truths and frameworks of the sayable and the knowable. This occurs through disseminating misinformation and encouraging distrust of traditional sources of unbiased information such as traditional media, universities, and science. One way to counteract this, as Esther Edelmann and Frans-Willem Korsten note, is to identify climate change denialism as a tool for obliterating reputable sources of knowledge.

To illustrate the current and, in the future intensified, environmental destruction of the planet and its biodiversity, the authors explore the trope of shredding. After Trump's election in 2016, a Trumpian publically shredded a copy of the Paris Climate Accord to signify the nullification of previously agreed upon measures to combat climate change. Subsequent instances of shredding, including posting memes of shredding, demonstrate how Trumpist politics utilizes a rhetoric of protecting supposedly endangered national food supplies and 'good' American farmers to further the interests of the fossil fuel and mass agricultural industries.

Most strikingly, the authors present the poor material conditions of working farmers in the U.S.A. and in the Netherlands, their reliance on subsidies, and dependence on government control. Yet the successful framing of theories about environmental destruction as fictions created by a global elite has led to farming protests in the United States and the Netherlands. In these protests, the so-called "peasant wisdom" of groups such as the "Farmers Citizen Movement" (*Boeren Burger Beweging*) is presented as combating elitism and foreign interests. With Edelmann and Korsten, we wish to highlight how the actual economic interests of the group that is protesting for more authoritarian control – in this case farmers in the U.S. and the Netherlands – are harmed, even while their protests are deployed by those who will profit from their actions.

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of Maryland in College Park" (n.p.). Benjamin Plackett, "What the Science of Elections Can Reveal in this Super-Election Year," Nature, June 10, 2024, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-01712-2.

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Diversity in Relation to LGBTQIA+ Rights and Advocacy

> Drag storytelling events are fundamentally about democracy itself and the practice and possibility of imagining and creating more diverse and inclusive political communities with (our) children and future generations.
> – Christine M. Klapeer[57]

We begin this section with a quote by Christine M. Klapeer that highlights a central theme of this volume. Diversity is democratic, whereas anti-diversity efforts mask attempts to restrict democracy through fearmongering. Nominally, the anti-diversity topic at hand appears to be a protest against drag story hours because they supposedly hurt innocent children. On a deeper level, however, the named issue – banning drag storytelling events, for instance – disguises an attempt to restrict democratic movements and articulations.

An estimated 20% of Gen Z voters identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, inter, trans or non-binary, and this cohort along with older LGBTQIA+ voters played an important role in Joe Biden's winning in many battleground states in 2020. Yet particularly anti-trans invective has become a prominent feature in populist right-wing politics, especially in the United States. Six hundred and twenty anti-trans bills are now making their ways through legislatures and U.S. American courts.[58]

A perplexing aspect of the past decade is what is often called the visibility trap. Since trans rights were termed the new civil rights by *Time Magazine* in 2014, an increase in popular media representations of trans and non-binary people should ideally have raised awareness of cis-heteronormativity. Yet increased visibility and legal advancements for trans and non-binary people in Germany,[59] for instance, have been followed by increased anti-trans hate speech and legislative initiatives. The mismatch between "media's 'out and

57 Christine M. Klapeer, "Entangled Drag/Trans Panics: A Reflection on the Intersections of Anti-Gender U.S. Politics and Recent Attacks on Drag Storytelling in Germany and Austria," in this volume.

58 Trans Legislation Tracker, "2024 Anti-Trans Bills Tracker," Trans Legislation, n.d., https://translegislation.com/.

59 In April 2024, the restrictive and problematically named Transexuals Law (*Transsexuellengesetz*) was struck down. The earlier law had required two "experts" to attest to the irrevocability of a person's desired change in gender, whereas changing one's gender identity legally is now based on self-identification. See Human Rights Watch, "Germany: Landmark Vote for Trans Rights Law. Creates Gender Recognition Procedure,

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proud' mentality" and "increased violence against queer – particularly trans – bodies" has had a paradoxical effect.[60] As Laura Borchert and Melanie Kreitler observe, "the increasing visibility we witness on-screen maintains and legitimizes existing, cis-heteronormative socio-cultural orders that are then reflected in legal developments."[61]

Taking up this theme in their essay in this volume, K. Allison Hammer quotes an interview with Trump on Fox News in which Trump notes that his diatribe against "men" playing on women's sports teams always gets the greatest amount of applause from his supporters. [62] Anti-trans sport bans employ a rhetoric of needing to protect supposedly helpless girls from the machinations of trans youth. These bills suggest that cis girls need to be defended against sexual predation in locker rooms and gender-based unfairness on the playing field.[63] They set up a binary of helpless femininity against transness. In a further iteration of this binary, the trans person has been repeatedly framed by Trump as in opposition to the military.

Hammer demonstrates how an enemy is created out of the transfeminine individual, who is constructed as a nefarious "enemy within," who is also associated with invasive immigration. Hammer grounds the success of Trump's rhetoric of hate in Christian nationalism and its absolutist belief in a strict gender binary in which women can be only mothers and helpmates, and men need to be 'contained' in their appropriately channeled sexuality to lead their biological families. This Christian nationalism conceives of "the American social body as straight, White, Christian, native born (English-speaking), and patriarchal."[64]

Christine M. Klapeer's text also demonstrates the transnational reach of far-right and anti-LGBTIQIA+ initiatives, which are based in and financed by Christian nationalist organizations in the United States. Her work on protests

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Upholds Nondiscrimination," April 12, 2024, https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/04/12/germany-landmark-vote-trans-rights-law.

60 Melanie Kreitler and Laura Borchert, "Representing, Repressing and Pushing Back: Queer and Trans (In)Visibilities in Media, Law and Culture," *Queer Studies in Media & Popular Culture* 7, no. 3 (2022): 147–164, 148.

61 Ibid., 149.

62 K. Allison Hammer, "How to Make an Enemy: Transmisogyny and the 2024 Presidential Election," in this volume, quoting an interview of Donald Trump on The Will Cain Show.

63 Olson and Borchert, "Narrative Authority, Affective Unreliability, and Transing Law," 391.

64 Hammer, "How to Make an Enemy."

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against drag storytelling hours in Austria and Germany uncovers transnational organizational structures between far-right U.S. American agitators in Europe and the United States, as well as overlaps in rhetoric, including most prominently moral panics surrounding drag storytelling as the apotheosis of so-called gender indoctrination. Like Hammer, Klapeer shows that the demonization of trans topics, and, by extension, drag storytelling hours, in supposed defenses of 'the family' mask larger efforts to impose authoritarian structures and undermine democratic institutions.

The last text in this volume examines issues that Hammer and Klapeer discuss, yet now in relation to African geopolitical areas. Mariel Reiss's polyphonic essay highlights the effects of the U.S. elections on marginalized communities in Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa that include lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer persons. She invites co-collaborators Kevin Besong (Cameroon), Adrian Jjuuko (Uganda), Āryā Jeipea Karijo, (Kenya), Nozizwe Ntesang (Botswana), Belinda Qaqamba Makinana and Khanyisile Phillips (South Africa), Omar van Reenen (Namibia), Ayodele Sogunro (Nigeria), and Monica Tabengwa (Botswana and South Africa) to speak to their specific contexts. Reiss then organizes interview statements around issues such as neocolonialist anti-LGBTQIA+ efforts that are often funded by U.S. American evangelical groups, thus underlining a point that Hammer and Klapeer make as well. Issues include how changes in administrations affect local activist efforts, such as the imposition of the Gag Rule on abortion information after Trump came into power. Reiss and her collaborators examine "norm contestations" relating to how "U.S. based and U.S. funded anti-LGBTIQ+ movements … currently manifest themselves in norm discourses, legislation initiatives, policies, and development cooperation in African national and regional contexts."[65]

Speaking directly to one another despite the geographical distance between the geopolitical areas they examine, Hammer's, Klapeer's, and Reiss's essays all attest to the global spillover of U.S. American anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQIA+ preoccupations. For example, in Reiss's essay, Āryā Jeipea Karijo describes how the the draft legislation, the so-called Family Protection Bill in Kenya not only mimics anti-trans bills in the United States but also exports topics specific to the U.S. American bathroom bills that make little sense in Kenya.

65 Reiss, "U.S. Presidential Elections."

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The current vilification of trans persons and persons read as trans recurs to anti-homosexual prejudices of an earlier era, and extends to other non-gender conforming persons as well. K. Allison Hammer's, Christine M. Klapeer's and Mariel Reiss's texts demonstrate how anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric and programs as well as legal and policy initiatives that limit reproductive rights are exported from Christian nationalist circles in the United States and are then localized in distinct ways, depending on where the rhetoric or policy initiative lands.

Barriers to Achieving Diversity

> One may question whether it is really that essential that a woman be elected U.S. President, especially at a moment in U.S. politics when democratic foundations as such are at stake. However, one may argue that it is precisely at these moments that we need to focus on exclusions that political systems create and how they contribute to democracy becoming more exclusive, if not dismantled entirely.
> – Birte Christ[66]

Although Birte Christ's topic in this volume is electability bias and gender, we quote her here at the beginning of this section to highlight a larger pattern that many of the contributions point out. The exclusions of certain groups or the vilification of certain persons – immigrants or drag storytellers or trans women – stand in for a far larger attack on democratic institutions. Maik Paap diagnoses this pattern when healthcare is presented as a scarce commodity that citizens will be deprived of by immigrants, and as a security issue. Marzia Milazzo's powerful *j'accuse* demonstrates how economic precarity is regularly used to control populations and incite forms of racism, anti-Blackness, and Afrophobia. And Christine M. Klapeer diagnoses the same pattern as "Attacks on Drag Performances as Global Assaults on Democracy."[67]

With the contributing authors, we note the following political and rhetorical strategies that are employed to impede diversity initiatives and to roll back existing progressive positions, all of which are anti-democratic. One is what Gayle Rubin identified as a bait-and-switch operation, by which "disputes

66 Birte Christ, "All About Electability: Women, Power, and the Presidential Elections," in this volume.

67 Klapeer, "Entangled Trans/Drag Panics."

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over sexual behaviour [or immigration, we would add] become the vehicles for displacing social anxieties, and discharging their attendant emotional intensity."[68] The affectively-laden stand in figure or issue does regulatory work for something entirely unrelated to it. This can be 'the innocent child' in need of protection as Hammer, Klapeer, and Belinda Qaqamba[69] all point out in their analyses of anti-trans and anti-LGBTQIA+ rhetoric and policies.

The bait-and-switch strategy can also be found in anti-trans and anti-queer efforts that find funding and logistical support in the United States through Christian nationalists.[70] As Kevin Besong describes the situation in Cameroon, homosexuality is connoted with being UnAfrican, even if the financial backing for anti-LGBTQIA+ efforts comes from the United States. This pattern demonstrates how nimbly anti-diversity discourse operates in various settings. Christine M. Klapeer notes a pattern of likeness in protests against drag storytelling in Austria and Germany. Again, the funding and the logistical basis stems from the United States. The explicit intention of these efforts is to protect children from so-called early sexualization.

Making Enemies

> The legacy of the first Trump presidency is the endless manufacture of an enemy.
> – K. Allison Hammer[71]

K. Allison Hammer's powerful thesis in this book is that trans women and trans feminine individuals have become the identified enemies of the Christian Right. Old-school homophobic fears of bodily violation are re-directed

68 Gayle S. Rubin, "Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality," in *Deviations*, ed. Gayle S. Rubin (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011 [1984]), 143.

69 Quoted in Reiss, "U.S. Presidential Elections."

70 With Annika Brockschmidt, we prefer this term to Evangelicals. See *Die Brandstifter: Wie Extremisten die Republikanische Partei übernahmen* (Leipzig: Rowohlt, 2024). For a discussion in English, see Andrew L. Seidel, "'We Remember a United States That Fought the Nazis': A German Scholar of Fascism Weighs in on Christian Nationalism in the U.S.," Religion Dispatches, November 22, 2021, https://religiondispatches.org/a-german-scholar-of-fascism-weighs-in-on-christian-nationalism-in-the-united-states/.

71 Hammer, "How to Make an Enemy."

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at trans women and transfeminine persons when transness is equated with invasive tropes of migration. The inviolable male body is at stake, as is the body politic. Hammer's central thesis about making transfemininity the enemy has been further validated since Governor Tim Walz was selected by Kamala Harris to be her running mate as Democratic candidate for the vice presidency in the general elections. Walz was immediately attacked by Trump for his previous advocacy of trans healthcare. Playing to his base, Trump announced on Fox News that Walz is "very heavy into transgender. Anything transgender he thinks is great."[72] The assumption is that this statement will be enough to discredit Walz altogether.

Making an enemy is an omnipresent trope in the 2024 elections, and as the essays here reveal, the two most vilified enemies in the election campaigns are immigrants and transfeminine persons. Often the negative imagery used to depict these 'enemies' is overlapping. So-called elites and whatever other figure is represented as opposing whiteness follow closely behind immigrants and transfeminine persons as similarly assailed figures.

Beyond the bait-and-switch is the already mentioned particularly effective form of play that Trump has mastered and which Sara Polak scrutinizes. Polak demonstrates how Trump speaks, posts, and acts in ways that according to previous behavioral norms are entirely unacceptable, yet then insists that he did not mean what he said or did. This pattern aligns with strategies of the Alt Right and the New Right to articulate racist, anti-Semitic, or misogynistic sentiments and memes and then to state that these enunciations were meant ironically and to insist that those who detect hate speech in them lack a sense of humor.[73]

A final anti-diversity strategy that this book identifies is the attempt to reverse legal protections of vulnerable groups by using human and civil rights discourse. Attempts to prohibit diversity topics being discussed or taught in

72 Fenit Nirappil and McKenzie Beard, "A Look at Walz's Record on Gender-Affirming Care as Republicans Attack," The Washington Post, August 8, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/08/08/look-walzs-record-gender-affirming-care-republicans-attack/.

73 Andrew Anglin, "A Normie's Guide to the Alt-Right," The Daily Stormer, August 31, 2016. The original is no longer online, likely due to multiple domain seizures for The Daily Stormer, but a snapshot of it survived thanks to the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine, at https://web.archive.org/web/20170821172825/https://dstormer6em3i4km.onion.link/a-normies-guide-to-the-alt-right/.

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schools on the basis of the supremacy of parental rights, or to argue for abortion bans as assertions of state rights, or to delete words such as "sexual orientation," "gender identity" and "diversity" from active usage because they supposedly impinge on the First Amendment freedom of speech all demonstrate a similar pattern. Rights discourse is utilized to reverse the historical expansion of protections for those who have been positively affected by pro-diversity initiatives. Such appropriations of civil and human rights discourses and attempts to re-write catalogs of rights in the service of anti-diversity efforts have to be noted, diagnosed, and actively countered.[74]

Paths Forward and the Benefits of Transnational Perspectives

The successful deployment of strategies of scapegoating, bait-and-switching, and using victimization, and rights discourses, as well as the widespread influence of U.S.-based initiatives, whether in anti-immigration policies, anti-trans initiatives, or abortion and contraception restrictions, highlight the necessity of understanding the 2024 elections and their potential impact from transnational perspectives. The perspectives assembled here help to identify ways to counter anti-diversity efforts resonating from out of the United States that are amplified during the elections.

Contributors to this volume articulate the need to decenter the United States from their own efforts to increase diversity and to pursue progressive political aims. Quoting Mariel Reiss's text, activists see the need for "creating stronger transnational alliances across the [African] continent," given the United States quixotic responses to LGBTIQIA+ and other human rights issues.[75] This involves an active de-centering of U.S. politics and political rhetoric. As Omar van Reenen straightforwardly states: "Africans should not be expected to push back against the American export of homophobia."[76] This sentiment could be echoed by Europeans working to increase diversity projects as well.

Identifying the narratives, tropes, and spectacles with which enemies are created and stand-in issues are deployed constitutes another way to actively re-

74 Jayne Huckerby and Sarah Knuckey, "Appropriation and the Rewriting of Rights," *I·CON* 21, no. 1 (2023): 243–265, 243.

75 Reiss, "U.S. Presidential Elections."

76 Ibid.

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sist anti-diversity practices and discourse. The essays assembled here demonstrate how voter support is garnered through racist, anti-Black and anti-immigrant discourse, how economic patterns are masked as lifestyle issues, and how control is exercised through the narrative of healthcare scarcity. Naming these issues, combatting misinformation, and addressing the ways in which political affects are mobilized remain central tasks.

Whether the 2024 U.S. elections are viewed as moments of reification, reform, or resistance depends on one's standpoint. Sabine N. Meyer's essay makes clear that voting has been embraced by many Native Americans as a form of active resistance, captured in the phrase "casting a ballot."[77] For Marzia Milazzo, elections often amount to exercises in empty semblances of reform in which politicians are "[c]ommitted to their own reproduction while delivering promises of social change."[78] At any rate, the general agreement on the extent to which U.S. American trends affect other geopolitical contexts galvanizes people working on progressive issues everywhere, particularly in light of the possibility of a second Trump presidency.

When we began work on this book in 2023, it appeared certain that Donald Trump and Joseph Biden would be the Republican and Democratic candidates for presidency. As the general elections came nearer, a palpable dread became widespread that Trump was very likely to win, bringing permanent damage to U.S. American democratic institutions, and further damage to diversity efforts in the United States and elsewhere. This dread dissipated somewhat in late July and August 2024 when Vice-President Kamala Harris became the Democratic presidential nominee. Tim Walz responded to Harris's request that he be on the ticket with the following public sentiment: "Thank you, Madam Vice-President, for the trust you put in me but, maybe more so, thank you for bringing back the joy."[79] Harris and Walz's presenting themselves as "joyful warriors" represents a vivid contrast to the MAGA Republicans who cast themselves as God's Warriors, when they attempted an insurrection on 6 January 2021. We note the current moment of Kamala-Euphoria with a renewed sense of history

77 Meyer, "IndigiPolitics."

78 Milazzo, "Elections."

79 Lauren Gambino, "Democrats' joy is unconfined as Harris and Walz take upbeat message on tour," The Observer, August 11, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/aug/11/kamala-harris-tim-walz-campaign-joy-election.

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repeating itself, recalling the Obama-Euphoria of 2007 and 2008 and its rapid decline during Obama's first term in office.[80]

We end this Introduction by advocating for what K. Allison Hammer has termed "unruly alliances" between unlike persons and groups that do not rely on the tropes of familial or erotic relationships. As Hammer writes, unruly alliances "[transcend] the limits of identitarian thinking" and offer "a vision for a politics of solidarity that can scale up to address gender and raced oppressions as well as ecological and economic issues."[81] In a later text, Hammer expands on this idea:

> Unruly alliances may form in a variety of locations – on a factory floor, an urban neighborhood, a field hospital, or an isolated geographical location; they be temporary, utilitarian, and with or without pathos. Only mass mobilization across identity categories will affect change.[82]

This volume and its authors want to open a space for unruly alliances. The texts assembled here speak to each other not just in that all the authors address the moment of the 2024 presidential elections and ask how they will impact the future. The alliances formed between the authors and texts are at times unlikely. Elements of Georgiana Banita's poignant analysis of Trumpian election rhetoric reappear in Esther Edelmann and Frans-Willem Korsten's discussion of the spectacularization of anti-ecological politics, and in Maik Paap's dissection of exclusionary anti-immigration narratives in the U.S. and Germany. We also find unruly alliances in the way that Sabine N. Meyer and Mariel Reiss counter the institutional gaze by organizing their contributions around the voices of citizens of Native Nations and activists from a variety of African nations.

For many people in the United States and abroad, the 2024 presidential elections mark a "time of possibility and of the unknown, which is also the time of unruly alliance."[83] Readers of this book will find other alliances between

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80 Greta Olson, "What Has the Obama Presidency Changed?" in *Obama and the Paradigm Shift: Measuring Change*, ed. Birte Christ and Greta Olson (Heidelberg: Winter), 11–33.

81 K. Allison Hammer, *Masculinity in Transition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023), 3.

82 K. Allison Hammer, "Exuberant Embodiment: A Trans Utopia for an Unbearable Present," *Utopian Studies: The Journal of the Society for Utopian Studies* 35, no. 3 (Winter 2024): forthcoming.

83 Hammer, *Masculinity*, 45.

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texts than those we have mentioned here. The unruly alliances forged here invite further intersectional transnational analyses of U.S. politics. We leave this Introduction with the hope of making many more unruly alliances in the future – spontaneous and temporary, yet also stabilizing relationships between unlikely people and groups – in a spillover beyond the pages of this book to a more gloriously diverse future.

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Part I: Ethnicity and Racial Politics

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Elections and Racial Power

Marzia Milazzo (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)

> An electoral choice of ten different fascists is like choosing which way one wishes to die.
> – George Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*[1]

In Europe and former European settler colonies, when one is close to elections one is rarely far from racism. The move to the far-right in the European elections of June 2024 demonstrates that racism continues to matter in elections.[2] It also reminds us of the intimate ties between racism and democracy. Racism, after all, has made many electoral victories possible. Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party did not become racist, anti-Semitic, and homophobic after garnering popular support, but deployed anti-Semitic and racist sentiments to consolidate power, including by exploiting the electoral system. Fascism, racism, and elections still operate in tandem today. When I complain to my Sicilian grandmother about the Giorgia Meloni-led neofascist government that runs Italy, my grandmother, assuming that fascism is antithetical to democracy, insists that it has nothing to do with the current Italian government. Yet, today as in the past, fascism thrives under democracy and remains fundamentally tied to capitalism, imperialism, and racism.

At the same time, George Jackson argues in *Blood in my Eye* (1972) that fascism is not static:

1 George L. Jackson, *Blood in My Eye* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1990 [1972]), 72.

2 On the election results see Ella Joyner, "Europe's Far Right Won Ground in the EU Elections. Can They Unite to Wield Power?" AP News, June 11, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/european-parliament-election-far-right-b9339cf1a7d2067bf6fa1941c166936d.

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> We will never have a complete definition of fascism, because it is in constant motion, showing a new face to fit any particular set of problems that arise to threaten the predominance of the traditionalist, capitalist ruling class. But if one were forced for the sake of clarity to define it in a word simple enough for all to understand, that word would be "reform."[3]

Jackson was a staunch critic of *both* fascism and elections, viewing the latter as incompatible with revolution, to which he dedicated his life. When he was nineteen years old, Jackson was given an indeterminate sentence of one year to life for stealing seventy-one dollars from a gas station, and spent eleven years in prison, seven of them in isolation.[4] During these years, Jackson continued writing, organizing, and theorizing the making of a revolution in the United States, until a guard killed him in San Quentin prison in California in 1971 at the young age of twenty-nine. It was the racist U.S. state, then, that made Jackson a revolutionary who opposed reform. Elections, we cannot forget, are precisely in the business of reform. Committed to their own reproduction while delivering promises of social change, many electoral parties and candidates, both in Europe and in the neocolonies, continue to routinely exploit racism, anti-Blackness, and popular discontentment to garner consent, showing that racism remains a powerful tool of social control to this day.

In Italy, the rise of the Lega Nord (Northern League) is emblematic of the strategic function that racism and anti-Blackness continue to play in many elections.[5] In the 1990s, the Lega Nord built its constituency in the North by targeting Southern Italians, depicting them as lazy, corrupt, and generally inferior to Northern Italians.[6] In the process, the Lega Nord mystified the fact that the so-called 1861 unification of Italy was a violent annexation that the North imposed upon the South, from which it extracted wealth, labor, and resources.[7] Despite its anti-Southern sentiments, the Lega Nord eventually gar-

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3 George L. Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*, 118.

4 See George L. Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994 [1971]).

5 Marzia Milazzo, *Colorblind Tools: Global Technologies of Racial Power* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2022), 263–4.

6 Michel Huysseune, "Come interpretare l'Altro: Il Mezzogiorno nel discorso della Lega Nord," *Meridiana*, 63 (2008): 175, 179.

7 Antonio Gramsci, *Selection from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International, 1971), 71; see also Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question*, trans. Pasquale Verdicchio (New York: Bordighera Press, 2015), 16.

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nered votes in the South and became a majority party in the Italian government in 2018. To achieve this, it redirected its racist propaganda towards Black migrants and refugees, while it renamed itself La Lega, strategically dropping the term "Nord" from its name.

Anti-Blackness, packaged in the colorblind language of immigration, has operated as a nation-building tool in Italy, where Northerners and Southerners have united over targeting Black people, while Southern Italians no longer face institutionalized discrimination in Northern Italy.[8] Speaking volumes about the ongoing power of racist and anti-Black propaganda masked as cultural nationalism, Southern Italians have thus been easily coopted into supporting a party that does not have our interests at heart. The strategies that La Lega used, of course, are not new. Neither are they confined to Europe, as white elites in Panama, for example, also used racism, anti-Blackness, and anti-immigrant propaganda in the early twentieth century to divide the working classes, gain popular consent, and propel a nation-building process that benefitted the white minority.[9]

In May 2024, general elections in South Africa also pushed the country further to the right. For the first time since the inaugural democratic elections of 1994, the ruling African National Congress (ANC) lost the majority, while the neoliberal Democratic Alliance (DA) consolidated its position as the main opposition party. On June 30, South Africa's president Cyril Ramaphosa announced the creation of a Government of National Unity, which sees the ANC entering a coalition with the DA and other political parties, including the pro-Afrikaner far-right party Freedom Front Plus (FFP).[10] Even as the ANC has long moved away from its originally socialist values towards a neoliberalism that has pushed most citizens further into poverty, the coalition government clearly is no good news for Black people. Rather, it will likely lead South Africa further towards nonracialism and neoliberalism in a country where white people, who

8 By "colorblind language" I mean language that is not explicitly racialized, while it seeks to achieve racist effects. On the Lega Nord and nation-building in Italy, see Milazzo, *Colorblind Tools*, 263–264.

9 For an analysis of how white elites exploited racism and anti-Blackness to garner consent in early twentieth century Panama, see Milazzo, *Colorblind Tools*, 57–80.

10 South African Government, "Meet SA's New Cabinet," SAnews, June 30, 2024, https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/meet-sas-new-cabinet.

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are merely seven percent of the population, continue to own over seventy percent of the land.[11]

What Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko said over fifty years ago thus remains relevant in post-1994 South Africa. Asked by a European journalist in 1977 whether he envisioned a democratic South Africa as a socialist society, Biko answered:

> Yes, I think there is no running away from the fact that now in South Africa there is such an ill distribution of wealth that any form of political freedom which does not touch on the proper distribution of wealth will be meaningless. The whites have locked up within a small minority of themselves the greater proportion of the country's wealth. If we have a mere change of face of those in governing positions what is likely to happen is that black people will continue to be poor, and you will see a few blacks filtering through into the so-called bourgeoisie. Our society will be run almost as of yesterday.[12]

Biko's words have been prescient given that in post-apartheid South Africa de facto there has been "a mere change of face of those in governing positions" so that the country is "run almost as of yesterday." Black people today are even poorer than during apartheid, while white people are collectively richer.[13] This makes sense as assets grow in value over time, and the South African constitution protects private property (and therefore white property). It also speaks to how, as Jackson writes, independent African countries "which allowed capitalism to remain are still neo-colonies."[14] This neocolonial condition affects every facet of society. Black people in South Africa have an abysmal life expectancy, which *decreased* from sixty years in 1985 to a shocking forty-nine years in 2004.[15] The South African government nonetheless has stopped collecting

11 Mandisi Majavu, "Laundering Racial Capitalism in Post-apartheid South Africa," *Politikon* 50, no. 3 (2023): 209–223, 216.

12 Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like: Selected Writings* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022), 149.

13 Martin Legassick, *Towards Socialist Democracy* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2007), 506.

14 Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*, 4.

15 Gerrit Rooks and Leon Oerlemans, "South Africa: A Rising Star? Assessing the X-effectiveness of South Africa's National System of Innovation," *European Planning Studies* 13, no. 8 (2005): 1205–1226, 1210.

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life expectancy statistics disaggregated by race, merely stating in the 2022 census that life expectancy is sixty-five years for women and sixty years for men.[16]

Many South African politicians exploit the abject conditions of poverty in which most Black South Africans live, as the unemployment rate for Black people is close to fifty percent, while for white people it is ten percent.[17] Illustrating how anti-Blackness and racism in South Africa function as tools of social control used against Black people themselves with the complicity of the Black elite, local elections in the last decade have seen the frightening growth of overtly xenophobic political parties, such as Action SA led by Herman Mashaba, who is an admirer of Donald Trump.[18] Xenophobia in South Africa is best described as Afrophobia given that it specifically targets Black immigrants, who are accused of stealing jobs from South Africans and bringing crime into the country.[19] It is a xenophobia that excludes white people, even as we continue to possess what Biko called "the natural passport to the exclusive pool of white privileges."[20] In deflecting attention away from white wealth and towards convenient scapegoats, Afrophobia sustains white power in South Africa.

In the United States, the ongoing presidential electoral campaign has also seen the exploitation of racist sentiments for the benefit of whiteness, as Trump is again using anti-immigrant propaganda to gain votes. Trump said during the presidential debate of June 27, 2024:

> The fact is that [Biden's] big kill on the Black people is the millions of people that he's allowed to come in through the border. [Immigrants are] taking Black jobs now – and it could be 18, it could be 19 and even 20 million people. They're taking Black jobs, and they're taking Hispanic jobs, and you

16 South African Government, "People of South Africa," gov.za, https://www.gov.za/about-sa/people-south-africa-0#birth.

17 Statistics South Africa, "Statistical Release P0211: Quarterly Labor Force Survey, Quarter 4: 2022," Quarter 4, 2022, https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02114thQuarter2022.pdf, 42–43.

18 See Niall Reddy, "South Africa Has Not Been Immune to Right-Wing Populism," Jacobin, March 1, 2022, https://jacobin.com/2022/03/south-africa-right-wing-populism-anc-eff-ethno-nationalism.

19 On Afrophobia in South Africa see Zamansele Nsele, "Framing Afrophobia as the 'Swart Gevaar's' Doppelgänger in Gerald Machona's Afrofuturistic *Vabvakure* (*People from Far Away*)," in *The Imagined New (or, What Happens When History is a Catastrophe?) – Volume I: Working through Alternative Archives: Art, History, Africa and the African Diaspora*, ed. Anthony Bogues et al. (Johannesburg, Lagos, Bayreuth: Iwalewa Books), 186–203.

20 Biko, *I Write What I Like*, 65.

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> haven't seen it yet, but you're gonna see something that's going to be the worst in our history.[21]

Trump here attempts to garner both Black and Latinx votes by predictably depicting immigrants as threatening competitors on the labor market, relying on an old and transnational racist strategy.[22] He has also tried to manipulate Black voters by depicting himself as a victim of the criminal justice system.[23]

In this context, we cannot forget that racist tactics enabled Trump to win the 2016 elections. In his Republican nomination speech, delivered in July 2016, Trump targeted Black people and undocumented immigrants, falsely depicting the United States as a country engulfed by racialized violence and crime.[24] Trump criminalized Black people by deploying colorblind language as he portrayed cities with a significant Black population, such Baltimore and Chicago, as emblems of violent crime.[25] More overtly targeting undocumented Latinx immigrants, who cannot vote, Trump argued that "illegal immigrants with criminal records … are tonight roaming free to threaten peaceful citizens."[26] That undocumented immigrants in the United States contribute *billions* in taxes did not prevent Trump from depicting them as a burden on the economy and as a threat to the racialized working classes, whose interests are certainly not represented by the Republican party.[27]

The fact that Trump continues to deploy explicitly racist tactics to gain votes does not mean that he is the sole locus of racism in this electoral campaign. The

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21 Trump cited in Ja'han Jones, "Trump's 'Black Jobs' Comment was a Lowlight in His Fact-Free Debate Performance," MSNBC.com, June 28, 2024, https://www.msnbc.com/the-reidout/reidout-blog/trump-black-jobs-2024-debate-rcna159521.

22 See Milazzo, *Colorblind Tools.*

23 Lalee Ibssa, Gabriella Abdul-Hakim, and Soo Rin Kim, "Trump Claims Black Americans Relate to His Criminal Prosecutions," ABC News, February 24, 2024, https://abcnews.go.com/US/trump-claims-black-americans-relate-criminal-prosecutions/story?id=107509919.

24 Milazzo, *Colorblind Tools*, 262.

25 Ibid.

26 Donald Trump, "Transcript: Donald Trump at the G.O.P. Convention," The New York Times, July 22, 2016, https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/22/us/politics/trump-transcript-rnc-address.html.

27 On the taxes paid by undocumented immigrants in the United States, see American Immigration Council, "Fact Sheet: Adding Up the Billions in Tax Dollars Paid by Undocumented Immigrants," April 4, 2016, https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/adding-billions-tax-dollars-paid-undocumented-immigrants.

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upcoming U.S. elections might appear to involve two very different candidates and parties, yet U.S. voters are again choosing between two versions of white supremacy. While Joe Biden and Donald Trump called each other "racist" during the 2024 campaign, these mutual accusations obscure the fact that racism is institutionalized in the United States and will remain a structural feature of the U.S. American state no matter who wins the presidential elections.[28] In this context, it is telling that institutional racism also thrived during Barack Obama's presidency.[29]

Further sustaining structural racism, Biden has continued to exploit fears of crime to fund the genocidal U.S. police. Biden's "Safer America Plan" includes funding for an additional 100,000 police officers.[30] Under the current administration, the U.S. government spent $135 billion on police in 2021 alone, with this money overwhelmingly going to salaries and benefits.[31] At the 2022 State of the Union Address, Biden renewed his commitment to extend policing by stating: "We should all agree the answer is not to defund the police. It's to fund the police. Fund them. Fund them. Fund them with resources and training. Resources and training they need to protect their community."[32] Here, Biden reproduces the myth that the police exist to "protect their community," while the U.S. police was created to protect white property and white people from the legitimate demands of the racialized working classes.[33] As Micol Seigel writes, "any analysis of U.S. policing must consider its constitutive relationship to the

28 Brakkton Booker, "Trump and Biden Campaigns Call Each Other 'Racist' as They Seek to Court Black Voters," Politico, May 23, 2024, https://www.politico.com/news/2024/05/23/biden-trump-racism-television-ads-black-voters-00159745.

29 See Bettina L. Love and Brandelyn Tosolt, "Reality of Rhetoric? Barack Obama and Post-Racial America," *Race, Gender, and Class* 17, no. 3–4 (2010): 19–37.

30 White House, "Fact Sheet: President Biden's Safer America Plan," The White House, August 1, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/08/01/fact-sheet-president-bidens-safer-america-plan-2/.

31 Urban Institute, "Criminal Justice Expenditures: Police, Corrections, and Courts," n.d., https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/cross-center-initiatives/state-and-local-finance-initiative/state-and-local-backgrounders/criminal-justice-police-corrections-courts-expenditures.

32 Joe Biden, "Full Transcript of Biden's State of the Union Address," The New York Times, March 1, 2022. https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/01/us/politics/biden-sotu-transcript.html.

33 On the history of the U.S. police, see Sam Mitrani, *The Rise of the Chicago Police Department: Class and Conflict, 1850–1894* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

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racialization of Black and brown subjects, not only theoretically but also in history, with the U.S. police's structural formation as an antiblack force."[34] The U.S. police remains an anti-Black force today.

While Biden continues to pump money into the police, police killings rise in number each year in the United States, where cops killed 1,163 people in 2023 alone.[35] As of May 27, 2024, of the 469 people killed by the police, 159 were white, which is thirty-three percent of the victims of police killings, even though white people make up sixty-one percent of the U.S. population.[36] This means that the U.S. police continues to inordinately kill Black people and people of color, who are also disproportionately incarcerated. In 2020, Black people were imprisoned at five times the rate for white adults in the United States.[37]

Biden's withdrawal from the 2024 presidential campaign and his endorsement of vice president Kamala Harris has been met by media outlets arguing that, "With Harris, Democrats would bet against US history of sexism, racism."[38] Indeed, Harris has been the object of racist attacks that predictably question her "political skills and competence," attacks which further show that racism and anti-Blackness are alive and well in the United States, where many might refuse to support a Black woman as president.[39] Far from being a passive victim of racism, however, Harris herself contributed to bolstering structural racism during her twenty-seven years as a "tough-on-crime" prosecutor in the state of California.[40]

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34 Micol Seigel, *Violence Work: State Power and the Limits of Police* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 21.

35 Statista, "People Shot to Death by U.S. Police 2017–2024, by Race," Statista, June 6, 2024, https://www.statista.com/statistics/585152/people-shot-to-death-by-us-police-by-race/.

36 Ibid.

37 Pew Charitable Trusts, "Racial Disparities Persist in Many U.S. Jails," May 16, 2023, https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2023/05/racial-disparities-persist-in-many-us-jails.

38 USA Today, "With Harris, Democrats Would Bet against US History of Sexism, Racism," July 22, 2024, https://www.usatoday.com/videos/news/politics/2024/07/22/kamala-harris-democrats-bet-against-us-history-sexism-racism/74493264007/.

39 Christina Greer, "The Real Reason a Kamala Harris Presidency is Unfathomable to Her Critics," MSNBC, July 11, 2024, https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/kamala-harris-dei-president-racist-sexist-comments-rcna161043.

40 Michael Finnegan, "California's Tough-on-Crime Past Haunts Kamala Harris," Los Angeles Times, October 24, 2019, https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2019-10-24/kamala-harris-california-crime.

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As vice president, Harris has maintained an inhumane stance on immigration, famously affirming during her 2021 visit to Guatemala, "If you come to our border, you will be turned back."[41] Over 37,000 migrants have been detained in the United States as of July 14, 2024.[42] During the 2020 presidential campaign, Biden promised to halt for-profit immigration detention centers. Yet as of 2023 more than ninety percent of immigrants held by U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) were locked up in private facilities, with the private prison company GEO Group having increased its revenues by forty percent to a record $1.05 billion.[43] The criminalization of immigration remains a racialized issue in the United States, where Black immigrants, for example, are subjected to discriminatory treatment, including arbitrary detention, higher bonds, and excessive use of force.[44]

Voter suppression also remains deeply racialized and anti-Black in the United States. In 2016, over six million U.S. citizens were deprived of the right to vote because of felony convictions.[45] While there are state differences, voter disqualification based on felony convictions are common throughout the United States.[46] No other democracy in the world disenfranchises for life people who have already served their sentence. White supremacists used felony disenfranchisement to prevent Black people from voting after the Civil War,

41 BBC, "Kamala Harris Tells Guatemala Migrants 'Do Not Come to US,'" June 8, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-57387350.

42 TRAC Immigration, "ICE Detainees," trac.syr, n.d., https://trac.syr.edu/immigration/detentionstats/pop_agen_table.html.

43 Ted Hesson, Mica Rosenberg, and Kristina Cooke, "Biden Vowed to Reform Immigration Detention. Instead, Private Prisons Benefited," Reuters, August 7, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-vowed-reform-immigration-detention-instead-private-prisons-benefited-2023-08-07/.

44 Human Rights First, "Anti-Black Discrimination within US Immigration, Detention, and Enforcement Systems," September 2022, https://humanrightsfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/CERD-1pger_Anti-Black-Discrimination-within-US-Immigration-Detention-and-Enforcement-Systems-1.pdf.

45 Christopher Uggen, Ryan Larson, and Sarah Shannon, "6 Million Lost Voters: State-Level Estimates of Felony Disenfranchisement, 2016," The Sentencing Project, October 2016, https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2022/08/6-Million-Lost-Voters.pdf.

46 The Sentencing Project and Human Rights Watch, "Disenfranchisement in Other Countries" under "Losing the Vote: The Impact of Felony Disenfranchisement Laws in the United State," Human Rights Watch, October 1998, https://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports98/vote/usvot980-04.htm.

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for example through Mississippi's 1890 constitution.[47] This same constitution is still in place today, and recent attempts to change it have failed. In the last thirty years, over 55,000 people in Mississippi have lost the right to vote; six out of ten disenfranchised people in the state are Black.[48]

Disenfranchisement thus clearly remains a method of racialized social control in the United States. At the same time, Black radical and Afropessimist thinkers teach us that elections are not a solution to racism and much less to anti-Blackness. As mentioned in the opening of this essay, elections are about reform, and reform, as Anthony Farley writes, "is a mode of repetition."[49] Moreover, Jackson said the following about elections: "When any election is held it will fortify rather than destroy the credibility of the power brokers. When we participate in this election to win, instead of disrupt, we're lending to its credibility, and destroying our own."[50] Jackson insists that elections sustain, legitimize, and naturalize the power of the state. In the United States, a country built on the genocide of Indigenous people and the enslavement of Black people, elections are meant to support the anti-Black and racist status quo rather than disrupt it. It is not simply a matter of abolishing the racist Electoral College or recognizing that a two-party system can hardly be considered democratic, but to contend with the fact that elections are antithetical to abolition. The state will never let people vote on its own destruction!

I hear the questions: Are you advocating for dictatorship? What else is there beyond democracy? Such questions reveal a profound lack of imagination and demonstrate that we can barely think beyond the structures of the nation state. And yet, for Black people, the nation state is no safe haven. Rather, as Rinaldo Walcott writes, "for Black subjects … settlement is impossible; citizenship is a mirage; and the nation-state is the site of our deepest estrangement and our deaths."[51] The nation state provides no protection for Black people. Anti-Blackness, too, thrives under democracy.

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47 Daja E. Henry, "How Mississippi's Jim Crow Laws Still Haunt Black Voters Today," The Marshall Project, April 4, 2024, https://www.themarshallproject.org/2024/04/04/mississippi-voting-rights-history-disenfranchisement.

48 Ibid.

49 Anthony Farley, "Toward a General Theory of Antiblackness," in *Antiblackness*, ed. Moon-Kie Jung and João H. Costa Vargas (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 82–105.

50 Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*, 26.

51 Rinaldo Walcott, *The Long Emancipation: Moving Toward Black Freedom* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2021), 50.

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In the United States, there is an obsession with elections and hegemonic ideology which contends that voting is an ethical practice in itself or even a duty. However, Frank B. Wilderson invites us to rethink the presumed ethicality of voting within a system put in place to maintain racism and anti-Blackness. Wilderson states:

> One thing that everyone is forgetting is that the only way that voting could actually be an ethical practice is if, say, every Indian had 22 votes and every black had a vote and everybody else sat back…. Having other people vote makes … pulling the lever an unethical act.[52]

Every time we are concerned with the outcome of a specific election, we forget that U.S. elections, to return to Jackson, "strengthen the credibility of the power brokers."[53] The electoral power brokers in the United States are committed to the reproduction of capitalism and the reproduction of their own class, a class that is dependent on the death and exploitation of Black people, regardless of who is running for whatever office. While we do not yet know whether the Democratic or Republican candidate will win in November, we can be sure that the elections will bring yet another victory for anti-Blackness and white supremacy.

52 Omar Ricks and Frank B. Wilderson. "'Knowing Oneself to Be a Dead Relation': A Review Essay and an Interview with Frank B. Wilderson III (Continued Part 2 of 2)," n.d., https://cosmichoboes.blogspot.com/2015/08/knowing-oneself-to-be-dead-relation_12.html.

53 Jackson, *Blood in My Eye*, 26.

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IndigiPolitics: Native American Voters and the 2024 U.S. Presidential Election

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> In 2024, the power of the Native Vote holds the potential to swing elections and shape history not just for Native people, but for everyone in the United States for generations.
> – Mark Macarro (Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians), President of the National Congress of American Indians[1]

> Every vote in our communities is not just crucial; it's a powerful catalyst for change. Native voices are increasingly becoming decisive factors in local elections, shaping the political future at every level. Our engagement in the United States political fabric is not just significant; it's revolutionary . . . We are not only making the invisible visible; we are paving the way for a future where Native representation is undeniable and influential.
> – Janeen Comenote (Quinault), Executive Director of National Urban Indian Family Coalition[2]

At the time of my writing, that is, in June 2024, with very few exceptions, non-Native media are keeping silent about the role and impact of Native voters in the upcoming presidential election. An article from *The New York Times* from April 29, 2024, serves as a case in point. When reporting about Arizona, "a 2024 political hothouse,"[3] journalists Jack Healy, Kellen Browning, and Michael

1 Levi Rickert, "READ NCAI President Mark Macarro's State of Indian Nations Address," Native News Online, February 14, 2024, https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/read-ncai-president-mark-macarro-s-state-of-indian-nations-address.

2 Kaili Berg, "Native Voters Could Be Key Deciders in 2024 Elections, New Report Says," Native News Online, February 1, 2024, https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/native-voters-could-be-key-deciders-in-2024-elections-new-report-says.

3 Jack Healy, Kellen Browning, and Michael Wines, "With Abortion and the Border, Arizona Becomes a 2024 Political Hothouse," The New York Times, April 29,

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Wines delve into the vastly complex and changing demographics in the state, which have made the political landscape ever more unpredictable and led to battles about its political future between a wide array of players. While the journalists talk about the important role that Latinx voters and moderate newcomers from California and other parts of the U.S. are going to play in the election, they fail to mention the twenty-two federally recognized Native nations within Arizona's state borders and the presence of more than 390,000 Native Americans, making up 5.41% of the state's total population.[4]

This oversight of a group of this size is all the more astounding because past elections in Arizona have proven that Native voters have a decisive impact on electoral outcomes. Using precinct-level data, journalists show that voter turnout on reservations helped Joseph Biden carry the state by just 11,400 votes in 2020, making him the first Democratic presidential candidate to win Arizona in more than twenty years.[5] Native Americans in Arizona also went to the polls in large numbers during the 2022 midterm elections, helping Democratic Governor Katie Hobbs secure a win.[6]

Examples such as the article from *The New York Times* suggest that Native political participation tends to be overlooked by non-Native media and political analysts. Native Americans are either not mentioned at all when talking about groups of voters or subsumed under the heading 'Something else,' as CNN did on election night 2020.[7] In a similar vein, both political parties "have been really negligent when it comes to the Native American vote"; generally, they in-

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2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/04/29/us/arizona-abortion-border-2024-election.html?smid=nytcore-android-share.

4 World Population Review, "Native American Population by State 2024," n.d., https://worldpopulationreview.com/state-rankings/native-american-population.

5 Anna V. Smith provides maps showing that in some precincts of the Tohono O'odham Nation, Biden and Kamala Harris won 98% of the vote. At the time of her writing, the three counties that overlap with the Navajo Nation and Hopi Tribe were won by Biden at a rate of 57%, as opposed to 51% statewide. Voter precincts on the Navajo Nation were won by Biden at a rate of 60–90%. Anna V. Smith, "How Indigenous Voters Swung the 2020 Election," HighCountryNews, November 6, 2020, https://www.hcn.org/articles/indigenous-affairs-how-indigenous-voters-swung-the-2020-election/.

6 Ximena Bustillo, "Sometimes Overlooked by Campaigns, Native Voters Could Decide Major Elections in 2024," NPR, November 21, 2023, https://www.npr.org/2023/11/20/1213525361/native-voters-influence-2024-elections-arizona-montana-wisconsin.

7 Katrina Phillips, "It's Time to Recognize the Forgotten Americans Who Helped Elect Joe Biden," The Washington Post, November 9, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/2020/11/09/its-time-recognize-forgotten-americans-who-helped-elect-jo

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vest neither time nor funds in Indian Country, as Jacqueline De León (Isleta Pueblo), a senior staff attorney and expert on Native voting rights at the Native American Rights Fund (NARF), critically points out.[8]

By contrast, Native Americans – activists, professionals, and organizations – are conscious of the enormous potential and power of the Native vote. De León is just one of many Native activists/professionals in the fight for Native civic engagement and political participation who insist on the ability of Native voters to decide elections in places "where the population of Native Americans is bigger than the vote differentials that decide those races."[9] In the 2024 State of the Indian Nations Address, Mark Macarro (Pechanga Band of Luiseño Indians), President of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI),[10] also emphasized "the power of the Native vote" in the upcoming election. The Native vote is "a catalyst for change," Janeen Comenote (Quinault), Executive Director of the National Urban Indian Family Coalition,[11] said in a recent press release. "Native representation," Comenote and Macarro argue, is "revolutionary" and "shape[s] history" by moving Native concerns centerstage and by increasing Native leadership in defining the political future of the country.[12]

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e-biden/?bbeml=tp-pck9Q6QNPEiuBt3JmyTokQ.j_A449GHrZU6gsiXEwkkqjw.rhpa3D81JCk2FHErD8XV8wQ.Ius4S-howQE-NpNFoKvkIDA.

8 Ximena Bustillo and Elena Moore, "In Arizona, These Young Native American Voters Seize Their Political Power," NPR, February 1, 2024, https://www.npr.org/2024/02/01/1218630008/native-american-arizona-tribe-navajo-voters-election-2024.

9 Ibid.

10 Since its founding in 1944, the NCAI has been the largest and most representative Native-led organization serving the broad interests of tribal governments and communities. See National Congress of American Indians, "About NCAI," NCAI, n.d., https://www.ncai.org/about-ncai.

11 Since 2018, NUIFC has sought to mobilize Native Americans living off-reservation, especially those residing in urban centers. These populations represent more than 70% of the total American Indian/Alaska Native population and are usually overlooked by conventional voter turnout campaigns. By channeling money to 24 urban communities, NUIFC has supported a grassroots movement mobilizing Native voters and emphasizing the significance of Native voters for the political process. National Urban Indian Family Coalition, "Democracy Is Indigenous: Five Year Impact Report," Issue Lab, January 14, 2024, https://search.issuelab.org/resource/democracy-is-indigenous-five-year-impact-report.html.

12 Bustillo and Moore, "Young Native American Voters"; National Urban Indian Family Coalition, "Democracy Is Indigenous."

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In what follows, I offer reflections on facets of what citizen of the Navajo Nation and political correspondent Pauly Denetclaw calls "IndigiPolitics" in her eponymous Indian Country Today (ICT) newscast dedicated to Indigenous politics and policy.[13] IndigiPolitics implies a focus on Native American voters and their political interests, concerns, and voting practices and considers the upcoming elections from the perspective of Native Americans. In order to historically situate Native voting practices, I start this article by engaging with the manifold barriers to political participation that Native Americans have been facing up to the present day. I then think about the Democratic and Republican presidential candidates, Joseph Biden and Donald Trump, from the perspective of Native American voters. Questions I consider include: "Where do the candidates stand on Indigenous issues?" And, "How have they engaged Native concerns during their respective terms as president?" Finally, I offer predictions about the political alignment of Native American voters in the 2024 presidential election. I ask, "What issues are central to Native Americans voters, especially young voters?" "How are they politically aligned?" And, "In which states other than Arizona could Native voters make a difference?"

My contribution builds primarily on available journalistic pieces from leading Native news outlets and on reports by Native-led organizations seeking to mobilize Native voters and amplify Native concerns in political discourse. I also draw on the scant political science scholarship on contemporary Native American politics.[14] Like politicians and non-Native media sources, political

13 Pauly Denetclaw, "IndigiPolitics: ICT's Indigenous Politics, Policy Newsletter," Indian Country Today, September 21, 2022, https://ictnews.org/newsletters/indigipolitics-icts-indigenous-politics-policy-newsletter; David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark speak of "American Indian Politics" in their eponymous monograph. David E. Wilkins and Heidi Kiiwetinepinesiik Stark, *American Indian Politics and the American Political System* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

14 The most extensive publication to date is Daniel McCool, Susan M. Olson, and J. L. Robinson's 2007 *Native Vote: American Indians, the Voting Rights Act, and the Right to Vote*. See also Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*; Gabriel R. Sanchez and Raymond Foxworth, "Social Justice and Native American Political Engagement," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 86, no. S1 (2022): 473–498; Radka Štroblová, "The Power of the Native Vote: Evaluation of the Influence of Native Americans on the Outcome of the 2020 Presidential Elections in the United States – A Case Study of Arizona," Master's Thesis (Charles University, 2021); Rebekah Herrick and Jeanette Mendez, "American Indian Party Identification: Why American Indians Tend to Be Democrats," *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 8, no. 2 (2018): 275–292; Jeonghun Min and Daniel Savage, "Why Do American Indians Vote Democratic?" *Social Science Journal* 51, no. 2 (2014): 167–180; Eileen M. Luna,

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analysts need to engage more thoroughly with IndigiPolitics. American Indians and Alaska Natives constitute one of the fastest growing populations in the United States. Indigenous people will be key players in future elections.[15] Hence, the NARF's campaign slogan seems trenchant indeed: "Democracy is Native."[16]

"Obstacles at Every Turn": Barriers to Native Political Participation

Present-day Native voting rights and practices can only be understood in light of the historical fight about Native citizenship and suffrage and ongoing attempts to hamper Native Americans from voting. Many people assume that the Indian Citizenship Act, passed one hundred years ago on June 2, 1924, automatically enabled Native Americans to vote. However, this is far from true, as a multitude of state laws, constitutional clauses, and court decisions barred Native Americans from voting.[17] In "Obstacles at Every Turn: Barriers to Political Participation Faced by Native American Voters," a report released by the NARF in 2020, the contributing authors outline the strategies that were employed by many states, especially Western states, to prevent Native American political participation. Some of them implemented voting restrictions in their constitutions. Minnesota's Constitution, for instance, originally prohibited Native Americans from voting unless they "adopted the language, customs, and habits of civilization."[18] Each potential Native American voter had to appear before a district court to prove that they met those requirements. Other states, such as New Mexico and Utah, argued that Native Americans were not residents of the state and hence ineligible to vote. In line with Minnesota's Constitution, several states passed laws that barred Native Americans from voting as long

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"Mobilizing the Unrepresented: Indian Voting Patterns and the Implications for Tribal Sovereignty," *Wicazo Sa Review* 15, no.1 (2000): 91–115.

15 The 2020 census saw an 86.5% increase in the American Indian and Alaska Native population. Native American Rights Fund, "Obstacles at Every Turn: Barriers to Political Participation Faced by Native American Voters," NARF Comprehensive Field Hearing Report, 2020, https://vote.narf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/obstacles_at_every_turn.pdf, 11; Berg, "Native Voters Key Deciders."

16 Native American Rights Fund, "Democracy is Native," NARF, n.d., https://vote.narf.org/native-american-democracy/.

17 McCool, Olson, and Robinson, *Native Vote*, 8.

18 NARF, "Obstacles," 11.

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as they maintained tribal relations. "[S]ever[ing] their tribal relations," adopting Christianity and "liv[ing] the same as white people," as the North Dakota Supreme Court phrased it in 1920, became a litmus test for voting.[19]

Another popular argument that has been used by states to deny Native Americans the right to vote was the idea of "Indians not taxed." Native Americans pay some taxes but not all. For instance, they do not pay property taxes on reservation homes. Even though Native voters won several court cases affirming their right to vote despite not paying property taxes,[20] some local jurisdictions and non-Native voters have argued that Native Americans living on reservations should not be allowed to vote.[21] Another way to keep Native Americans from exerting their right to vote are arguments advanced by single states about guardianship. Being "under guardianship" of the federal government, Native Americans have often been placed by states into the same category as other individuals "under guardianship" – people considered mentally incompetent or formally judged to be insane – "a truly imaginative twisting" of the notion of guardianship, as the authors of the "Obstacles" report aptly phrase it.[22] Another way to bar Native voters from the polls was the use of literacy tests, which became notorious in the South before the passage of the Voting Rights Act (VRA) in 1965 and the 1970 amendments. Testing a person's literacy drastically reduced the number of Native voters, especially in tribal communities with a great number of Indigenous-language speakers.[23]

Daniel McCool, Susan M. Olson, and Jennifer L. Robinson have offered the first detailed analysis of both the VRA and its positive impact on Native voter registration, turnout, representation, and access to government. The VRA and its amendments prohibit practices or procedures that result in the denial and curtailment of voting rights, such as literacy tests. The Act also enabled the litigation of Native claims of voting rights abuses. Lawsuits abounded, especially in states where Native Americans are numerous enough to exert political influence (Arizona, South Dakota, New Mexico). Many of these cases ended with

19 Ibid., 11–12.

20 See, for instance, the New Mexico court case of *Trujillo v. Garley* (1948).

21 NARF, "Obstacles," 12. For an elaborate treatment of the tension between, as Glenn A. Phelps puts it, "claims of tribal sovereignty and immunity from state and local processes" and "the responsibilities incumbent upon citizenship and suffrage in state and local governments," see Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 210.

22 NARF, "Obstacles," 13.

23 Ibid., 13–14.

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victories for the plaintiffs. The cases engaged not with "complete disenfranchisement" (states do no longer openly deny Native Americans the right to vote) but with "discriminatory treatment in the application of general voting rules and procedures" – a practice that persists until the present day.[24]

Native American political influence continues to be curtailed through gerrymandering districts, as well as through failing to provide information about the voting process, adequate opportunities to register and to vote, and adequate language assistance where needed.[25] Examples of such structural barriers include: placing polling booths a several-hour drive away from tribal lands, providing an insufficient number of ballots in predominantly Native precincts, using the state police to intimidate voters, not accepting tribal identification cards as valid forms of identification,[26] and failing to provide a sufficient number of satellite offices on reservations that facilitate access to early voting and same-day registration services.[27]

Despite successes in litigation, there still exist "obstacles at every turn," as the eponymous report suggests. New obstacles are constantly devised by states and local jurisdictions to minimize Native political influence, particularly in places where Native Americans are numerous enough to have a political impact. In March 2024, for instance, in *Western Native Voice et al. v. Jacobsen et al.*, the Montana Supreme Court overruled two laws, House Bill 176 and House Bill 530 that would have ended Election Day registration and prohibited third-party ballot assistance. Montana Native populations number among the rural communities in the state that heavily rely on ballot assistance and Election Day registration and whose voting rights were severely curtailed by these bills.[28]

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24 McCool, Olson, and Robinson, *Native Vote*, 47–67, 72, 88, 155–175; Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 209.

25 McCool, Olson, and Robinson, *Native Vote*, 73–74; Luna, "Mobilizing the Unrepresented," 96–97.

26 Recent, scholarship has demonstrated that North Dakota's photo-ID law disproportionately harmed Native American voters in that state. Sanchez and Foxworth, "Social Justice," 474.

27 Chrissie Castro, Anathea Chino, and Laura Harris, "Advance Native Political Leadership," Advance Native Political Leadership, October 2016, https://advancenativepl.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ANPL-Political-Power-09-22-16.pdf, 19.

28 ACLU of Montana, "Montana Supreme Court Strikes Down Voting Laws Intended to Disenfranchise Indigenous Voters," American Civil Liberties Union, March 27, 2024, https://www.aclu.org/press-releases/montana-supreme-court-strikes-down-voting-laws-intended-to-disenfranchise-indigenous-voters.

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The "Obstacles" report establishes a link between Native resurgence and the persistence of voting barriers. Native Americans "pulled themselves out of the deep pit of near-extinction to become a potent political force," the report's authors argue. Such "Native resurgence" has encouraged the continuous crafting of legal strategies that undermine Native power.[29] Additionally, tribes operating casinos have financially contributed to political campaigns, with their contributions (and hence their political influence) having increased tremendously over the past years.[30] De León establishes an inextricable link between "a flux of [Native] political power" and "a corresponding backlash that makes attempts to make it more difficult to vote."[31]

The ongoing infringement of Native voting rights has spawned numerous measures and initiatives in- and outside the realm of politics. The Frank Harrison, Elizabeth Peratrovich, and Miguel Trujillo Native American Voting Rights Act (NAVRA), which has been introduced in every Congress since 2021**,** is a bipartisan political measure that has grown out of the conviction that federal intervention is needed "to establish baseline, consistent standards for voting in Indian Country."[32] Ever since 2013, when the U.S. Supreme Court in *Shelby County v. Holder* held that jurisdictions with a history of voting discrimination no longer had to submit voting changes for advance review ("preclearance"), strategies and schemes to restrict voting have picked up speed.[33]

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29 NARF, "Obstacles," 14.

30 For detailed data, see Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 199–201.

31 Bustillo, "Sometimes Overlooked by Campaigns."

32 Native American Rights Fund, "NARF Voting Rights Actions in Congress," NARF, June 10, 2024, https://vote.narf.org/native-american-voting-rights-act-navra/; ICT Opinion, "Protecting the Sacred Right to Vote for Native Americans," ICT News, July 20, 2023, https://ictnews.org/opinion/protecting-the-sacred-right-to-vote-for-native-americans. For the key provisions of NAVRA, see the explainer flyer at NARF, "Native American Voting Rights Act (NAVRA)," 2024, vote.narf.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/navra-brief-overview-draft_small_1.pdf. As early as 2015, Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), vice chairman of the Indian Affairs Committee, introduced a Native American Voting Rights Act. Castro, Chino, and Harris, "Advance Native Political Leadership," 19.

33 Civil Rights Division, "The *Shelby County* Decision," Justice.gov, November 17, 2023, https://www.justice.gov/crt/shelby-county-decision; The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, "The Leadership Conference Celebrates Reintroduction of John R. Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act to Protect the Freedom to Vote," civilrights.org, February 29, 2024, https://civilrights.org/2024/02/29/reintroduction-of-john-r-lewis-voting-rights-advancement/#.

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"We really need the Native American Voting Rights Act," as NARF Executive Director John Echohawk (Pawnee) emphasizes. "We all have to get involved in the political process in Washington, D.C. This is our only hope . . . We need to get Congress to act on this now."[34] But NAVRA has yet to be approved by Congress despite its endorsement by the Interagency Steering Group on Native American Voting Rights, which was founded as part of President Biden's Executive Order 14019 on Promoting Access to Voting with the task of researching barriers to Native political participation and recommending measures to reduce or eliminate these barriers.[35]

Native American non-profit organizations, grassroots groups, and activists have worked hard to facilitate and increase Native political participation. In 2004, the NCAI took the lead in organizing Native voters by initiating a nationwide registration drive called "Native Vote 2004." They gave out bumper stickers and lapel buttons ("I'm Indian and I Vote" and "Native Vote"), provided toolkits, set up a website (www.nativevote.org), and organized rallies.[36] Besides the NCAI, one of the best-known groups is the NARF, which works toward bringing together voting rights advocates, lawyers, civil rights experts, and tribal advocates to develop measures against Native voting restrictions. One of their most impactful projects was the formation of the Native American Voting Rights Coalition in 2015, in which the organizations involved pool their expertise and experience and devise strategies in the areas of "legislation and policy issues," "litigation," and "capacity building and education issues."[37] The 2020 "Obstacles" report and its continuous updates result from the work of the coalition.

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34 NARF, "NARF Voting Rights Actions in Congress."

35 Interagency Steering Group on Native American Voting Rights, "Report of the Interagency Steering Group on Native American Voting Rights," The White House, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Tribal-Voting-Report-FINAL.pdf.

36 McCool, Olson, and Robinson, *Native Vote*, 177–78. For an example of such a toolkit, see National Congress of American Indians, "Voter Action Kit," NCAI, 2022, http://www.nativevote.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Native-Vote-Toolkit.pdf.

37 The Native American Voting Rights Coalition includes, for instance, the NARF, the NCAI, the American Civil Liberties Union, Voting Rights Project, the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, the Fair Elections Center, Western Native Voice, and Four Directions. Native American Rights Fund, "Native American Voting Rights Project," NARF, n.d., https://narf.org/cases/voting-rights/.

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While doing research for this article, I came across a multitude of other Native-led groups – the majority of which are non-partisan – that seek to inform and mobilize Native voters on tribal lands and in urban areas, to increase Native voter registration and turnout, and to raise awareness of the power of the Native vote: Native American Voters Alliance, National Voice, Native Action Network, Native Organizers Alliance, Native Youth Leadership Alliance, Advance Political Leadership, Arizona Native Vote, New Mexico Native Vote, Wisconsin Native Vote, National Urban Indian Family Coalition – a plethora of other groups could be added.[38] They are doing this work with incredible success: The 2020 Election Eve Survey stated that 57% of Native American voters were contacted before the election by a community organization, campaign, or political party to ask them to register to vote.[39]

These groups also engage with Native Americans who "see a tension between participating in U.S. elections and maintaining their political commitment to tribal sovereignty."[40] Voting in state and local elections, some Native Americans believe, will impact questions of tribal sovereignty negatively. They see voting as tacitly consenting to be governed from outside and, hence, stay away from the polls.[41] As the late Ray Cook (Akwesasne Mohawk) put it:

> To vote as Americans sends a mixed message. If we strive to live a free and independent existence, does voting as Americans surrender that existence? Certainly as governments of real nations it does. After that act of voting do we still remain a sovereign and distinct people, or do we become dark Amer-

38 Some initiatives are strictly partisan, such as the Native Americans for Trump coalition. Štroblová, "The Power of the Native Vote," 37. The Democrats and Republicans have also begun to create infrastructures inclusive of Native Americans. There are, for instance, active Democratic Native American caucuses in New Mexico, California, Washington, Minnesota, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. As Advance Political Leadership writes in its 2016 report, the Republican Party did not have the same degree of internal infrastructure. Castro, Chino, and Harris, "Advance Native Political Leadership," 16.

39 Gabriel R. Sanchez, "What Might We Expect from Native American Voters in the Upcoming 2022 Election?" Brookings, December 16, 2021, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/what-we-might-expect-from-native-american-voters-in-the-upcoming-2022-election/.

40 Kevin Bruyneel, "Native Vote: American Indians, the Voting Rights Act, and the Right to Vote. By Daniel McCool, Susan M. Olson, and Jennifer L. Robinson," *Perspectives on Politics* 7, no. 3 (2009): 664–65.

41 McCool, Olson, and Robinson, *Native Vote*, 194.

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> icans, a minority in a sea of many? . . . A price comes with American citizenship and voting in American elections.[42]

Voting, Cook suggests, in another piece, is like "Inviting the Wolf into the Hen House."[43] Mark Trahant (Shoshone-Bannock) disagrees. For him, "voting is the surest route to change. I've seen it happen. Again and again."[44]

Like Trahant, the Native groups and organizations involved in the fight for the Native vote, and a multitude of individual Native activists and journalists, are convinced of the significance of Indigenous political participation and work hard to get Native voters to the polls. The little scholarship available provides data that confirms their convictions. As McCool and his co-authors demonstrate, the Native vote became a prominent topic of political conversation in the early 2000s. Political races, ranging from county sheriff to Congress, began to be determined by the Native vote, and various politicians openly acknowledged that they owed their elections to Native voters.[45] In the years to come, the power of the Native vote continued to be a topic of conversation. However, as the NARF put it, the "Native voter impact" remained "a potent but untapped political force."[46]

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42 Ray Cook, "Beware the Voices of Political Assimilation," ICT News, September 12, 2018, https://ictnews.org/archive/beware-the-voices-of-political-assimilation.

43 Ray Cook, "Inviting the Wolf into the Hen House: Tribal Citizens and American Elections," ICT News, September 12, 2018, https://ictnews.org/archive/inviting-the-wolf-into-the-hen-house-tribal-citizens-and-american-elections. Wilkins and Stark also elaborate on many Native Americans' hesitation or even refusal to vote. Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 202. For a scholarly treatment of Native fears of political participation in non-Native elections, see also Luna, "Mobilizing the Unrepresented," 95–96.

44 Mark Trahant, "Yes, It's an Imperfect System but the Native Vote Is Worth Counting," ICT News, September 12, 2018, https://ictnews.org/archive/yes-its-an-imperfect-system-but-the-native-vote-is-worth-counting.

45 McCool, Olson, and Robinson, *Native Vote*, 177.

46 Native American Rights Fund, "Native Voter Impact: A Potent but Untapped Political Force," NARF, n.d., https://vote.narf.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/obstacles_voter_impact_summary.pdf. After the publication of McCool, Olson, and Robinson's monograph in 2007, scholarly analyses of Native voting patterns were curiously absent in political science scholarship for many years. By contrast, Native journalists and activists continued to report on the power of the Native vote, as the NARF report and other journalistic pieces demonstrate. See, for instance, Tristan Ahtone, "Election 2008 – The World Is Watching: Paying Attention to the Native American Vote," Frontline World, November 4, 2008, https://www.pbs.org/frontlineworld/election2008/2008/11/paying-attention-to-the-n.html.

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COVID-19 contributed to what NCAI President Jefferson Keel in the 2019 State of the Indian Nations Address called "Indian Country's resurgence," and this radiated into the field of electoral politics.[47] I have argued elsewhere that the pandemic operated like a magnifying glass that threw deficient, unjust, and discriminatory structures into relief and highlighted the necessity and inevitability of legal-political change. It empowered Native Americans across the nation and fostered Native protest and resistance.[48] Focusing specifically on electoral politics, Gabriel R. Sanchez and Raymond Foxworth argue that the pandemic "was a catalyst for Native American political engagement."[49] In the wake of the pandemic, many Native Americans began to (re-)conceptualize voting as a practice of resistance. The importance of political participation was emphasized across Native media and art. Thus, during the 2020 presidential election campaigns, Apache artist Douglas Miles stated: "Native people need to look at [voting] as a weapon of the colonizer that they can use to alleviate some of the systemic oppression that we're dealing with."[50]

The 2022 report "From Protests, to the Ballot Box and Beyond: Building Indigenous Power" by IllumiNative, the Native Organizers Alliance, and the Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute suggests that Miles' view was shared by many other Native Americans: according to a survey, Native Americans across the nation increasingly viewed the ballot box as a potent means of "building indigenous power."[51]

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47 Damon Scott, "NCAI's Keel Sees Strong, Resurgent Indian Country; PECS' Joy Prescott Mentioned in Address," The Seminole Tribune, March 1, 2019, https://civilrights.org/2024/02/29/reintroduction-of-john-r-lewis-voting-rights-advancement/.

48 Sabine N. Meyer, "COVID-19 as a Magnifying Glass: Native America Between Vulnerability and (Self-)Empowerment," in *In the Realm of Corona Normativities II – The Permanence of the Exception*, eds. Werner Gephart and Jure Leko (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klosterman, 2022), 223–50.

49 Sanchez and Foxworth, "Social Justice," 477.

50 Casey Quackenbush, "Voting as a 'Weapon of the Colonizer,'" Contra Post, November 3, 2020, https://contrapost.substack.com/p/voting-as-a-weapon-of-the-colonizer.

51 IllumiNative, Native Organizers Alliance, and Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, "From Protests, to the Ballot Box, and Beyond: Building Indigenous Power," 2020, https://illuminative.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/indigenous_Futures_Survey_report_FINAL.pdf.

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"A Repeat of Four Years Ago": Trump, Biden and the Native Electorate

When Native journalists, such as Denetclaw, report about the 2024 U.S. presidential election, they often use terms such as "repeat" or "rematch," alluding to the identical constellation of Democratic and Republican presidential candidates.[52] In order to gauge political affinities of Native voters in the upcoming election, it is worthwhile to compare Trump's and Biden's respective records on Native affairs and to analyze how Native Americans voted in the 2020 election.

The 2016 Republican platform, which Republicans decided to abide by in 2020 as well, includes a long section titled "Honoring Our Relations with American Indians." But Donald Trump struck a different note upon entering the Oval Office. It all began with a symbolic act that must have chilled the blood of many Native Americans. In January 2017, Trump selected a work of art for the Oval Office: a portrait of his predecessor Andrew Jackson, whom Trump reveres as "an amazing figure in American history – very unique [in] so many ways."[53] Jackson is certainly unique in that he is known as a long-time proponent and the eventual executioner of Indian Removal. He signed into law the Indian Removal Act on May 28, 1830, which authorized the forced relocation of the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Creek, and Seminole to the West – to what later became known in settler jargon as Oklahoma.[54]

Trump's affront to Native Americans soon left the realm of symbolism. Upon taking office, he discontinued the White House Tribal Nations Conference that President Barack Obama had hosted annually over eight years, and which had brought together tribal leaders from federally recognized tribes and leading administration officials in order to discuss issues of importance in Indian Country. Native leaders held these conferences in high esteem, as they embodied a nation-to-nation relationship between the federal government and tribal nations. Moreover, Obama, who gave the closing address at all these conferences, gave Native leaders the feeling that his administration took them

52 Pauly Denetclaw, "Presidential Race Repeat," ICT News, May 3, 2024, https://ictnews.org/newscasts/05-03-24-newscast,%200, 06:35–13:49.

53 Olivia B. Waxman, "5 Things to Know About the President Whose Portrait Donald Trump Chose for the Oval Office," TIME, January 25, 2017, https://time.com/4649081/andrew-jackson-donald-trump-portrait/.

54 Sabine N. Meyer, *Native Removal Writing: Narratives of Peoplehood, Politics, and Law* (Oklahoma City: University of Oklahoma Press, 2022), 24–49.

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seriously and listened to their concerns. Until the fourth year of his term, Trump also failed to reestablish President Obama's White House Council on Native American Affairs despite tribal leaders' requests. Trump's decision to end the White House Tribal Nations Conference and the late reinstatement of the White House Council on Native American Affairs were clear signs that Native issues did not have priority for Trump.[55] And this is precisely how journalists and politicians recapitulated Trump's impact on Indian Country after four years in office.

Writing for the Indigenous Affairs desk of *High Country News* in December 2020, Anna V. Smith emphasized the negative effects of the Trump administration on Indian Country. Besides ceasing to meet with and listen to Native leaders on a regular basis, Trump left vacant many leading positions in the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Department of the Interior or filled them with appointees who were not vetted by Congress. Trump's "America First" energy policy facilitated projects such as the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines.[56] Trump also reduced the size of the Bears Ears National Monument in southeastern Utah by 85%, which was perceived as an attack on tribal sovereignty by Native Americans across the United States.[57] During the Trump presidency,

55 Levi Rickert, "Biden's Promise to Reinstate the White House Tribal Nations Conferences Is Good for Indian Country," Native News Online, October 27, 2020, https://nativenewsonline.net/opinion/biden-s-promise-to-reinstate-the-white-house-tribal-nations-conferences-is-good-for-indian-country; The United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, "MEMO: Fact Checking the Trump Administration's Attempt to Re-write Its Native American Record, False Promises to Tribes," Indian Affairs Committee, October 17, 2023, https://www.indian.senate.gov/newsroom/press-release/democratic/memo-fact-checking-trump-administration-s-attempt-re-write-its-native-american/.

56 The Dakota Access Pipeline is an underground pipeline transporting crude oil and stretching across 1,172 miles through four states (North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Illinois). The pipeline poses a danger to the water reservoir and sacred sites of the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Proposed by TC Energy in 2008, the Keystone XL pipeline extension was designed to transport 830,000 barrels of Alberta tar sands oil per day to refineries on the Gulf Coast of Texas. Biden revoked the permit of the pipeline after taking office. Shelia Hu, "The Dakota Access Pipeline: What you Need to Know," NRDC, June 12, 2024, https://www.nrdc.org/stories/dakota-access-pipeline-what-you-need-know; Melissa Denchak and Courtney Lindwall, "What Is the Keystone XL Pipeline?" NRDC, March 15, 2022, https://www.nrdc.org/stories/what-keystone-xl-pipeline.

57 The monument had been established by Barack Obama by presidential proclamation in 2016. Trump's revocation was seen by the Hopi Tribe, Navajo Nation, Ute Mountain Ute Tribe, Pueblo of Zuni, and Ute Indian Tribe as an attack on their sovereignty. Pres-

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federal laws like the National Environmental Policy Act, Clean Water Act and Endangered Species Act, which had endowed tribes with regulatory powers, were considerably weakened. "The total onslaught of federal rule rollbacks under environmental laws was like nothing we've ever seen. It was dizzying," says Gussie Lord (Oneida Nation of Wisconsin), managing attorney of tribal partnerships at Earthjustice.[58]

And then came COVID-19. Of all the COVID-19 bills passed by Congress during the first year of the pandemic, the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), which was signed into law by Trump on March 27, 2020, was by far the largest legislative initiative. While tribal governments were relieved to receive funds at all, the CARES Act only allocated 5% of the $2.2 trillion in aid to them. Through the Coronavirus Relief Fund that the act established, tribal governments were supposed to receive $8 billion in direct assistance. In addition, the Indian Health Service (IHS) received $1.032 billion to fund IHS, Tribal, and Urban Indian Organization programs. Besides pointing out the insufficiency of the funding, Native leaders and non-partisan policy institutes criticized the government's management of the allocated funds. The Treasury Department neither disbursed any money until well after the deadline determined by Congress had passed, nor did it allocate the full amount of funds (instead only $4.8 billion). Moreover, the CARES Act was set up without proper input from and consultation with Native Americans. Federal legislation, critics of the act argued, should be grounded in Native sovereignty and allow tribal governments more self-determination in how to use funding. And as the leaders of some tribal communities argued, the Corona-relief funds in the CARES Act were also used, on some occasions, to whip tribal governments into compliance with federal ideas about the extent of Native sovereignty.[59]

Just two weeks before the 2020 presidential election, the White House apparently became cognizant of the potential impact of Native voters. It released the Trump administration's policy agenda for Indian Country, entitled "Putting America's First Peoples First: Forgotten No More!" This prompted Vice

ident Biden reinstated protections for the Bears Ears Monument in October 2021. For more information, see Native American Rights Fund, "Protecting Bears Ears National Monument," NARF, n.d., https://narf.org/cases/bears-ears/.

58 Anna V. Smith, "Trump's Impact on Indian Country Over Four Years," High Country News, January 24, 2024, https://www.hcn.org/articles/indigenous-affairs-trumps-impact-on-indian-country-over-four-years/.

59 Meyer, "COVID-19 as a Magnifying Glass," 228–30.

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Chairman of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, Senator Tom Udall (D-NM), to speak up. He published a memo in which he proceeds to "fact-check" the Trump administration's attempt "to re-write President Trump's abysmal record [on Native issues] with misleading propaganda." "This administration's record is one of repeated failures for Native communities," Udall argued. The White House "is actively undermining Tribal sovereignty across the country and mishandling a once-in-a-century pandemic that is disproportionately hurting Native communities."[60] Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez positioned himself in a similar vein in his speech to the Democratic National Convention. "Tribes have been pushed aside by this administration," he said. According to Nez, the difference between the Obama and Trump administrations was "night and day."[61] Former Walker River Paiute Tribe Chairwoman Amber Torres evaluates the Trump years in a similar vein: It was a "destructive era" for Native Americans, during which "the doors of access were closed to tribes" and Native "spiritual health and wellness" were under "a constant assault."[62]

Just like Trump, Joseph Biden and Kamala Harris addressed and sought to appeal to Native voters before Election Day. In October 2020, they released the Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations, a fifteen-page document that communicated to Native voters that they stood for change. They intended to rebuild "trust, good faith and respect" by reinstating the annual White House conferences, appointing Native Americans to leadership positions in law and politics, tackling health disparities, providing economic opportunities for tribal nations, restoring tribal lands, improving infrastructure, education, and health in Native communities, and by devising strategies to address the crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women. The plan also promised to ensure equal access of Native Americans to voter registration and polling sites and the establishment of a Native American Voting Rights Task Force.[63]

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60 The United States Senate Committee on Indian Affairs, "MEMO."

61 Smith, "Trump's Impact on Indian Country Over Four Years."

62 Amber Torres, "Trump's Tribal Record: The Destructive Era," Native News Online, August 22, 2023, https://nativenewsonline.net/opinion/trump-s-tribal-record-the-destructive-era.

63 Aliyah Chavez, "Biden-Harris Campaign Announces Tribal Nations Plan," Indian Country Today, October 8, 2020, https://ictnews.org/news/biden-harris-campaign-announces-tribal-nations-plan. For the entire plan, see Indianz, "Biden-Harris Plan for Tribal Nations," n.d., https://indianz.com/News/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/bidenharrisplanfortribalnations.pdf.

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The combination of the pandemic and Trump's overall negative record concerning Native affairs, against the backdrop of the promises embedded in the Biden-Harris Plan, led to a "record-breaking [Native] voter turnout in 2020," as the "Indigenous Futures Survey" phrased it. Moreover, in that election, six Native American and Native Hawaiian candidates were elected to Congress, an all-time record so far.[64] There are as yet few analyses of Native voting patterns in the 2020 election. Sanchez and Foxworth found that young Native voters, Native Americans living on or near a reservation, and those living in tribal communities greatly affected by COVID-19 were less likely to vote for Trump.[65] They also argue that the palpable discrimination against Native Americans during the Trump years greatly mobilized Native voters in 2020.[66]

As I mentioned in the introduction, Native voters helped Biden to win Arizona in 2020. Native American voters voted in larger numbers in that state than in 2016, and over 80% of their ballots went to Biden. Wisconsin had a larger Native voter turnout than in 2016 as well, and it has been demonstrated that the Red Cliff and Bad River Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa, the Menominee Indian Tribe, and the Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians helped to secure a Democratic majority.[67]

The 2020 presidential election taught an important lesson: in times of political polarization and close elections, Native voters are able to make a difference, especially in battleground states and so-called "impact states," that is, states featuring large Native populations.[68] Additionally, surveys that year revealed the high percentage of Native voters not firmly attached to either the Re-

64 IllumiNative, Native Organizers Alliance, and Research for Indigenous Social Action and Equity (RISE) Center, "2021 Indigenous Futures Survey," n.d., https://nativeorganizing.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/IFS-2.0-Survey-Results.pdf;" Phillips, "Recognize the Forgotten Americans."

65 Sanchez and Foxworth, "Social Justice," 486.

66 Ibid., 489.

67 Radka Štroblová analyzed Native voting in Arizona in the 2020 election and found that after rounding, in seven out of eleven selected counties, the precincts with a predominantly Native population cast over 80% of ballots for Biden. Similarly, the most populous Arizona tribal nations, the Navajo and Hopi tribes, San Carlos Apache, and Gila River Indian Tribes, gave more than 80% of their votes to Biden. Štroblová, "The Power of the Native Vote," 110. See also Anna V. Smith's analysis of the Native impact in Arizona and Wisconsin. Smith, "How Indigenous Voters Swung the 2020 Election."

68 IllumiNative, Native Organizers Alliance, and Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, "From Protests, to the Ballot Box, and Beyond," 44–46, 48–50.

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publican or Democratic Parties.[69] The 2020 election provided evidence of the long-held dictum that many Native voters care less about party affiliation but are more interest-focused: they vote for candidates who take their concerns seriously and represent and support their communities.[70]

On November 8, 2020, less than a week after Election Day, the NCAI held its annual meeting, during which President Fawn Sharpe of the Quinault Indian Nation demanded "a new era, a new chapter" of Indian Country's advancement and growth – a demand that was certainly directed at President-elect Biden. Reconciliation, Sharpe argued, was of utmost importance. "We have to reconcile this country to those foundational principles of social justice, of economic justice and certainly of environmental justice." She did not mention but certainly alluded to Trump's (mis)handling of Native affairs. Sharpe and other tribal leaders also clarified that they wished to see a Native person in Biden's cabinet, circulating a letter written to the White House to that effect.[71]

Once in office, Biden followed suit and nominated Deb Haaland, a member of New Mexico's Laguna Pueblo, who consequently became the first Native American cabinet secretary in U.S. history. Haaland's nomination faced severe opposition by Republicans who criticized her stance on environmental issues and frequent criticisms of economic inequalities, but it was celebrated by Native Americans across the country.[72] Haaland has used her position to represent Native interests. An outstanding example of her work is the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative that she launched in 2021 to explore the violent history of federal Indian boarding schools and the legacies of these schools for Native communities till today. Besides investigative reports and a "Road to

69 The 2020 report "From Protests, to the Ballot Box and Beyond: Building Indigenous Power" presents estimates of Native voting patterns: While the majority of Native Americans identify as Democrats (51%) or as Democratic Socialists (9%) and 7% define as Republicans, 26% of Native voters identify as independent and 7% as "Other"; IllumiNative, Native Organizers Alliance, and Center for Native American Youth at the Aspen Institute, "From Protests, to the Ballot Box, and Beyond," 17. For further analysis of Native party identification, see Herrick and Mendez, "American Indian Party Identification"; Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 210–215.

70 Sanchez, "American Voters in the Upcoming 2022 Election."

71 Kolby KickingWoman, "Tribal Leaders Call for Truth, Healing," ICT News, November 14, 2020, https://ictnews.org/news/tribal-leaders-call-for-truth-healing.

72 Nathan Rott, "Deb Haaland Confirmed as 1st Native American Interior Secretary," NPR, March 15, 2021, https://www.npr.org/2021/03/15/977558590/deb-haaland-confirmed-as-first-native-american-interior-secretary.

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Healing" tour, the Initiative also launched an oral-history project with the aim of documenting the stories of Native children forced to attend these schools.[73]

Haaland is only one example of Biden's nominations of Native Americans to leading positions in the federal government; his appointment of Marilynn "Lynn" Malerba (Mohegan Tribe) as the Treasurer of the United States is another. Biden has also continuously nominated Native Americans to the federal bench. In April 2024, he made his fifth nomination, Danna Jackson (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes). However, her nomination was blocked by Montana Republican senator Steve Daines at the end of May 2024.[74]

Upon taking office, Biden also sought to revitalize the government's relations with tribal nations by bringing Native Americans back to the table and by speaking and listening to them. He re-introduced the annual White House Tribal Nations Conference, now called White House Tribal Nations Summit, with both the reintroduction and the name change emphasizing the nation-to-nation relationship between the United States and tribal nations. In 2021, Biden became the first president to commemorate Indigenous Peoples' Day with a presidential proclamation.[75]

The 2022 and 2023 White House Tribal Nations Summit Progress Reports outline in great detail the positive impact of the Biden administration regarding Indian Country. Successful interventions include the signing of

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73 U.S. Department of The Interior, "Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative," n.d., https://www.doi.gov/priorities/strengthening-indian-country/federal-indian-boarding-school-initiative.

74 Kolby KickingWoman, "Joe Biden Nominates Native Woman to Federal Bench," ICT News, April 24, 2024, https://ictnews.org/news/joe-biden-nominates-native-woman-to-federal-bench; Associated Press, "Republican Blocks Confirmation of First Native American Federal Judge for Montana," AP News, May 30, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/native-american-judge-blocked-montana-daines-904c8d41fa9c1ec81617f705fc115f59. For further examples of Biden's nominations of Native American federal officials and his nomination and appointment of Native Americans to serve on federal boards, commissions, and independent agencies, see the White House Tribal Nations Summit Progress Reports 2022 and 2023 at Domestic Policy Council, "The White House Tribal Nations Summit Progress Report," The White House, 2022, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022_11_23-WH-Tribal-Nations-Summit-Progress-Report-Final.pdf; Domestic Policy Council, "2023 Progress Report for Tribal Nations," The White House, 2023, https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/2023.12.04-TNS-Progress-Report.pdf.

75 Domestic Policy Council, "2023 Progress Report," 9–10; Torres, "Trump's Tribal Record."

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agreements with tribal nations to co-steward and co-manage lands and waters of importance for tribal communities, as well as efforts to protect and expand tribal lands and to electrify tribal homes.[76] President Biden has also issued several executive orders and presidential memoranda with the objectives of reforming existing federal processes for tribal nations, facilitating access for tribal nations to federal funding programs, and promoting economic independence and self-determination.[77]

It is beyond the reach of this article to evaluate the Biden administration's numerous interventions or the precise degree of their success. Reporting of Native media outlets suggests that, with some exceptions, such as Biden's approval of the controversial Willow Project – a massive oil-drilling project on Alaska's North Slope[78] – or, his stance on the Israel-Palestine conflict, Native journalists, political leaders, and activists judge the Biden administration positively in various areas of governance. In May 2024, in an interview on ICT, Troy Heinert (Sicangu Lakota), Executive Director of the Intertribal Buffalo Council, assessed Biden's term in office as follows: "I tell you what, I, you know, I thought Obama was good for Natives. The Biden administration – I can't think of an Administration that has actually truly listened and then said: 'All right, how do we do it.' And, you know, that's – those are big things.'"[79] Several months earlier,

76 Domestic Policy Council, "2023 Progress Report," 17–18, 19–20, 28. Native American leaders evaluate "Bidenomics" and its impact on Indian Country positively. Torres, "Trump's Tribal Record"; Native News Online Staff, "Native News Weekly: D.C. Briefs," Native News Online, May 5, 2024, https://nativenewsonline.net/currents/native-news-weekly-may-5-2024-d-c-briefs; Sanchez, "What Might We Expect from Native American Voters in the Upcoming 2022 Election."

77 Domestic Policy Council, "2023 Progress Report," 10; The White House, "Executive Order on Reforming Federal Funding and Support for Tribal Nations to Better Embrace Our Trust Responsibilities and Promote the Next Era of Tribal Self-Determination," December 6, 2023, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2023/12/06/executive-order-on-reforming-federal-funding-and-support-for-tribal-nations-to-better-embrace-our-trust-responsibilities-and-promote-the-next-era-of-tribal-self-determination/; Cecily Hilleary, "Native American News Roundup Dec. 3–9, 2023," Voice of America, December 9, 2023, https://www.voanews.com/a/native-american-news-roundup-december-3-to-9-2023/7389690.html.

78 Ella Nilsen, "The Willow Project Has Been Approved. Here's What to Know About the Controversial Oil-drilling Venture," CNN, March 14, 2023, https://edition.cnn.com/2023/03/14/politics/willow-project-oil-alaska-explained-climate/index.html.

79 Free Speech TV, "Indian Country Today | Native Rights Under Biden Administration," May 21, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K7PUby4zb-k, 05:48–06:05.

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NCAI President Mark Macarro struck a similarly laudatory note. In the State of Indian Nations Address, he emphasized the "the meaningful changes" that President Biden had made for Native Americans:

> Under this presidency, there are more Native Americans in the highest levels of the government than ever before, from the White House to so many agencies in government . . . Substantial efforts have been made to enhance government-to-government dialogue and to seek consultation with us. We've seen improvements in fee-to-trust processes, NAGPRA, and environmental standards. This Administration has also worked with us to restore stewardship over our ancestral homelands . . . President Biden's commitment to improving justice and public safety in Indian Country remains paramount, alongside the need to address the fentanyl and opioid epidemic . . . This Administration has set a powerful precedent – collaboration grounded in respect for sovereignty, fueled by Indian Country's unified voice.[80]

The idea of a unified voice in Indian Country making itself heard is a powerful image steeped in hope and suggestive of power. The power of the Native vote, McCool and his coauthors argue, depends on cohesion. In situations like 2024, when "the electorate is divided roughly equally," resulting in many close elections, "the Indian vote can make the difference between victory and defeat, but only if it too is not divided."[81]

However, there seems to be fear of a division of votes. Amber Torres summons her readers to compare both Trump's and Biden's records on Native affairs before going to the polls in 2024: "With all the progress that we have made under the Biden administration to uphold the government's responsibility to tribal nations, why do we want to reopen the gates to power for people whose hearts are full of xenophobia and lies? This election matters. The presidency matters. The actions of a president matter."[82] With the possibility of a divided Native vote on the horizon, can the Native vote make a difference in this year's presidential election?

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80 Rickert, "Macarro's State of Indian Nations Address."

81 McCool, Olson, and Robinson, *Native Vote*, 194.

82 Torres, "Trump's Tribal Record." Similar fears of division are carefully voiced by Holly Cook Macarro in a conversation with Denetclaw. ICT, "Indigenous Voting Rights Still on the Line," June 5, 2024, https://ictnews.org/newscasts/06-05-2024,%2004:, 04:09–14:50.

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The Power of the Native Vote in the 2024 Presidential Election

At the moment of my writing, reporting and scholarship on Native political orientations and Native Americans' impact on the 2024 presidential election remain scarce. Journalists and analysts generally agree that if the turnout of Native American voters is on par with the election cycles of 2018, 2020, and 2022, this group will once again have a considerable impact.[83] Based on Native Americans' partisan affiliations, recent voting patterns, and the Trump and Biden administrations' starkly different records on Native affairs, it can be expected that Native American voters will, once again, lean heavily Democratic in 2024. However, as scholars and Native political analysts convincingly argue, the Native vote "is not monolithic."[84] As the quote above by Torres suggests, some Native Americans still lean Republican. They emphasize the positive effects of Trump's term in office, such as his nomination of U.S. Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch, who was turned out a staunch defender of tribal rights, or his focus on border security. Many Native Americans cite inflation having hit 20% since Biden took office as the reason why they favor Trump and are worried about the incumbent's mental health.[85]

Moreover, in this year's election, "it is the middle ground that matters often times Indian Country," as Holly Cook Macarro (Red Lake Band of Ojibwe), said in a recent interview with Denetclaw. Native Americans, especially young Native voters, look closely at the issues at stake and the records of all candidates on these issues. Thus, according to Macarro, fighting for both the moderate

83 See, for instance, Berg, "Native Voters Key Deciders"; Bustillo, "Overlooked by Campaigns."

84 Štroblová, "The Power of the Native Vote," 111.

85 See Denetclaw's conversation with Michael Stopp (Cherokee), and John Tahsuda (Kiowa). ICT, "Native Family Represents in the House," ICT News, March 20, 2024, https://ictnews.org/newscasts/native-family-represents-in-the-house,%20, 08:07–12:03; Pauly Denetclaw, "IndigiPolitics: Border Security and Conflicts in Middle East," ICT News, February 1, 2024, https://ictnews.org/news/indigipolitics-border-security-and-conflicts-in-middle-east, 00:25–05:00. Oklahoma's Governor Kevin Stitt, himself Cherokee, endorsed Trump in February 2024, also mentioning border security as a significant motivating factor. Katrina Crumbacher, "Oklahoma's Kevin Stitt Endorses Donald Trump for President," ICT News, February 26, 2024, https://ictnews.org/news/oklahomas-kevin-stitt-endorses-donald-trump-for-president. See also Kalle Benallie and Jourdan Bennett-Begay, "What Do Indigenous Voters Want in the 2024 Election," ICT News, June 12, 2024, https://ictnews.org/news/what-do-indigenous-voters-want-in-the-2024-election-..

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and independent voters in Indian Country, who are not "dug in on either side," becomes significant especially in battleground states with large Native populations.[86] As of my writing, neither of the candidates have explicitly addressed Native voters. In 2020, they issued their policy agendas for Indian Country only a few weeks before the election. One would hope that the candidates' engagement with Native voters will be more substantive this year, including visits to tribal nations and direct communication with Native voters.

Media outlets and commentators consistently mention Arizona, Montana, and Nevada in reports on the 2024 presidential election. As in 2020, much is at stake in Arizona in 2024. The NCAI estimates that Arizona has more than 315,000 Native Americans who are old enough to vote, which is one of the largest populations of Native voters in the country. Not only are Native voters able to once again swing the presidential race in Arizona, but they can also help elect former Navajo president Jonathan Nez, who is running for the 2nd Congressional District, which covers about 60% of Arizona, including large areas of tribal land. Nez would be the first Native candidate from Arizona in the U.S. House of Representatives.[87]

A second significant race in Arizona is that of U.S. Representative Ruben Gallego, a Democrat who is running for the U.S. Senate seat currently held by Kyrsten Sinema who is not seeking re-election. His Republican competitor is Kari Lake. Gallego is highly conscious of the power of the Native vote. As early as October 2023, *The New York Times* reported that he had already visited half a dozen tribes, aiming to visit all of Arizona's federally recognized tribal nations before election day. He intended to "go everywhere and talk to everyone," he explained when asked about his ambitious outreach plans. Lake has realized the importance of the Native vote as well, having hosted events on Native issues and organized a Natives for Kari Lake group.[88]

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86 ICT, "Indigenous Voting Rights Still on the Line," 04:09–14:50.

87 Bustillo and Moore, "Young Native American Voters"; Shondiin Silversmith, "Former Navajo Nation President Launches Bid to Flip AZ's Largest Congressional District," Source New Mexico, October 19, 2023, https://sourcenm.com/2023/10/19/former-navajo-nation-president-launches-bid-to-flip-azs-largest-congressional-district/; Jasmin Ulloa, "To Win a Senate Seat in Arizona, He's Visiting All 22 of Its Tribes," The New York Times, October 12, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/12/us/politics/ruben-gallego-arizona-senate.html.

88 Ulloa, "Senate Seat in Arizona"; see also Chris Lomahquahu, "Taking Back Native Voting Rights," ICT News, May 17, 2024, https://ictnews.org/news/taking-back-native-voting-rights?utm_source=ICT&utm_campaign=64bee743a0-The+Weekly%2C+2

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In Montana, where, according to the U.S. Census, about 6.5% of the state's population identify as American Indian or Alaska Native, tribal voters could "determine the makeup of the Senate" and also its control, as Natalie Fertig recently phrased it in *Politico*. Democratic Senator Jon Tester is up for re-election in this solidly Republican state, facing a race against six other candidates, the majority of whom are Republicans. Conscious of the importance of Native voters in Montana, the state's Democrats are currently preparing an extensive Native voting initiative called "Big Sky Victory" with the aim to invest over $1 million to mobilize Native voters and get them out to the polls.[89] "The Native American vote is being courted very aggressively in the state," says political analyst Tom Rodgers, an enrolled member of the Blackfeet Nation in Montana. "The path forward for the Republicans to take control of the Senate again looks like [it] would go through Montana"; hence, Rodgers thinks that the issues Native voters care about – most notably, continued access to Medicaid and Medicare, support in fighting crime and resources to preserve their Native culture and language – cannot be ignored by Democrats.[90]

Nevada's Native population of more than 62,000 (3.5% of the state's population) has been credited with having contributed to Democratic victories in recent elections. In 2020, Native voters in the state had the highest turnout of all demographic groups; turnout that year was up 25% compared to the 2016 presidential election. "That is the largest increase of any subpopulation in the state of Nevada," said Stacey Montooth, citizen of the Walker River Paiute Tribe and Executive Director of the Nevada Indian Commission. "I think it is likely due to voter choice or the ability for our people to vote by whatever method they

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%2F16_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_5e3432615c-64bee743a0-362185351. For Kari Lake's efforts, see Kari Lake, "Kari Lake Hosts Roundtable on Native American Heritage," November 29, 2024, video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9JHDrpwwNro; Bustillo and Moore, "Young Native American Voters."

89 Natalie Fertig, "Montana's Tribal Voters Could Determine the Makeup of the Senate," Politico, May 12, 2024, https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2024/05/12/letter-from-montana-00155737; Bustillo, "Overlooked by Campaigns."

90 Fertig, "Montana's Tribal Voters"; Natalie Fertig, "Tester Campaign Plans Seven-figure Push to Bring Out Montana Tribal Voters," Politico, March 18, 2024, https://www.politico.com/live-updates/2024/03/18/congress/montana-push-for-tribal-votes-tester-senate-00147312.

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wanted: in person, early, by mail, or via drop boxes."[91] In 2024, Native voters residing on reservations in Nevada can, for the first time, vote electronically with "EASE," the state's Effective Absentee System for Elections.[92] Encouraged by such measures, the Native Voters Alliance Nevada has inaugurated its campaign to evaluate and endorse candidates based on their record on Native affairs, with the ultimate goal to amplify Native voices.[93]

Besides Arizona, Montana, and Nevada, Midwestern swing states such as Wisconsin and Michigan are also mentioned by journalists and analysts as places where Native voters could tip the scales for one or the other candidate.[94] Moreover, attention needs to be paid to the numerous Native Americans running for public office in local, state, and federal elections across the nation, whose (re-)election could make a difference in the U.S. political landscape. As of June 11, 2024, the 2024 ICT's Indigenous Candidates Database lists 174 persons.[95]

I want to conclude with some thoughts on young Native voters who are increasingly moving to the center of "IndigiPolitics." In the 2024 presidential election, young Native voters will again be of key importance, as Native and non-Native journalists and analysts argue across the board.[96] The 2020 presidential election turned out to be a pivotal moment for young Native Americans, who felt that they were heard for the first time. The experience of having an impact has energized Native youth. As twenty-five-year-old Alec Ferreira, from the San Carlos Apache Tribe, puts it: "Remember who is running the table

91 Jennifer Solis, "Nevada Tribes Taking Advantage of Improved Voting Access," Nevada Current, March 31, 2022, https://nevadacurrent.com/2022/03/31/nevada-tribes-taking-advantage-of-improved-voting-access/.

92 Jennifer Solis, "Tribal Citizens in Nevada Can Now Vote with Ease," Nevada Current, February 5, 2024, https://nevadacurrent.com/2024/02/05/tribal-citizens-in-nevada-can-now-vote-with-ease/.

93 Dana Gentry, "Nevada 5th in Home Price Increase Year-to-year," Nevada Current, October 13, 2021, https://nevadacurrent.com/2021/10/13/nevada-5th-in-home-price-increase-year-to-year/; see also Native Voters Alliance Nevada, "Native Voters Alliance Nevada Launches Influential Endorsement Process," NVA, April 15, 2024, https://nativevotesnv.org/2024/04/15/2024-endorsements/.

94 Bustillo, "Overlooked by Campaigns."

95 "2024 Indigenous Candidates Database," Google Docs, n.d., https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ZBA6CCfmEGafT6gLpiyJAVK9NuocSBcsFDAYHs5IUeg/edit?pli=1#gid=667112351.

96 See, for instance, Bustillo and Moore, "Young Native American Voters"; ICT, "Indigenous Voting Rights Still on the Line."

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right now. It's our time. Native people, we decided at the last election. We can very well decide the next one." In a similar vein, Dillon Chavez, citizen of the Navajo Nation, considers voting the "greatest form of resistance" that young people can practice as "the Indigenous warriors of the contemporary era."[97]

Even more than older Native voters, young Native voters identify as independent or nonaffiliated.[98] While hesitant to vote for Trump, they are critical of Biden's record. In particular, they have been disappointed over Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war, specifically his support for the Israeli military offensive. While recent polls suggest that the Israel-Hamas war "is far down the list for young Americans," it is a top priority for young Native voters with the power to drive them to the polls.[99] Young Native voters highlight the similarities between the U.S. government's historic and ongoing treatment of Native Americans and Israel's treatment of Palestinians. Kianna Pete (Diné), who was part of the student protests at Columbia University, said in an interview with ICT that she and other Native American students were in solidarity with both Palestinians and the pro-Palestinian movement at Columbia. She views Israel's actions and their effect on Palestinians in light of "settler-colonial projects we've experienced here in the United States as Indigenous peoples – that being the justification of land grabs and that is done through stealing Indigenous land and displacing them, (we are) being super highly surveillanced [sic!]."[100]

The Israel-Hamas war and ensuing student protests have mobilized young Native voters. The war and the protests have generated intense conversations about experiences and structures of settler colonialism and human rights violations in North America and elsewhere. "Settler colonialism is alive and

97 Dillon Chavez, "The Margin of Error: Young Native Voters Have the Power to Tip the Scales," Native News Online, October 30, 2020, https://nativenewsonline.net/opinion/the-margin-of-error-young-native-voters-have-the-power-to-tip-the-scales. For an analysis of the voting patterns of young Native Americans in 2018, see Sanchez, "Native American Voters in the Upcoming 2022 Election."

98 Wilkins and Stark, *American Indian Politics*, 213.

99 Geoffrey Skelley, "Young People Disapprove of Biden's Israel Policy. It May Not Mean Much for November," ABC News, May 3, 2024, https://abcnews.go.com/538/young-people-disapprove-bidens-israel-policy-november/story?id=109875950.

100 Renata Birkenbuel, "Native Students Join pro-Palestine Campus Protests," ICT News, April 26, 2024, https://ictnews.org/news/native-students-join-pro-palestine-campus-protests?utm_source=ICT&utm_campaign=be8d674c0b-The+Weekly%2C+2%2F16_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_5e3432615c-be8d674c0b-362185351.

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well. . . we are still occupied by a settler colonial regime. . . we are still fighting for our rights and our liberation," one Native student argued in a podcast. The protest on campuses "sparked an interesting conversation of what we consider resistance and whether resistance is justified or not," another student said in the same episode.[101]

Conversations about voting as a form of resistance may help mobilize those young Native Americans to vote who have previously refused to participate politically in a system that harms their communities.[102] In addition to older Native Americans who have been mobilized by Native-led groups, these energized young Native voters could swing the battleground states in one or the other direction by voting Democratic (as they have been wont to do) or by casting their votes for independent candidates, which could tip the scales for Trump.

Concluding Thoughts

As the past few weeks have demonstrated, nothing seems certain in this year's presidential election, including the roster of candidates. We might end up not witnessing a rematch. A different constellation of presidential candidates will, of course, impact the ways in which Native voters align politically, as they always carefully evaluate each candidate's record on Native issues. Court convictions, U.S. Supreme Court rulings concerning Presidential immunity, TV debates, as well as politically motivated attacks may mobilize Native voters to go to the polls, or persuade some Native voters that not much can be gained by participating in this election.

No matter how this particular election ends, the significance of "IndigiPolitics" remains. Native American voters and their political interests, concerns, and voting practices are important factors in U.S. politics that deserve the constant attention of politicians, political think tanks, journalists, political analysts, and scholars working in the field of Political Science and Native and In-

101 Art Hughes, "Friday, May 3, 2024 – Native College Students on the Front Lines of Gaza Protests," Native America Calling, May 3, 2024, https://www.nativeamericacalling.com/friday-may-3-2024-native-college-students-on-the-front-lines-of-gaza-protests/.

102 As Loren Marshall of Northeast Arizona Native Democrats said: "Why would we want to participate or get involved in something that just has not been something that we've practiced or something that we've done as Natives," repeating comments she often hears among young Native voters. Bustillo and Moore, "Young Native American Voters."

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digenous Studies. Since the early 2000s, the Native vote has become a topic of conversation among a small circle of academics and journalists. During the same period, Native Americans have also become increasingly conscious of the power of the Native vote. They are no longer willing to be categorized as 'Something else.' Instead, they want to be recognized as a formative force in the political landscape of the United States.

Especially since the pandemic, voting has taken on an additional layer of meaning. It has come to be viewed as a practice of resistance, which is why some Native Americans prefer the more active phrase of "casting a ballot." "You're casting your ballot with your ancestors and all the people who fought for our right to be here in mind," as Arizona Native Vote Executive Director Jaynie Parrish has stated.[103] Participating in U.S. elections no longer carries the unmistakable stigma of political assimilationism. Instead, many Native Americans, including Native youths, consider it a right that needs to be honored and fought for and an important pillar in the fight for survival and justice.

The breadth of Native-led grassroots efforts against discriminatory voting policies and practices, the number of organizations and the amount of people working on the ground to increase Native turnout, as well as the many voting rights lawsuits that are continuously filed (and often won) on behalf of Native individuals and tribes: all of these factors demonstrate the power of Native advocacy as well as the tremendous will to ensure Native equal political participation and representation on local, state, and federal levels. As Native activists do not cease to emphasize, the Native vote has the power to effect change and to craft a more just future. Voting is a way to remind the federal government of its trust obligation to Native Americans. Voting is a way to spotlight the flagrant and persistent disparities between Native American communities and non-Native ones with regard to healthcare, education, housing, infrastructure, and the economy.[104]

The conscious infusion of Native voting with notions of power, change, and futurity is visualized in Ernesto Yerena Montejano's artwork, which was

103 Shondiin Silversmith, "100 Years after Citizenship, Indigenous Peoples Continue to Fight to Vote," Utah News Dispatch, June 6, 2024, https://utahnewsdispatch.com/2024/06/06/100-years-after-citizenship-indigenous-peoples-continue-to-fight-to-vote/.

104 Chris Picciuolo, "The Power of the Native Vote in Arizona – O'odham Action News: Home," O'odham Action News: Home, December 27, 2023, https://oan.srpmic-nsn.gov/the-power-of-the-native-vote-in-arizona/.

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commissioned by IllumiNative and used by Native campaigners in the 2022 midterm election. On two posters, the phrases "Voting Is One Way We Build Native Power" and "Voting Is One Way We Fight for Our Future – Together We Have Power!" are printed in bold letters.[105] In both posters, a young woman with dark long hair, wearing Native jewelry, looks at viewers. Her facial features suggest an unflinching presence, unwavering determination, and strength of mind. Democracy has indeed become Native. The NARF's campaign slogan rings loud in my ears as I look at these powerful posters. "Democracy is Native."[106]

105 Ernesto Yerena Montejano and IllumiNative, "Voting Is One Way We Build Native Power," 2022, https://static1.squarespace.com/static/630f841cef1cf76338b2dfd2/t/6349d250f356c23a7b920428/1665782352776/NATIVE+POWER+FINAL+POSTER+18x24.png; Laura Zornosa, "A Week from the Election, This Poster Harnesses the Power of Native Voting Rights," Los Angeles Times, October 27, 2020, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-10-27/indigenous-peoples-day-native-voting-rights-our-future.

106 Native American Rights Fund, "Democracy is Native."

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Part II: Migration Policies and Anti-Immigration Rhetoric

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Demographic Dystopias: Criminalizing Immigration in U.S. Election Campaigns

Georgiana Banita (University of Bamberg, Germany)

> Some of us are illegal, and some are not wanted,
> Our work contract's out and we have to move on;
> Six hundred miles to that Mexican border,
> They chase us like outlaws, like rustlers, like thieves.
> – Woody Guthrie, "Deportees (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)" [1]

1. Intuitions of Crime: Immigration, Nativism, and the Noncitizen Vote

In 1854, Henry Winter Davis of Maryland was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives as a member of the nativist American Party. Through its various iterations as the Know-Nothing Party and the Native American Party, the American Party sought to suppress the political influence of the growing number of immigrants entering the U.S. In his address to Congress on January 6, 1857, Davis challenged the validity of James Buchanan's election during the previous year. The result had been marred, Davis claimed, by a large number of noncitizen votes. In his telling, "vast multitudes of foreign-born citizens [who were] ignorant of American interests, without American feelings, influenced

1 Woody Guthrie, "Deportees (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)," words by Woody Guthrie, music by Marty Hoffman, Ludlow Music Inc. of New York, 1961.

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by foreign sympathies," had been naturalized by the thousands on the eve of the election. These individuals were allegedly to blame for the fraudulent outcome of the elections. Swayed by religious zealotry, these voters had, according to Davis, aggressively usurped the "national spirit" through the "danger and degradation" of their alien loyalties.[2]

Davis' concern that ignorant and illiterate foreigners had been manipulated to swing the election in James Buchanan's favor aligned with the Know-Nothing Party's support for strict immigration policies and naturalization periods of twenty-one years, which were aimed at limiting the power of immigrants at the polls. The party's platform also included measures to ensure that only native-born white Anglo-Saxon Protestants could hold public office.[3] Both Davis and the Know-Nothings reacted to a demographic shift of unprecedented magnitude. The years between 1850 and 1860 witnessed the highest level of immigration in U.S. history, caused by the many Irish and Germans, most of them Catholic, who had fled famine and economic hardship in Europe, leading to a vicious backlash from nativist Americans. White members of the Know-Nothing Party even referred to themselves as Native Americans, thus co-opting the term from Indigenous peoples, who had been previously displaced, in order to express their own fears of displacement. Their promotional insignia included a U.S. American flag emblazoned with the message "Native Americans Beware of Foreign Influence" (Figure 1). As the sociologist Ron Eyerman has noted, the nativist sentiment conveyed by this flag prefigured the "fears of elimination that mobilize the white power movement today."[4] The peak of immigration was reached in 1854, and, by the following year, immigrants had outnumbered native-born citizens in several Northern cities, including Chicago and Detroit. The same trend would soon emerge in New York and Cleveland.[5]

Davis was not wrong about the susceptibility of Irish and German immigrants to populist political messaging. The son of poor Irish immigrants him-

2 Henry Winter Davis, "The Teachings of the Late Election," in *Speeches and Addresses Delivered in the Congress of the United States, and on Several Public Occasions* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1867), 81.

3 Marius M. Carriere, *The Know Nothings in Louisiana* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018), 57–58.

4 Ron Eyerman, *The Making of White American Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 134.

5 Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 8.

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self, Andrew Jackson made significant inroads with these groups with his veneration of the common man, his fight against elitism, and his vocal, albeit selective, egalitarianism. His plainspoken, straightforward speeches tapped into the aspirations of the white lower classes and garnered him support, especially among impoverished and disenfranchised immigrants, who warmed to his promise to protect their interests against various 'others' who were even less 'white' than themselves, including Blacks and Indigenous people. In his Farewell Address of 1837, Jackson solidified the tripartite division of the U.S. American society into wealthy elites, the patriotic, hardworking middle-class majority – "the bone and sinew of the country" to which white immigrants strove to belong – and an underclass of social parasites.[6] Driven by a desire for economic opportunity and social mobility, many naturalized immigrants aligned their voting preferences with those of native-born citizens.

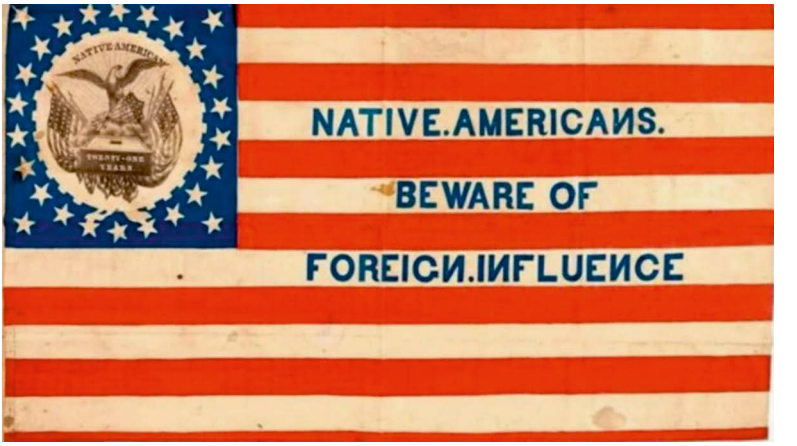

Figure 1: Know-Nothing Party Flag, circa 1850.[7]

6 Thomas J. McInerney and Fred L. Israel, eds., *Presidential Documents: The Speeches, Proclamations, and Policies that Have Shaped the Nation from Washington to Clinton* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 86. See also Takis S. Pappas, *Populism and Liberal Democracy: A Comparative and Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 87.

7 "Know-Nothing Party Flag," circa 1850. Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Digital_Reproduction_of_the_Know-Nothing_Party_Flag.jpg.

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Yet the intersection of whiteness and anti-immigration rhetoric on the eve of the Civil War was more nuanced than Henry Winter Davis' xenophobic fearmongering might suggest. An ardent abolitionist, Davis rejected the South's claim that slavery was a divinely ordained practice. He recognized the moral bankruptcy of the institution and worked tirelessly to prevent the expansion of slavery to new territories.[8] His postwar support for extending voting rights to African Americans underscored his commitment to civil rights and marked him as a progressive figure in Reconstruction-era politics. However, Catholic Irish and German immigrants remained outside the scope of his democratic vision. These immigrant groups instilled in him and many of his contemporaries fears of economic competition and undue political influence in ways beyond the reach of the already excluded and ostracized African American population.

After all, the path towards citizenship, the ballot box, and political participation were all readily available to white immigrants. Prior to the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, the Black codes had effectively denied suffrage to Blacks in most Southern legislatures. In Davis' view, African Americans posed less of a danger to the social and political order. Nativists, like Davis, could envision a marginal place for African Americans in the nation's political fabric, which would be shaped by their purported racial inferiority and history of enslavement. Yet the same Nativists feared Irish and German immigrants as an unassimilable, disruptive force. The Irish, in particular, were seen as inclined to incite riots. The distinction that was made between African Americans and Irish persons highlights how perceptions of 'otherness' have not always hinged on skin color on the U.S. political stage, but also on factors such as religion, class, and economic competition.

Contemporary political discourse witnesses similar outcries about the alleged illegal influence of immigrants on election outcomes, most notably in Donald J. Trump's claims of voter fraud following his loss in the 2020 election. Trump insisted that between three and five million illegal votes had been cast in 2016, a narrative that was echoed by his supporters despite a complete lack of evidence. Research has found that illegal voting by noncitizens is extremely rare. The Brennan Center for Justice at New York University looked at forty-two jurisdictions that accounted for 23.5 million votes in the 2016 presidential election. It found only thirty incidents of possible noncitizen voting,

8 Michael D. Robinson, *A Union Indivisible: Secession and the Politics of Slavery in the Border South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 206.

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or 0.0001% of the total votes cast.[9] Yet, in May 2024, Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives unveiled a bill to ban noncitizens from voting in federal elections, thereby explicitly prohibiting something that had already been illegal since 1996. Although the legislation initiative is unlikely to pass in the Democratic-led Senate, it draws attention to Trump's unsubstantiated allegations of widespread voter fraud.

House Speaker Mike Johnson told reporters in a press conference on the Capitol steps: "We all know – intuitively – that a lot of illegals are voting in federal elections. But it's not been something that is easily provable," without presenting any evidence.[10] The proposed Safeguard American Voter Eligibility, or SAVE Act, requires prospective voters to submit documentation of U.S. citizenship in order to be able to cast a ballot and demands that states purge foreign nationals from their voter rolls. Democrats have blasted the bill as a non-issue and a stunt designed to sow confusion ahead of the 2024 election rematch between Trump and Joe Biden. But such measures raise serious concerns among voting rights advocates, who fear that many citizens do not have passports, birth or naturalization certificates on hand, documents that can be expensive to obtain and create barriers to accessing the ballot box.[11]

This chapter situates the 2024 election within a long history of U.S. anti-immigrant campaign discourses that criminalize foreign-born populations. Reflecting on the shifting configuration of these narratives from the 1860s onward until Trump, I want to address the following questions: What myths about immigration and crime animate campaign discourses and platforms? How have these cultural and legal frameworks emerged and evolved over time? What do these framings tell us about the ever-changing intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, class, and religion along the borders of the United States? And, how do recent election cycles mobilize earlier imaginaries of immigrant crime, and the trope of immigration as a criminal act?

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9 Douglas Keith, Myrna Pérez, and Christopher Famighetti, "Noncitizen Voting: The Missing Millions," Brennan Center for Justice, May 5, 2017, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/noncitizen-voting-missing-millions.

10 David Morgan and Nathan Layne, "US Republicans Target Noncitizen Voting, as Trump Keeps Up False Voter Fraud Claims," Reuters, May 9, 2024, https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-republicans-target-noncitizen-voting-trump-keeps-up-false-voter-fraud-claims-2024-05-08/.

11 Ian Vandewalker, "The Effects of Requiring Documentary Proof of Citizenship," Brennan Center for Justice, July 19, 2017, https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/effects-requiring-documentary-proof-citizenship.

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My argument is that anti-immigrant U.S. election campaign rhetoric is not solely driven by racial animus and xenophobia, although these factors constitute its bedrock. Rather, specious claims about the inherent criminality of immigrants have thrived on a temptation that U.S. conservatives have faced since the mid-nineteenth century. The temptation is to react to demographic shifts by fabricating dystopian scenarios to whip up fear and gain political power. The goal of this strategy is not to secure political majorities, which are rarely attained through anti-immigrant campaign rhetoric. Instead, the aim is to mobilize a militant minority to the degree necessary to bolster a broadly exclusionary agenda on social issues such as welfare and labor rights that will win electoral victories, and, ultimately, control of the White House.

2. The Barrel and the Ballot Box

After the demographic watershed of 1860, widely circulated xenophobic caricatures dehumanized and 'othered' Irish immigrants as violent brawlers with subhuman features in a practice of "othering" that served to legitimize policies aimed to discourage or deter them from voting. A recurring stereotype of the Irish was that they were prone to drunken violence, as illustrated in a notorious 1867 *Harper's Weekly* illustration, "The Day We Celebrate," by cartoonist Thomas Nast (Figure 2). Despite the festive occasion, the scene looks turbulent and bloody. In March 1867, Irish immigrants from all over New York City converged on Broadway and Grand Street for the annual Saint Patrick's Parade. The streets were still slick from a spring snowfall, and at the intersection of Pitt Street, members of a Brooklyn branch of the Ancient Order of Hibernians were blocked by a stranded wagon. The unlucky wagon driver was attacked, and when the Metropolitan Police came to his aid, a full-scale riot broke out, injuring more than twenty police officers before the crowd was dispersed.[12]

12 The New York Times, "Serious Affray Between the Police and One of the Brooklyn Societies," March 19, 1867, https://www.nytimes.com/1867/03/19/archives/st-patricks-day-the-celebration-of-the-daymilitary-and-civic.html.

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Figure 2: "The Day We Celebrate"[13]

The inflammatory image suggests that the presence and conduct of Irish immigrants undermine the social order and political stability of U.S. American cities. The focal point of the cartoon is an ape-like caricature of an Irishman wielding a club in a menacing pose that reflects nativist fears, while the background shows scenes of disorder and unrest, with mobs fighting and buildings in flames. Like many of the magazine's readers, Nast was likely still haunted by the clashes of the New York City draft riots of 1863. Irish Americans, many of whom had been recently naturalized, protested the Enrolment Act passed by Congress that year forcing them to fight in the Civil War, which they felt affected them disproportionately. Irish working-class men had taken to the streets to express their resentment that they could not afford to avoid the draft by hiring a substitute or paying a fee. Wealthier men, including many better-paid African Americans, were able to do so, while enslaved Blacks living in Northern states were not being drafted as they were denied citizenship. The subsequent ransacking of Black homes led to a demographic shift in Manhattan, with many Black residents relocating to Brooklyn. After uncomfortably

13 Thomas Nast, "The Day We Celebrate" [illustration], Harper's Weekly, April 6, 1867: 212. Archives and Special Collections, Dickinson College, Carlisle, Pennsylvania.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839474730 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - CC BY

sharing the same dilapidated social and economic spaces with African Americans and competing with them for the same low-wage jobs, the Irish became the 'new Blacks' in the 1860s. As historian Leslie Harris points out: "Occupying the jobs formerly the domain of blacks, jobs to which associations of servility and dependence still clung, the Irish experienced a prejudice akin to that blacks had endured for so long."[14] The public image of the Irish, epitomized in Nast's illustration, was at this point inextricably linked with representations of violent and degraded behavior.

Another engraving by Thomas Nast, "The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things," published in *Harper's Weekly* on September 2, 1871 (Figure 3), depicts a bestial Irishman with exaggerated features in a manner typical of Nast and other contemporary cartoonists, newspaper editors, writers, and opinion makers. Nast positions his grotesque figure atop a barrel of gunpowder, giving a concrete, destructive shape to the perceived volatility and danger associated with the Irish population. The message is that the Irish presence in America is a literal powder keg of imminent violence that is ready to explode at any moment. Adding to the image of danger, the Irishman brandishes a bottle of "demon rum," highlighting that the link between the Irish and alcohol went beyond mere stereotype and revealed the intersection between nativism and the temperance movement gaining momentum during this period. As sociologist Joseph Gusfield has argued, temperance legislation served as a way to address the unrest and social upheaval caused by the immigrant urban poor whose culture ostensibly clashed with U.S. American Protestant morality.[15] Alcohol was seen as a malignant force, much like the newcomers themselves.

14 Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626–1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2023), 251.

15 Joseph R. Gusfield, *Symbolic Crusade: Status Politics and the American Temperance Movement* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 6.

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Figure 3: "The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things"[16]

Violent Irish involvement in the Philadelphia riots of 1844, in which Nativists clashed with Irish immigrants over which version of the Bible should be used in public schools, and in the draft riots of 1863 fueled perceptions of a potential imported insurgency. The image of an Irishman perched on a barrel of gunpowder evokes the Fenian raids of the 1860s and 1870s, as well as various other Irish uprisings against British rule. It also references the Gunpowder Plot of 1605, whose use of explosives is embedded in the Anglo-American cultural memory as a hallmark of treason and subversion. In the U.S., riots often sprang from economic hardship and social injustice. Yet they were painted as evidence of an innate Irish unruliness. It bears mentioning that the perceived Irish propensity for excessive drinking, brawling, and political resistance in

16 Thomas Nast, "The Usual Irish Way of Doing Things" [wood engraving], Harper's Weekly, September 2, 1871. American Social History Project/Center for Media Learning, City University of New York.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839474730 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

fact stemmed from socioeconomic factors such as poor wages, low social status, and the trauma of the Great Famine. Negative stereotypes were also rooted in traditions of ritualized violence in rural Ireland, particularly the so-called faction fights, which were not uncommon in the pre-famine era as a form of sport or entertainment designed to defuse community tensions.[17]

Figure 4: Cartoon of Irish and German Immigrants Stealing American Elections.[18]

The Irishman's anger in Nast's illustration is inflamed by pro-Irish political broadsides, suggesting that Irish rebelliousness was a threat to U.S. political stability. This played into a broader fear of immigrant revolt at the ballot box,

17 Jonny Geber and Barra O'Donnabhain, "Against Shameless and Systematic Calumny: Strategies of Domination and Resistance and Their Impact on the Bodies of the Poor in Nineteenth-Century Ireland," *Historical Archaeology* 54 (2020): 160–183.

18 John H. Goater, Cartoon of Irish and German immigrants Stealing American Elections, circa 1850. Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.m.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Screen-Shot-2021-02-16-at-1.webp.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839474730 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

where increasing Irish and German turnout was met with suspicion and hostility. Building on this image of Irish disorder, other political cartoons directly tied immigration to election integrity. In a cartoon from the 1850s attributed to John H. Goater, two stereotypical immigrants, one Irish and one German, make off with a ballot box, while pandemonium ensues outside the building labeled "Election Day Polls" behind them (Figure 4). The Irish man is armored in a wooden barrel labeled "Irish Whiskey" and raises a club ominously, embodying the trope of the Irish as prone to disorder and criminality. Next to him, the German man is encased in a keg marked "Lager Bier," with a pipe in his hand, rehashing the stereotype of the German immigrant as a heavy drinker. The carrying away of the ballot box positions the Irish and German voters as a threat to the nation's democracy, while the chaotic scene at the polling station in the background adds to the sense of anarchy attached to immigrant participation in politics. As already noted, the familiar imagery of Irish and German voters as thieves and lushes owes much to the temperance movement, whose advocates linked drinking to crime. The even more pernicious message is that these immigrant groups are not only unfit to participate in democracy but are actively working to undermine it.

The incendiary appeals represented in these caricatures were highly effective tools of political propaganda, driving the base instincts of Nativist mobs to fever pitch, particularly on Election Day. After investigations had revealed that some immigrant Democrats could neither read nor name the candidates for whom they voted, American Party leaders urged supporters to "defend the purity of the ballot box."[19] In the municipal election of April 1855, rumors of German immigrants tampering with ballot boxes prompted a riot in Cincinnati, Ohio. Know-Nothing mobs attacked the German section of the city and destroyed ballots to prevent them from being counted.[20] On August 6, 1855, in Louisville, Kentucky, the Know-Nothings formed armed groups to guard the polls in Irish and German neighborhoods, determined to use violence and intimidation to deter immigrants from casting ballots. Election violence also rocked Henry Winter Davis' home state of Maryland on November 4, 1856, when Baltimore Democrats and Know-Nothings tried to drive each other out

19 Frank Towers, *The Urban South and the Coming of the Civil War* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 117.

20 William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852–1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 197.

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of the polls and clashed with the police, many of whom were Irish American themselves.

Tensions had risen over whether the results of the election would be fairly polled. This had as much to do with anecdotal cases of Democrat voter fraud as with the gullibility of Know-Nothing agitators. Rabble-rousing rhetoric in newspapers, whose editors sometimes ran for office themselves, added fuel to the fire of anti-immigrant speculations. The American Party attracted many previous nonvoters to the polls who, unfamiliar as they were with the routines of elections, easily gave credence to the claims that Democrats were systematically conniving with immigrants to steal elections with illegitimate votes.

Cartoon portrayals of the Irish and Germans as bestial others, inflamed by alcohol and political agitation, reflected broader nativist sentiments that sought to criminalize and marginalize immigrant populations. But they also underscore the enduring power of visual media in steering public perceptions and policies toward immigrant groups. As we shall see, more recent electoral messaging also draws on visual clichés to stir up anxieties about supposedly delinquent minorities.

3. Legislative Criminalization: The Chinese Exclusion Era and the Immigration Act of 1924

Election rhetoric that stigmatizes immigrants has often been accompanied by legislative measures barring immigrants from the workforce. In the late nineteenth century, economic protectionism led to a nation-wide Chinese scare and the institutionalization of anti-Chinese sentiment in U.S. American law, politics, and public discourse. This exclusion was especially harsh considering the exploitation of Chinese laborers throughout the expansion era. California's transition from a mining economy to industrial capitalism benefited greatly from their contributions and work ethic. During the California Gold Rush and the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad, the U.S. adopted an expedient open-door policy with China to meet the demand for foreign manpower. Yet when recession hit in the 1870s, U.S. American workers found themselves competing with Chinese immigrants and began to call for stricter regulations. During Rutherford B. Hayes' one-term presidency (1877–1881), he faced pressure particularly from his West Coast constituents to address the 'Chinese nuisance.' Hayes' veto of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1879 was motivated by polit-

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ical pragmatism. Because the act violated a treaty with China, the veto did not express an endorsement of Chinese immigration.

The racially fueled panic over Chinese immigration went hand in hand with white workers' protest against capitalist corporations and industrial monopolies, with political candidates quickly adopting racist demagoguery to secure the working-class vote. As historian Alexander Sexton observed in his landmark study *The Indispensable Enemy*, "racial identification cut at right angles to class consciousness."[21] Nowhere was this entanglement more apparent than in the platform of the Workingmen's Party of California and in the speeches of its firebrand founder and advocate, Denis Kearney, who famously campaigned under the slogan "The Chinese Must Go!" A manifesto issued by the party bleakly proclaimed: "To an American, death is preferable to life on a par with the Chinese."[22] During cross-country tours that drew tens of thousands to his speeches, Kearney, himself an Irish immigrant, urged his supporters to arm themselves. These tensions culminated in a rally in San Francisco in 1877, after which his followers rampaged through Chinatown, smashing windows and setting buildings on fire.[23]

After Hayes declined to seek reelection, Republican James Garfield defeated Democratic candidate Winfield Hancock only by the smallest of margins in the popular vote. Both parties had made the restriction of Chinese immigration a centerpiece of their platforms, depicting Chinese immigrants as an economic and criminal menace. An 1880 cover illustration in *Puck* magazine visualizes the bipartisan political maneuvering over Chinese exclusion with particularly cavalier imagery (Figure 5). The two candidates, James Garfield on the left and Winfield Hancock on the right, are shown nailing a Chinese immigrant between two identical planks, indifferent to the man's imploring cries and outstretched arms.[24] Garfield and Hancock could take up the anti-Chinese cause without having to worry about alienating a key constituency. The U.S. Supreme Court had declared Chinese immigrants ineligible for naturalized citizenship in 1878 and therefore unable to vote. As the caption to the

21 Alexander Saxton, *The Indispensable Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 1.

22 Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 11.

23 Mark Stein, *American Panic: A History of Who Scares Us and Why* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 75.

24 Andrew Gyory, *Closing the Gate: Race, Politics, and the Chinese Exclusion Act* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 191.

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Puck illustration caustically quips, "where both platforms agree – no vote – no use to either party." When President Chester Arthur finally signed the Chinese Restriction Act into law in 1882, thereby suspending Chinese immigration for ten years, it was the first time that the U.S. had barred immigrants based on their race or nationality. It would not be the last.

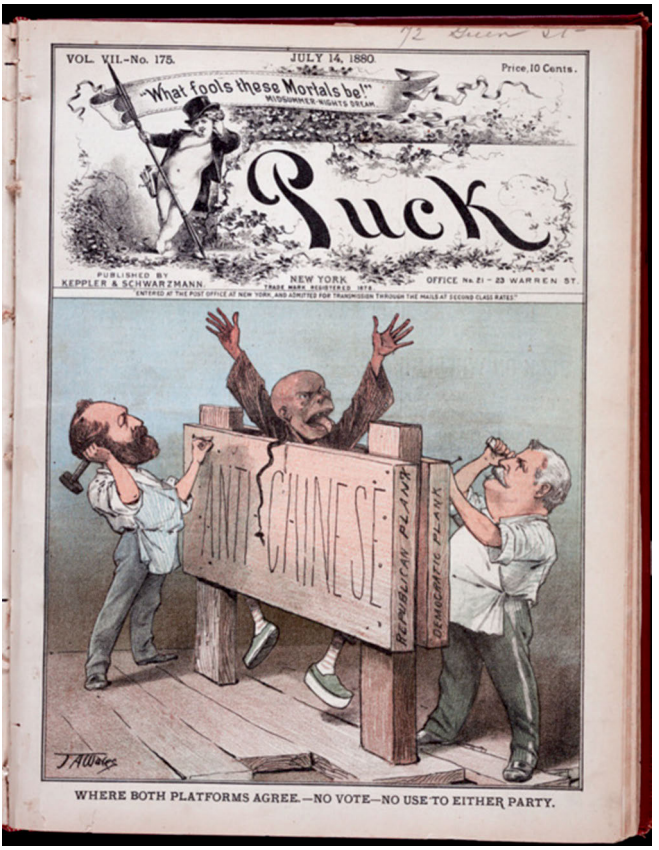

Figure 5: James Albert Wales, "Where Both Platforms Agree – No Vote – No Use to Either Party"[25]

25 James Albert Wales, "Where Both Platforms Agree – No Vote – No Use to Either Party" [cover], Puck, July 14, 1880. Library of Congress, Item 90707286. Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Where_both_platforms_agree-no_vote-no_use_to_either_party_-_J.A._Wales._LCCN90707286.jpg.

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Concerns about the country's changing demographics also prompted the Immigration Act of 1924, which attempted to preserve an elusive ideal of U.S. American homogeneity by imposing quotas on immigration from Southern and Eastern Europe and almost entirely excluding Asians. Calvin Coolidge, who was running for reelection in 1924, framed the Act as a necessary measure to prevent the saturation of the labor market and the suppression of wages caused by the surge of foreign workers. But he also portrayed immigrants from these countries as a social threat because of their alleged inability to assimilate into U.S. American culture. Drawing on pseudoscientific theories of eugenics that were popular at the time, Coolidge and other proponents of the law contended that the United States was fundamentally a nation of Western European descent and that immigrants from other regions would dilute the country's racial identity.

In 1921, while serving as Warren G. Harding's vice president, Coolidge wrote an essay for *Good Housekeeping* entitled "Whose Country Is This," in which he defended the 'right' kind of immigration: "Biological laws tell us that certain divergent people will not mix or blend. The Nordics propagate themselves successfully. With other races, the outcome shows deterioration on both sides."[26] Accepting the Republican presidential nomination at the convention on August 14, 1924, Coolidge revealed his motivations while trying to stifle the racism that bubbled underneath:

> Restrictive immigration is not an offensive but a defensive action. It is not adopted in criticism of others in the slightest degree, but solely for the purpose of protecting ourselves. We cast no aspersions on any race or creed, but we must remember that every object of our institutions of society and government will fall unless America be kept American.[27]

Coolidge adopted a strategy of criminalizing immigration itself rather than individual immigrants, which allowed him to cloak his xenophobic stance in a more palatable form than the blatant nativism of the nineteenth century. His coded language about the supposed failure of assimilation among non-

26 Sarah Churchwell, *Behold, America: A History of America First and the American Dream* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 121.

27 John Bond Trevor, *Japanese Exclusion: A Study of the Policy and the Law* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1925), 1.

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Western ethnic groups and his emphasis on Americanization reflected an association between immigration and national security that would not have been lost on his supporters. The cap on arrivals from Southern and Eastern Europe and from Asia forced people from these regions to enter the U.S. under false pretenses, adding to their stigmatization and creating a criminal aura around foreigners. Fear of foreign ideologies and the violence they might bring also played a role in the passage of the Immigration Act in 1924.

In the wake of the Russian Revolution and the rise of Bolshevism, concerns mounted that Eastern European immigrants would introduce radical communist ideologies into the United States and spark similar uprisings. The hysteria was exacerbated by the Red Scare of 1919–1920. Numerous bombings in New York, Washington, D.C., and other cities were attributed to anarchist groups, many of which included foreign nationals. In response, federal agencies conducted mass roundups and deportations, with little regard for civil liberties and due process. A controversial 1921 murder conviction and the 1927 execution of two Italian immigrants, Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti, triggered an outpouring of disapproval from writers and intellectuals, including Edna St. Vincent Millay, Upton Sinclair, Muriel Rukeyser, and John Dos Passos, who accused the justice system of punishing the two men for being foreign labor radicals.

Donald Trump's populist diatribes against undocumented Mexican workers as a mass of exploitable and disposable labor that can be criminalized at will for political gain echoes the exclusion rhetoric of the Gilded Age, revealing deep fault lines in the United States' racialized democracy. From his vulgar racist invective against immigrants from El Salvador, Haiti, and African nations, or what he called "shithole countries" in 2018, to his lament about the lack of immigrants to the U.S. from "nice," that is, majority-white countries like Norway, Denmark, and Switzerland in his 2024 speeches, Trump has leaned into racially charged rhetoric that is reminiscent of past nativist sentiments. This discourse reflects a historical continuity in which xenophobic sentiments are exploited to mollify a base wary of demographic change.

Much like Denis Kearney, Trump uses the media to transform his often hyperbolic, vitriolic rhetoric into a spectacle. While many may not take him seriously as a traditional politician, his perceived willingness to say the unsayable produces a media event that thrives on provocation, making him both a polarizing and disturbingly riveting figure. Trump's continued opposition to Muslim immigration and his hostile language toward the Chinese community during the COVID-19 outbreak harken back to early twentieth-century anti-

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immigrant messaging. Meanwhile, Trump's racially divisive rhetoric – against affirmative action or in support of perceived anti-white sentiment – is rooted in the historic appeals to white supremacy that permeated U.S. presidential campaigns in the second half of the twentieth century.

4. Southern-Style Negative Campaigning: Bush, Dukakis, and Penal Populism

In the 1960s and 70s, amid backlash to the Civil Rights Movement, anti-immigrant sentiments gave way to hostility toward African Americans, and the Republican Party responded with a tailor-made Southern Strategy. Confronted with Black revolt and a Democratic Party that was beginning to question the Jim Crow laws, Southern states embraced candidates who capitalized on white racial angst. By subtly appealing to white voters' fears and prejudices, Republicans were able to weaken the Democratic Party's stronghold in the region without resorting to explicit racism.[28] Coded language played an essential role in the Southern-style negative campaigning. Political candidates turned to phrases like "law and order" and "states' rights" to implicitly associate minority communities, particularly African Americans, with crime and civil disorder. The narrative that African Americans were responsible for rising crime rates was used to justify harsher law enforcement policies and to reshape electoral dynamics.

The legacy of the Southern Strategy is still visible today. Trump has made frequent use of coded messages to appease voters who feel threatened by ostensibly dangerous minorities. The slogan "America First" supposedly emphasizes U.S. interests in trade and foreign policy. However, it also carries nationalist and isolationist overtones that resonate with xenophobic attitudes. Furthermore, Trump's references to "inner cities" when discussing crime and poverty rely on his audience to fill in the blanks and associate urban crime with African American communities.

The 1988 presidential campaign stands out as a prime example of Southern-style negative campaigning, most notably in the infamous "Willie Horton"

28 See, for instance, Angie Maxwell and Todd G. Shields, *The Long Southern Strategy: How Chasing White Voters in the South Changed American Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 1.

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ad. Rather than merely promoting the strength of one's own policies, this campaign strategy relies on portraying the opponent as weak or ineffective, especially on the critical issues of crime and national security. The tactic has historical precedent among both Republican and Democratic presidential candidates. John F. Kennedy won the presidency in 1960 by exploiting fears of a fictional "missile gap" between the United States and the USSR, effectively blaming the Republican administration for perceived national security failures.[29] Richard Nixon's pioneering use of television ads in his 1968 campaign nourished the view that his Democratic opponent Hubert Humphrey was weak on law and order amid the civil unrest of the time, promising a return to stability.[30]

In the 1988 presidential race between George H.W. Bush and Michael Dukakis, Republicans adopted a version of the Southern Strategy that criminologists have called "penal populism," in which candidates play up supposedly rising crime rates and promise tougher punitive measures.[31] Borrowing from the Nixon playbook, the 1988 Bush campaign successfully stoked white fears of Black crime through a series of targeted television ads and strategic attacks in stump speeches. Polling of Democratic voters conducted in Paramus, New Jersey, in May of that year revealed that the failed furlough program in Massachusetts, where Michael Dukakis was governor, was a major issue turning voters away from the candidate. The furlough system, which allowed convicted felons to be temporarily released from prison on weekend passes, had resulted in numerous cases of reoffending. Among these, the crimes of African American convicted murderer William Horton received significant media attention. Horton, who was serving a life sentence for murder without the possibility of parole, was granted a weekend furlough, during which he kidnapped a young white couple, assaulted the man, and raped and stabbed the woman. His case put a graphic face on the failures of Dukakis' policies. Sensing an opportunity, the Bush campaign, which was orchestrated by prominent Republican strategist Lee Atwater and Fox News founder Roger Ailes, made Horton's crimes a

29 W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Real Making of the President: Kennedy, Nixon, and the 1960 Election* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2009), 24.

30 Michael A. Cohen, *American Maelstrom: The 1968 Election and the Politics of Division* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 32.

31 Tim Newburn and Trevor Jones, "Symbolic Politics and Penal Populism: The Long Shadow of Willie Horton," *Crime, Media, Culture: An International Journal* 1, no. 1 (2005): 72–87.

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cornerstone of their attack strategy. Bush was already framing Dukakis as a "tax-raising liberal who let murderers out of jail" on the campaign trail, but it was the TV ad focusing on Horton that drove the point home.[32]

The Willie Horton ad was independently funded and released by the National Security Political Action Committee (PAC), first airing on October 3, 1988. Dark and disturbing in tone, the ad featured a grainy photograph of Horton looking wild-eyed and disheveled. The words "kidnapping," "stabbing," and "raping" flashed across the screen for sensational effect. Although Horton was commonly known as William, the Bush campaign referred to him as "Willie." Political discourse scholar Kathleen Hall Jamieson argues that the nickname was deliberate: "One might trace the familiar 'Willie' to the naming practices of slave-masters, to our patterns of talk about gangsters, or to the sort of benign paternalism that afflicts adults around small children."[33] The ad blatantly linked crime to racial minorities in an attempt to undermine Dukakis' credibility and portray the Democratic candidate as soft on crime and incapable of protecting U.S. American citizens.

Just weeks after the "Willie Horton" ad garnered national attention, the Bush campaign released "Revolving Door," another attack ad on Dukakis' record on crime and the Massachusetts furlough program. The timing was strategic. While the ad does not explicitly mention Horton by name, the connection was unmistakable to the public, reinforcing the association between Dukakis and a policy of dangerous leniency. The ad opens with the image of an armed guard climbing a prison watchtower, followed by another guard patrolling a prison wall topped with razor wire. The camera settles on a revolving door in the bars of a prison fence as a line of inmates enters and immediately exits again facing the viewer. Several of them visibly belong to minority groups (Black, Hispanic, and Asian). A somber voice-over warns that under Dukakis' leadership, hardened criminals have repeatedly been released, only to commit more crimes:

> As Governor Michael Dukakis vetoed mandatory sentencing for drug dealers, he vetoed the death penalty. His revolving-door prison policy gave weekend furloughs to first-degree murderers not eligible for parole. While

32 Tanya Melich, *The Republican War against Women: An Insider's Report from Behind the Lines*, updated ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 2009), 263.

33 Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Dirty Politics: Deception, Distraction, and Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 129.

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> out, many committed other crimes, like kidnaping and rape, and many are still at large. [This last sentence appears on the screen.] Now Michael Dukakis says he wants to do for America what he's done for Massachusetts. America can't afford that risk.[34]

The message is unequivocal: Not only has Dukakis unleashed criminal forces on the unsuspecting public, but he himself must be kept at bay for the safety of the U.S. American people. The visually hard-hitting imagery of the "Willie Horton" and "Revolving Door" ads caught the attention of television news programs, which analyzed them extensively in the final month of the campaign. This coverage ensured that criticism of Dukakis' crime policies reached a wide audience. And while there are multiple reasons why Bush managed to overcome a double-digit polling deficit against Dukakis in the months leading up to the election, the ads were instrumental in damaging Dukakis' candidacy irreparably.

To expose weaknesses in Bush's tough-on-crime rhetoric and prove his own commitment to law and order, Dukakis ran a counter ad of his own featuring Angel Medrano, a Hispanic heroin dealer, in a manner that echoed Nixon's war on crime and Reagan's war on drugs narratives. Dukakis' decision to single out a Hispanic criminal was an alternative version of 'penal populism' that differed from Bush's only in that it shifted the electorate's out-group hostility from Black to Brown crime. Accentuating Hispanic crime funneled public fears toward a marginalized group more closely associated with immigration than African Americans. For the Democratic campaign, indirect anti-immigrant sentiment served as a more politically acceptable substitute for outright racism.

Dukakis' strategy did not resonate as strongly with the public as did Bush's adaptation of the Southern Strategy. In part, that is because the cat was already among the pigeons, with the Horton ad siphoning off white votes. In addition, fears of demonic Black criminality trumped concerns about the narcotics trade or the cross-border infiltration of Latin American cartels. The underperformance of Dukakis' counter ad also speaks to an important political dynamic. As criminologist Michael Tonry has noted, "it is easy to provoke voters' fears,

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34 New York Historical Society, "Presidential ad: 'Revolving Door' George HW Bush (R) v. Michael Dukakis (D) (1988)," June 8, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rZToNflF1z8,%20, 00:30.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839474730 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

… it is difficult for others to dampen them."[35] It was a challenge to counter the anti-Black slant of Republican anti-crime campaigning with an equally race-baiting, anti-Hispanic rhetoric. Though conservative campaign politics have gradually shifted away from the Black-crime narrative, Dukakis' Medrano ad presaged the "bad hombres" rhetoric of MAGA Republicans today.[36] Trump introduced this phrase into the political vernacular of the post-Obama era at a time when blatant anti-Black racism stopped featuring in Republican political advertising.

Above all, in 1988, Republicans understood and harnessed the power of symbolic politics. The iconic images of Horton and the revolving door in the prison fence quickly turned the tide of the race in Bush's favor. What Dukakis' then-campaign manager Susan Estrich said about Bush vs. Dukakis applies to Trump vs. Biden today: There is no competing Democratic iconography, as Democrats tend to campaign on policy rather than symbolism. In campaign rhetoric, they argue technocratically rather than emotionally.[37] With the exception of Obama, who aptly couched his presidential bid in sharp imagery rooted in the historical significance of his candidacy, Democrats still refuse to recognize the potency of symbolic politics, of using figurative language that sticks in voters' minds.

There are few memorable images associated with Biden's tenure, and what voters do remember does not bode well for Democrats in the 2024 election. The decline of the United States' power after a shambolic withdrawal from Afghanistan, reminiscent of the fall of Saigon, flashes through voters' minds as they take in Biden's speeches and press conferences. The policy proposals for the Southern border may be sound, but the border itself presents a chaotic picture. The triumph over COVID-19, a virus many U.S. Americans denied existed, is not tangible or visible. The frozen face of an incoherent Biden has seared itself into the United States' cultural memory, but not to the Democrats' advantage.

35 Michael H. Tonry, *Malign Neglect: Race, Crime, and Punishment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press), 34.

36 Christine A. Kray, Hinda Mandell, and Tamar W. Carroll (eds.), *Nasty Women and Bad Hombres: Gender and Race in the 2016 US Presidential Election* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018).

37 Susan Estrich, *Getting Away with Murder: How Politics Is Destroying the Criminal Justice System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 66.

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The emphasis on Black and other minority criminality not only secured George H.W. Bush's presidential victory, but also had a profound impact on the development of Southern-style negative campaigning in presidential elections. The Democrats, too, learned from Dukakis' defeat and revamped their approach, with candidates like Bill Clinton projecting a toughness akin to the Republican Southern Strategy.

5. Make America First Again: Pat Buchanan's Alien Nation

National security-centered approaches to immigration are a late twentieth and twenty-first century phenomenon. Yet they stem from the same tradition of antipathy toward immigrants that compromised fairness and justice in the U.S. immigration system in the 1860s and 1920s. In addition to being framed as lawbreakers on U.S. territory, immigrants have been inherently criminalized by physical and administrative barriers to admission since the 1990s. Similar to prisons, walls and fences reinforce the notion that immigrants are violating sovereign territory and must be contained by armed forces. Given that legal entry remains elusive, desperate individuals resort to unauthorized routes, marking them as felons and feeding into a broader narrative that equates immigration with anarchy and crime.

Among the conspiracy-driven, far-right agitators on the extreme fringes of the political spectrum, Pat Buchanan is notable for pushing mainstream party candidates toward radical 'Fortress America' positions. After an early career in journalism, Buchanan served as an advisor to both Nixon and Reagan and was a key architect of the Southern Strategy. He co-founded *The American Conservative* magazine and gained a reputation for his populist, confrontational style, especially on the issue of immigration. Like Trump, Buchanan was a member of the so-called punditocracy – a cable news star who bounced between conservative TV and the presidency. "No other American," he boasted upon announcing his first candidacy in 1991, "has spent as many hundreds of hours debating the great questions of our day on national television."[38] Reacting to the lack of a unifying external enemy in the post-Cold War era, Buchanan filled the void left by the dissolution of the Soviet Union by reshaping the ideological dichotomy of capitalism vs. communism into an opposition between native-

38 Eric Alterman, *Sound and Fury: The Making of the Punditocracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019), 8.

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born U.S. Americans and immigrants. Like Trump in 2015 and 2016, Buchanan used his direct access to the U.S. American people through TV shows to make xenophobic statements that would otherwise have sunk the campaign of any candidate seriously aspiring to win a major party nomination.

Buchanan advocated for strict immigration controls in his three presidential campaigns (in 1992 and 1996 as a candidate for the Republican presidential nomination and in 2000 as the Reform Party candidate). He framed these policies in terms that attempted to thread the needle between mobilizing extremist support and maintaining a veneer of political respectability. With dwindling subtlety, Buchanan used coded language to mask race-baiting while implicitly targeting non-white populations. Terms like "third world countries," which prefigured Donald Trump's "shithole countries" comment, stoked fears of cultural decline and economic displacement without directly invoking race.[39] Instead of embracing the country's changing demographic and reaching out to the growing Hispanic community, Buchanan realized that he could get more political capital by fomenting anxieties about skyrocketing immigration levels and white U.S. Americans' impending minority status. At his campaign events, he waved a copy of Peter Brimelow's 1995 book *Alien Nation: Common Sense about America's Immigration Disaster* and sought allies in states like California and Florida who shared his aims of restricting immigration.[40]

One of Buchanan's most memorable political maneuvers was his 1992 press conference at the U.S.-Mexico border, where he warned of an "illegal invasion" and made the case for the construction of the "Buchanan Fence," a diminutive euphemism for a massive system of trenches and barriers patrolled by the U.S. military designed to seal the border.[41] His proposal foreshadowed what would become a central theme in U.S. American conservative politics: the physical fortification of national borders to prevent undocumented immigration. Another flashpoint of Buchanan's doctrine was his call to alter the Fourteenth

39 Patrick Buchanan, *State of Emergency: The Third World Invasion and Conquest of America* (New York: St. Martin's, 2007).

40 On the extreme right white minority representing itself as the "silent majority," see Ari Berman, *Minority Rule: The Right-Wing Attack on the Will of the People – and the Fight to Resist It* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2024).

41 Jeremy W. Peters, *Insurgency: How Republicans Lost Their Party and Got Everything They Ever Wanted* (New York: Crown, 2022), 166.

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Amendment to deny citizenship to children born in the United States to undocumented immigrants, currently referred to as "anchor babies" by Trump and his surrogates in right-wing media.

Buchanan's views on immigration differed from the compassionate Reaganism that dominated conservative politics during the Cold War and was later embraced by George W. Bush and John McCain, both of whom maintained that assimilation was a two-way street. For immigrants, it meant adopting U.S. American values and norms; for the host country, it meant upholding those values and norms to facilitate integration. Buchanan never succeeded in his bids for the presidency, but his ideas left their mark on immigration policy on both sides of the political aisle. One notable influence was on California's Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot initiative aimed at denying public services to undocumented immigrants, which marked a significant moment in the politicization of immigration issues at the state level.

Buchanan's ideological legacy is most evident in Trump's immigration infrastructures. The wall and deportation camps are tangible political symbols that resonate with the electorate. Likewise, it is visible in Trump's strategic nativism, the notion of building a coalition of law-abiding native-born U.S. Americans, both white and Black, against the common threat of illegitimate intruders, to galvanize a broader base of support at a time when the Black vote is up for grabs. As historian Nicole Hemmer has observed, in Trump's campaigns, anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy proposals continue to serve as effective tools for "injecting enthusiasm" into his solid conservative base.[42] Like Buchanan, Trump is also tapping into entrenched fears about the crime of immigration by using partisan punditry in ways that are increasingly "thinning the line between extremism and presidential politics."[43]

42 Nicole Hemmer, "The Man Who Won the Republican Party Before Trump Did," The New York Times, September 8, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/08/opinion/pat-buchanan-donald-trump.html.

43 Ibid.

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6. Donald Trump's Migrant Crime Narrative and Beyond

The heir to this dog-whistle politics – what political communication scholar Mary E. Stuckey has called "despicable discourse"[44] – is Donald Trump. In 2016, 2020, and 2024, Trump targeted Mexican immigrants whom he described as delinquent, framed border control as a criminal justice issue, emphasized the need for a border wall, and brought ethnic profiling into mainstream politics. The aim of this xenopolarization tactic has been not only to support restrictive immigration measures, but also to encourage voter turnout by perpetuating a cycle of fear and misinformation.

I use the term xenopolarization to describe campaign strategies that capitalize on an already polarized political environment. These strategies aim to exploit existing divisions, emotional investments, and media echo chambers to reinforce fear and mistrust of outsiders, especially immigrants. By driving the electorate even further apart on immigration, Trump unites his supporters around a common external threat, while alienating other demographic groups. The tactic deepens the loyalty of conservatives, who feel their views are being validated. More importantly, it drives them to the polls to express both their suspicion of immigrants and their disagreement with immigration-friendly Democrats.

Trump's migrant crime narrative singles out incidents involving migrants, blurring the line between individual cases and systemic problems. The result is a skewed perception of widespread migrant crime, even though immigrants are statistically less likely to be offenders than native-born citizens. Language about alleged illegal invaders streaming across the border reinforces this narrative and obstructs discussions about the factors that drive migration flows. Crippling poverty and rampant gang violence in Central America compel migrants to head north in search of safety and opportunity. Trump turns this situation on its head by falsely equating immigrants themselves with crime, thereby conditioning his audience into a state of terror about Hispanic noncitizens. In an effort to rile up his base, Trump has used explosive language, with crude and unsavory terms thrown in as an accelerant. He infamously referred to Mexican immigrants as "rapists."[45] His portmanteau "bigrant crime" (Biden

44 Stuckey, Mary E. *Deplorable: The Worst Presidential Campaigns from Jefferson to Trump* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2021).

45 For example, Amber Phillips, "'They're Rapists.' President Trump's Campaign Launch Speech Two Years Later, Annotated," The Washington Post, June 16, 2017, https://www

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migrant crime) propagates the myth of crimes committed by immigrants living in the country illegally under Biden's overly permissive policies.[46] With its connotations of bisexuality and non-binary identities, "bigrant crime" is another example of dog-whistle linguistic priming. Not only does this tactic demonize migrants, but it also associates their presence with broader underlying fears about social diversity. Ironically, it was Republicans who spurned the opportunity to pass a comprehensive border bill supported by the Border Patrol union in 2024, opting instead for a fear-mongering strategy they believe will secure votes in an election year.

A notable feature of Trump's anti-immigrant discourse is how it overlaps with other exclusionary patterns in his intersectional politics of hate, including race, gender, sexuality, religion, and social status. Trump makes use of border imagery and metaphors – such as the central rallying cry about building the wall – to summon up an imperiled U.S. exceptionalism that only he, as a paternalistic savior figure, can restore to greatness. In the words of Joshua D. Martin, "Trump's disparaging comments pit an imagined Anglo body politic against a criminally invasive brown specter, contrasting the civic duty and law-and-order respectability of the former against the alleged malice, criminality, and sexual predation of the latter."[47]

Trump's anti-immigrant stance reinforces patriarchal narratives of protection and control. At the same time, he also targets Islam by fomenting fear of terrorism. He has tethered immigration to economic status, casting immigrants as a drain on public resources and a threat to the livelihoods of native-born citizens in the face of rising inflation. While this multi-layered "us-versus-them" discourse may seem new or over-the-top, it condenses a long history of multi-exclusionary rhetoric in U.S. American politics. Nativists portrayed single male Chinese workers as violent, predatory dangers to white

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.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2017/06/16/theyre-rapists-presidents-trump-campaign-launch-speech-two-years-later-annotated/.

46 For example, Althea Legaspi, "Donald Trump Claims His 'Persecution' Will Make the U.S. 'Truly Become a Third World Country,'" Rolling Stone, February 17, 2024, https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/donald-trump-michigan-rally-legal-rulings-complaints-1234970666/.

47 Joshua D. Martin, "The Border, Bad Hombres, and the Billionaire: Hypermasculinity and Anti-Mexican Stereotypes in Trump's 2016 Presidential Campaign," in *Nasty Women and Bad Hombres: Gender and Race in the 2016 US Presidential Election*, eds. Christine A. Kray, Hinda Mandell, and Tamar W. Carroll (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 60–73, 60–61.

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U.S. American women and children. In an effort to balance immigration enforcement with compassion, Obama prioritized the deportation of convicted criminals while trying to protect law-abiding immigrant families from being torn apart. Unfortunately, the distinction between criminal men and saintly families in Obama's ill-advised slogan "felons, not families" suggests a direct correlation between undocumented status and criminal behavior.[48] Such misguided messages inadvertently feed into the narrative that immigrants are disproportionately involved in criminal activity. A persistent bipartisan pattern thus becomes apparent in U.S. political discourse, in which marginalized groups are constructed as a threat to an idealized white U.S. American family. This trend also illustrates how immigration rhetoric often draws on anti-Black prejudices, especially regarding the alleged criminal conduct and predatory behavior attributed to Black masculinity.

The criminalization of immigrant communities looms large in U.S. electoral rhetoric and serves as a powerful tool for manipulating public opinion – and thus election outcomes. In the current election cycle, Republicans have followed this playbook with renewed vigor, tapping into deep national anxieties about the country's changing demographics. Reactionary white U.S. Americans are responding enthusiastically to the mythology I have traced throughout this chapter, which I call demographic dystopia. This fiction encapsulates the ongoing national struggle to reconcile ideals of equality with the realities of racial and ethnic diversity. In this elaborate fantasy, immigrants illegally manipulate the electoral process to their advantage, attack democratic processes, go on crime sprees, and take jobs from U.S. Americans, including Black Americans, as Trump pointedly asserted in his debate with Biden in 2024.[49] Further, migrants supposedly drive down wages, fail to pay taxes, and nonetheless benefit from public services. Anxieties about this "American carnage," to use a particularly grim phrase from Trump's 2017 inaugural address, fuel draconian re-

48 For example, Sarah Stillman, "Obama's Failed Promise to Immigrant Families," The New Yorker, June 30, 2016, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/obamas-failed-promise-to-immigrant-families.

49 For example, Abha Bhattarai, "Trump Says Immigrants Are Taking 'Black Jobs.' Economists disagree," The Washington Post, June 28, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2024/06/28/trump-black-jobs-economy-immigration/.

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sponses at the border and in border states, including calls to build deportation camps for migrants and force them to carry immigration papers.[50]

Often referred to as the "show me your papers" law, Arizona's SB 1070 mandates that immigrants carry identification proving their legal status at all times. It also authorizes law enforcement to demand documentation based on reasonable suspicion, which has led to widespread concerns about racial profiling and discrimination against Hispanic communities. The heightened scrutiny faced by documented and undocumented migrants today is chillingly reminiscent of earlier practices of control and surveillance that marginalized selected groups have had to endure. In antebellum United States, free African Americans in many states were required to carry 'freedom papers' to avoid being captured and sold into slavery. In the 1920s, immigration laws imposed extensive documentation requirements, thus reinforcing immigrants' status as outsiders who had to continually prove their right to be in the United States. Whether in the era of slavery, in the 1920s, or today, forcing individuals to carry proof of their status is a mechanism of social control designed to perpetuate a hierarchy that favors white and native-born citizens.

But what do the entwined campaign politics of immigration and crime control augur for the future of moral panics in U.S. election discourse? First, it is not just the United States. Immigration and crime are wedge issues and core currency in political communication in Europe as well. The issue topped the agenda in Italy in 2024. The far-right nationalist Brothers of Italy party, which came to power on an anti-immigration campaign, drummed up fears about immigration ahead of the EU vote. Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni accused non-EU citizens of fraudulently obtaining work visas and blamed criminal gangs for facilitating this process, reinforcing the criminal image of foreigners. Most EU states are tightening border security and speeding up the return of migrants. Much like the United States, the EU is pursuing a 'Fortress' agenda, incentivizing countries of origin to curb illegal immigration and empowering 'third' countries outside the EU to hold people back. The U.S. and Europe are also escalating the criminalization of immigration worldwide by implementing punitive measures against immigrants, such as detention and deportation. These policies not only deter asylum seekers, but also embolden

50 Politico Staff, "Full text: 2017 Donald Trump inauguration speech transcript," Politico, January 20, 2017, https://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/full-text-donald-trump-inauguration-speech-transcript-233907.

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other nations to adopt similarly harsh measures, exacerbating the global crackdown on immigration.

Despite the progressive optimism that has been ignited by Labour's electoral success in the UK, there is no end to this fearmongering in sight. In his inaugural speech, Prime Minister Keir Starmer included mentions of "secure borders" and "safer streets" alongside promises to revitalize the NHS and provide affordable housing, thereby cementing the link between public insecurity and immigration.[51] If the U.S. and its allies are sending a message to the world right now, it is that aspiring political leaders must adhere to the most widely accepted fundamental values of any political majority, which are, in Bill Clinton's words, "the ability to defend the nation and the strength to enforce its laws."[52]

51 Civil Service and The Rt Hon Sir Keir Starmer KCB KC MP, "A message from Prime Minister Keir Starmer to the Civil Service," GOV.UK, July 8, 2024, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/a-message-from-prime-minister-keir-starmer-to-the-civil-service.

52 Quoted in Kenneth S. Baer, *Reinventing Democrats: The Politics of Liberalism from Reagan to Clinton* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 126.

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Healthcare as Governance Technique: Anti-Immigration Politics Expressed in Access to Health

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Introduction

On October 4, 2019, President Donald J. Trump signed a proclamation requiring individuals to have health insurance or the financial means to cover foreseeable medical expenses to apply for a visa. Although the specific implementation of this requirement was initially vague, it significantly impacted the migration process. The rationale behind this policy was to reduce the financial burden on taxpayers and healthcare providers to treat uninsured individuals, particularly immigrants. A similar initiative was undertaken in Germany during the Asylum Compromise of 1993, with the enactment of the "Asylum Benefits Act." This law limited healthcare coverage for asylum seekers and individuals with irregular residency status to acute illnesses and emergency care. The underlying objective was to minimize the supposed attraction of healthcare benefits to migrants and alleviate the financial strain on taxpayers. These legal initiatives exemplify two approaches to using healthcare to limit immigration: one, to use healthcare as a condition to enter the country, and, two, to reduce healthcare incentives to decrease the influx of immigrants. Both approaches are based on the rationale that healthcare capacities are limited and can only be provided for citizens but not for aliens.

The examples above demonstrate that healthcare has become a critical area in anti-immigration politics. Access to healthcare serves as a tool of governance to control immigration flows and reinforce national identity. In the United States and Germany, restrictive healthcare policies for immigrants have been justified with claims of reducing financial burdens on taxpayers and preventing the exploitation of public services. According to the prevailing

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narrative that is mobilized by advocates for restrictions, nations' social benefits and advanced healthcare systems function as 'pull factors' that attract migrants and result in overburdened public systems.

This essay examines how healthcare policies marginalize immigrant populations and divert attention from systemic healthcare issues in the U.S. and Germany. Laws, policies, and rhetoric are analyzed in terms of their varying perspectives on health. In the context of migration, health policies are presented as either necessary to protect national health, as during the COVID-19 pandemic, or as essential to preventing the exploitation of the welfare and health systems. Since the capacity of hospitals, medication, and doctors can be assessed numerically, healthcare is posited as a limited good that needs to be distributed by political actors according to market logic. Access must be earned or deserved and is reduced to access to medical treatment without acknowledgement of the influence of living circumstances and their effects on health. This perspective leads to a rhetoric of healthcare exploitation in which migrants are beneficiaries and taxpaying citizens, exploited.

In this essay, I contrast a human rights perspective on health with German and U.S. American political realities and name the problems that political actors identify. Arguments about the overburdened healthcare system or migrants' supposed exploitation of the welfare state are critically questioned. Using a human rights framework opens the debate to a more critical engagement with current health and migration discourses. After questioning the logic of constrained health resources that leads to the exclusion of marginalized groups, I propose a human rights framework for how health and healthcare. This framework leads to broadening the spectrum of possible solutions.

To arrive at this perspective, this essay is organized into three parts. First, a post-structural understanding of policymaking is introduced, which contests the assumption that problems exist objectively. Second, the narrative of migration as a pressure point on the health system and the understanding of health as a limited good are elucidated. An underlying zero-sum logic lies behind them, that is, the assumption that a benefit to one group necessarily means a loss to the other. These concepts are then mobilized in the third section, which focuses on German and U.S. discourses on migration and their effects on health and healthcare.

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Health and Health Systems: Pressure Due to Migration?

What is a problem, and how can it be solved? From the perspective of poststructural policy analysis, problems do not exist objectively or independently of the actors who present them. Actors' perceptions determine which situation is perceived as a problem, and what kind of problem it represents.[1] Contesting essentialist assumptions about issues and their solutions enables critical reflection on why things are governed as they are. The solutions that are offered depend on the underlying assumptions of the actors making the judgements. For instance, the problem of overburdened hospitals could be solved by making investments to increase capacities or staff. Health issues could be prevented by addressing the causes of illness in society. Patient numbers could be controlled by limiting the number of people entitled to treatment. The predicament of "overburdened hospitals" becomes a different kind of problem that requiring varying types of knowledge and resources, depending on the political actor offering a solution. From such a perspective, we can question political measures and their intentions and ask whether proposed solutions actually target an identified problem or merely address a political actor's specific problematization.[2]

The concept of health is not universally defined.[3] Various approaches to health can be used to set priorities and justify policies. From a curative point of view, the treatment of sickness has the highest priority. Focus lies on the discipline of medicine as the key player in healthcare. Preventive perspectives, like public health, ask, by contrast, how health threats emerge in the workplace, living conditions, and consumption. Normative statements are used to justify the prohibition of health-threatening behaviors or choices. Although these approaches differ drastically in their views on how to promote health, they should not be interpreted as independent of one another.

The codification of the human right to health in Art. 12 para. 1 of the International Covenant of Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) and

1 Carol Bacchi and Susan Goodwin, *Poststructural Policy Analysis: A Guide to Practice* (Berlin: Springer Link 2016), 38–39.

2 Ibid.; Renate Mayntz, "Governance Theory als Fortentwickelte Steuerungstheorie?", Econstor, 2004, https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/44296.

3 Peter Franzkowiak and Klaus Hurrelmann, "Gesundheit," in *Leitbegriffe der Gesundheitsförderung und Prävention: Glossar zu Konzepten, Strategien und Methoden*, Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, last updated May 19, 2022, https://leitbegriffe.bzga.de/alphabetisches-verzeichnis/gesundheit/.

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its further definition in the general comment 14 of the CESCR provide a normative guarantee to the right to health, though not to right to be healthy. As the legal text states, everyone is entitled "to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health."[4] The notion of "highest attainable standard" appears vague at first glance. Yet it defines a clear framework in which states have to operate. It recognizes "individual's biological and socio-economic preconditions"[5] and considers structural circumstances and their influence on an individual's health status.

Depending on a state's particular circumstances and capacities, health has to be secured with an approach based in equity. General Comment 14 further defines clear categories for the design of health services. They must be *available*, and provide sufficient health services; *accessible* in a physical, economic, and non-discriminatory manner; and *acceptable* for different cultural, gender-based, or lifecycle requirements: the requirements of minorities are explicitly mentioned. Further, they must respect medical ethics. Finally, health services must be of good *quality*, and provide scientifically and medically appropriate services, including infrastructure and trained personnel.[6]

This brief overview of different conceptualizations of health helps to make clear the wide variety of measures governments can consider to ease pressure

4 United Nations (General Assembly), "International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights," in Treaty Series 999 (December 1966), Art. 12 para. 1.

5 UN Economic and Social Council, "General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12 of the Covenant)," E/C.12/2000/4, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), August 11, 2000, https://www.refworld.org/legal/general/cescr/2000/en/36991, par. 9.

6 Ibid., par. 12. The AAAQ concept is subject of further discussion and a non-exhaustive concept. There is, for instance, the call for implication of *Trust* (Sibel T. Savas et al., "Migrant-sensitive Healthcare in Europe: Advancing Health Equity Through Accessibility, Acceptability, Quality, and Trust," The Lancet Regional Health Europe 41, 2024, art. 100805); *Accountability* (Helen Potts, "Accountability and the Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health," 2007, https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/pais/research/csgr/csgr-events/conferences/2007/hivaids/papers/hrc_accountability_mar08.pdf) ; and *Participation* (Helen Potts, Ford Foundation, and Paul Hunt, "Participation and the Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health," 2008, https://repository.essex.ac.uk/9714/1/participation-right-highest-attainable-standard-health.pdf). These additions derive mainly from discussions about health services for irregular migrants, emphasizing the need for further investigation and a required paradigm shift, recognizing non-sedentary lifestyles and realities. Stefano Angeleri, *Irregular Migrants and the Right to Health* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023).

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on health systems. Most obviously, it is possible to invest large sums of money in national health systems, regardless of profit-oriented facilities' market-driven logic. Another approach is to invest in public health measures that reduce the causes of illness. This can include measures to decrease the spread of communicable diseases and the causes of non-communicable diseases, such as regulating access to sugar-filled and fatty foods and to addictive products and services, including gambling and social media. It can also include promoting traffic safety and safe working conditions, and fostering a healthy and clean environment.

The critical importance of health systems becomes evident during periods of significant stress. The most infamous example is the COVID-19 pandemic. The insecurity caused by missing knowledge and reliable data and the high demand for emergency treatment sensitized societies to the interconnectedness of social environments, human behavior, and infections. This awareness led in Germany, for instance, to prohibiting the sale of fireworks for New Year's Eve to protect the already overwhelmed hospitals against additional stress due to firework related injuries.[7] The pandemic has shown that overburdening can result in public health issues: the emergence of a new pathogen, inadequate structures to prevent infection and injury, and insufficient capacities in the health system. This contradicts the securitized assumption that health must be protected from "external threats."[8] However, states tend to respond to major disease outbreaks by imposing travel restrictions and barriers, despite WHO recommendations to the contrary.[9] Instead of following epidemiological evidence and recommendations that focus on domestic legislation and protecting residents, governments primarily carried out symbolic actions to "make the population feel like it is being protected and provide assurance that the government is doing all that it can, regardless of whether barriers actually prevent disease

7 Bundesregierung, "Verkaufsverbot für Silvesterfeuerwerk," December 28, 2021, https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/themen/coronavirus/verkaufsverbot-feuerwerk-1993038.

8 William Aldis, "Health Security as a Public Health Concept: A Critical Analysis," Health Policy and Planning 23, no. 6 (2008): 369–375.

9 Catherine Z. Worsnop et al. "The Unintended Consequences of Information Provision: The World Health Organization and Border restrictions during COVID-19," *International Studies Perspectives* 24 (2023): 39–66.

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spread."[10] This led to the false assumption that health threats are imported and that states can protect residents by banning travel.

In Germany, the rhetoric of overburdened healthcare systems has been present since the late 1970s. In 1987, the *Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund* (DGB) published a health program that acknowledged the relevance of social policy in preventing illnesses.[11] The fundamental critique that was expressed in this program was on the emphasis and even the exaggeration of individual behaviors as a cause of health issues and the ignorance of structural influences on health, as expressed in social determinants. Health policy has to be understood as social policy rather than focusing on the efficiency of healthcare systems in processing cases, as reflected in the limited time available for actual treatment. We need to shift the focus on the prevention of illnesses.[12]

From this perspective, blaming and shaming certain groups or individuals for overburdening German hospitals is a misguided endeavor. The rhetoric of limited healthcare capacities and overburdened systems is part and parcel of an epistemic hegemony that favors a medicalized perspective on health. Instead, the various contexts of diseases that lead to an overburdening of the healthcare system during certain periods have to be analyzed in relation to financial issues and work environments.

The False Assumption That Health Is a Limited Good

Health is not a good that can be quantified. Instead, it is a status that individuals and societies aim to have and maintain in order to live in dignity. Medical products and hospital capacities are, of course, limited. However, whether they are overburdened depends not on how many people live in a particular area but on what kind of illnesses or other health problems emerge in these areas and, therefore, how many people will need to rely on medical assistance. The argu-

10 Catherine Z. Worsnop, "Domestic Politics and the WHO's International Health Regulations: Explaining the use of trade and travel barriers during disease outbreaks," *The Review of International Organizations* 12 (2017), 365–395.

11 Jost Bauch, "Die Überforderung Des Gesundheitswesens – Anmerkungen Zum DGB-Programm," *Arbeit Und Sozialpolitik* 41, no. 5 (1987): 146–148.

12 Ibid.

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ment of "resource constraints"[13] that is made to prohibit the realization of the human right to health leads to framing healthcare as a charitable act rather than a right to which individuals are entitled.[14]

Using a human rights lens obliges states to follow their legal and moral duty to *respect* this human right by "refraining from denying or limiting equal access for all persons, including … asylum seekers and illegal immigrants to preventive, curative and palliative health services."[15] Likewise, states have to *fulfill* the human right to health by "ensur[ing] equal access for all to the underlying determinants of health, such as nutritiously safe good and potable drinking water, basic sanitation and adequate housing and living conditions."[16] On the basis of the human right to health, rejecting individuals' access to care due to limited resources is not tenable. Further, the duty to ensure equal access to health by refraining from interference in seeking healthcare contradicts the framing of health as a limited good that can only be provided for particular groups based on their residency status.

Yet enabling more people to benefit from healthcare challenges the status quo of society. Conservative political actors are prone to maintaining the status quo. Social hierarchies and differences are legitimized and the urge for change neglected. Hence, the inclusion of more groups is primarily considered in terms of a potential loss and/or threat to the status quo.[17] In the following, I contest this zero-sum logic by introducing a human rights perspective on health.

The scope of the human rights lens has limitations that are particularly evident in the U.S., which has not ratified the ICESCR and does not recognize health or healthcare as a human right. A legal analysis might stop at this point and refer to the state's law and sovereignty. However, human rights are not just legal treaties. Rather, they provide a theoretical basis for creating and evaluating policies. A counter-narrative can be found in Amartya Sens's capability

13 Kayvan Bozorgmehr, Judith Wenner, and Oliver Razum, "Restricted Access to Health Care for Asylum-Seekers: Applying a Human Rights Lens to the Argument of Resource Constraints," *European Journal of Public Health* 27, no.4 (2017): 592–593.

14 Ibid.

15 General Comment 14, par. 34.

16 Ibid., par. 36.

17 Shai Davidai and Martino Ongis, "The Politics of Zero-Sum Thinking: The Relationship Between Political Ideology and the Belief that Life is a Zero-Sum Game," *Science Advances* 5, no. 12 (2019): 1–10.

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approach,[18] which holds that human rights and health are fundamental for individuals to act as agents and expand on their freedoms. The approach assesses health by evaluating individuals' capabilities to achieve essential functions and pursue meaningful activities. It underscores the importance of expanding freedoms and opportunities to enhance health outcomes beyond economic indicators. However, capabilities have to be promoted on the basis of equity. This entails recognizing various vulnerabilities and the need to consider these vulnerabilities when attempting to create equal opportunities and "eliminating health disparities that are systematically associated with underlying social disadvantage or marginalization."[19] Therefore, transparent and participatory decision-making processes that consider asylum seekers' concerns are necessary, as these individuals are ultimately affected.[20] In this context, human rights obligations go far beyond the obligations of legal treaties. They represent the foundation that enables individuals to make free choices. A government that claims to act in accordance with human rights standards cannot, therefore, evade responsibility by claiming the lack of a legal basis for acting on those standards. Thus, the same criteria can be applied to the U.S. and to Germany despite their highly divergent legal frameworks.

A human rights lens requires accepting and prioritizing people as legal subjects. Human rights cannot be denied based on states' capability limits, as this would undermine their universality and inalienability, two characteristics intrinsic to human rights. The expansion and advancement of human rights positively influences individuals and structures in general. It increases individuals' freedoms to live "lives they [individuals] value;"[21] this, in turn, renders "social arrangements more appropriate and effective"[22] by acknowledging individuals' and groups' particular circumstances and needs. Therefore, investing in the social determinants of health and expanding access to health services is worthwhile for governments and society as a whole. Such actions

18 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Amartya Sen, *Elemente einer Theorie der Menschenrechte* (Ditzingen: Reclam, 2020), 31–33.

19 Paula Braveman and Sofia Gruskin, "Poverty, Equity, Human Rights and Health," Bulleting of the World Health Organization 81 (2003): 539–545, 540.

20 Bozorgmehr, Wenner, and Razum, "Restricted Access to Health Care for Asylum-Seekers," 592–593.

21 Sen, "Development as Freedom," 18.

22 Ibid., 31.

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recognize "joint interests in realizing the human right to health"[23] rather than following a zero-sum approach.

Scientific evidence promotes the advancement of migrant-sensitive healthcare to meet the conditions defined by an evidence- and human rights-based understanding of health. Political discourses, by contrast, paint a picture of healthcare as the privilege of citizens or migrants with legal immigration status (regular migrants). In this way, the overburdening of the healthcare system is framed as resulting out of people seeking treatment. Yet the numbers do not support the accusation of exploitation. Most migrants in irregular residency situations seek fewer health services due to the fear of deportation or other negative consequences.[24] These restrictions also lead migrants to seek only emergency care, which could have been avoidable if they were receiving regular care.[25]

Blaming immigrants reveals a limited conceptualization of the impact of state action and a narrow understanding of health. Positing healthcare as a limited good[26] and health as an individual responsibility fails to acknowledge the living circumstances of migrants in emergency shelters or at the border, and it neglects states' responsibility for dangerous migration routes. Furthermore, the overcrowding of health facilities results out of forcing marginalized people without health insurance into emergency rooms by limiting their access to other facilities.[27] In economic terms, state policies increase the demand for general health services by restricting access to specific (emergency) services; these parallel systems are more expensive than the integration of migrants into regular and preventive systems would be.[28] The governance of migration

23 Leslie London, "What Is a Human-Rights Based Approach to Health and Does It Matter?" *Health and Human Rights* 10, no. 1 (2008): 65–80.

24 Heide Castañeda, *Migration and Health: Critical Perspectives* (Taylor & Francis, 2022), 50; KFF, "Key Facts on Health Coverage of Immigrants | KFF," May 8, 2024, https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/fact-sheet/key-facts-on-health-coverage-of-immigrants/.

25 Elisabetta de Vito et al. "Are Undocumented Migrants' Entitlements and Barriers to Healthcare a Public Health Challenge for the European Union?" *Public Health Reviews* 37 (2016): art. 13, 7.

26 Castañeda, *Migration and Health: Critical Perspectives*, 50

27 Ibid.; Michael Knipper and Yasar Bilgin, *Migration und Gesundheit* (Berlin: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, 2009): 65.

28 Kayvan Bozorgmehr, Judith Wenner, and Oliver Razum, "Restricted Access to Health Care for Asylum-Seekers," 592–593.

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routes, accommodations for asylum seekers, and access to the labor market results out of state policies. In these cases, governments create the very health problems to which they also restrict healthcare access.

The narrative of limited resources reappeared in Germany in 2023 in the rhetoric of the Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the Christian Democratic Union (CDU); it was used to describe topics ranging from overburdened healthcare facilities to general social benefits. In September 2023, CDU party leader Friedrich Merz claimed on a talk show that rejected asylum seekers get their teeth cleaned without cost in Germany, thereby taking away regular appointments from German citizens.[29] During the same year, Federal Minister of Finance Christian Lindner (FDP) and Federal Minister of Justice Marco Buschmann (FDP) published an article in which they justified harsh restrictions to access to social benefits in the Asylum Seekers Benefits Act (*Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz* – AsylbLG), and demanded the introduction of a payment card (*Bezahlkarte*) to restrict costs for asylum seekers or tolerated persons.[30] In the article, they argue that social benefits function as a "pull factor" and that asylum seekers do not need financial resources for cultural activities.[31] The CDU agreed to these demands in a draft bill,[32] and the reform was implemented in February 2024. Thus, the CDU and FDP have created the basis for keeping rejected asylum seekers in a reduced version of the welfare system. Calculating in a zero-sum logic that is bound to national territories, as the politicians named above have done, neglects the capacities that are mobilized through migration and cooperation. Yet the argument that systems are overstretched and exploited serves as a popular justification for ever-stricter

29 Leonhard Landes, "Friedrich Merz über Asylbewerber beim Zahnarzt: CDU-Chef polarisiert mit Satz im WELT Talk," DIE WELT, September 28, 2023, https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article247694964/Friedrich-Merz-ueber-Asylbewerber-beim-Zahnarzt-CDU-Chef-polarisiert-mit-Satz-im-WELT-Talk.html.

30 Christian Lindner and Marco Buschmann, "LINDNER/BUSCHMANN-Gastbeitrag: Eine neue Realpolitik in der Migrationsfrage," FDP, October 10, 2023, https://www.fdp.de/pressemitteilung/lindnerbuschmann-gastbeitrag-eine-neue-realpolitik-der-migrationsfrage.

31 Ibid.

32 Deutscher Bundestag, "Gesetzentwurf der Fraktion CDU/CSU. Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Weiterentwicklung des Asylbewerberleistungsgesetzes (Asylbewerberleistungsweiterentwicklungsgesetz – AsylbLWG)," Bundestags-Drucksache 20/9309, November 14, 2023, https://dserver.bundestag.de/btd/20/093/2009309.pdf.

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migration policies, even if similar policies did not led to improvements in the past.

Germany: A Maze of Insecurity

The German law on providing healthcare to irregular migrants is complex due to the principle of subsidiarity, which leads to differences between the federal states (*Bundesländer*). In 1993, in response to the heavily violent attacks on accommodations housing immigrants in Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Hoyerswerda, and Solingen, the then governing coalition of the CDU and the FDP passed the so-called asylum compromise (*Asylkompromiss*), with the AsylbLG as one of its core components.[33] These policies aimed to reduce immigration incentives such as welfare and healthcare provisions and were intended to lower the influx of asylum seekers, thereby appeasing the aggressive and racist sentiments that had fueled the violent attacks against immigrants.[34] This legislation covers not only asylum seekers but also tolerated persons (*Geduldete*), that is, persons to whom asylum has been denied but who cannot be deported due to unsafe situations in their countries of origin or illness or missing documents. The law remained in effect, with several amendments, and was further restricted in 2023 by extending its period of applicability from eighteen to thirty-six months and by implementing the payment card.[35] People subject to this law are guaranteed living standards lower than the minimum subsistence level provided for citizens, regular immigrants, and refugees whose status has been recognized.[36]

The scope of health services and illnesses considered worthy of treatment is limited to the most basic emergency care. § 4 of the AsylbLG specifies that medical treatment is granted only in cases of acute illness or pain. Other services are provided only if deemed essential and at the discretion of the com-

33 Hannah Franke and Frederik von Harbou, "Das Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz und die Menschenrechte: Argumentationspraxis aus 30 Jahren Gesetzgebung und Rechtsprechung," *Zeitschrift für Ausländerrecht und Ausländerpolitik (ZAR)*, no. 11–12 (2023): 412.

34 Constanze Janda, "Existenzminimum, Gleichbehandlung, Menschenwürde: Rechtliche Anforderungen an die Gesundheitsversorgung von Asylsuchenden," *Z'Flucht. Zeitschrift für Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung* (2021): 29–50, 33.

35 Franke and von Harbou, "Das Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz und die Menschenrechte," 411.

36 Ibid., 412.

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petent authority (§ 6 AsylbLG).[37] In this context, "acute" refers to illnesses that break out unexpectedly, thus excluding chronic diseases.[38] The assessment of whether an illness is acute is determined by members of the social administration staff in the social welfare model (*Sozialamtsmodell*). In this case, migrants have to obtain a treatment certificate (*Behandlungsschein*) before they can see a physician. This certificate is issued only if Social Welfare Office officials consider the illness or injury to be acute.[39] However, these public officials lack medical training. This is particularly problematic in cases involving mental trauma as well as when symptoms occur that could indicate an emerging acute and life-threatening disease.[40] From a medical perspective, the distinction between "acute" and "chronic" is highly problematic; the former can easily lead to the latter, and the lack of treatment of a chronic disease often leads to acute emergencies, thus creating care situations that violate medical ethics.[41]

The situation for migrants without residency status is even more severe. Although physicians are bound to confidentiality, the Social Welfare Office and hospital billing offices are required to report to immigration authorities under § 87 of the Residency Act (*Aufenthaltsgesetz* – AufenthG). This poses the serious threat of deportation to those seeking care.[42] In extreme cases, physicians can be charged with aiding and abetting illegal residence (§ 96 AufenthG), which, although rarely prosecuted, serves as a significant deterrent.[43] When migrants do access the healthcare system, they may encounter differential treatment and barriers due to a lack of culturally sensitive communication, language barriers,[44] or polypragmasia – the increased prescription of medications or ther-

37 Ibid.

38 Janda, "Existenzminimum, Gleichbehandlung, Menschenwürde," 34; Kajo Kramp et al. "Wann wird das Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz erwachsen?", Völkerrechtsblog, November 30, 2023, https://voelkerrechtsblog.org/de/wann-wird-das-asylbewerberleistungsgesetz-erwachsen/; Anja Blümlein, "Die Gesundheitsversorgung älterer Geflüchteter in Deutschland – Die unterschiedliche Versorgung von Asylbewerber* Innen und geflüchteten Ukrainer* Innen," *Z'Flucht. Zeitschrift für Flucht- und Flüchtlingsforschung* 7, no. 2 (2023): 391–404, 401.

39 Janda, "Existenzminimum, Gleichbehandlung, Menschenwürde," 34.

40 Blümlein, "Die Gesundheitsversorgung älterer Geflüchteter," 394.

41 Knipper and Bilgin, *Migration und Gesundheit*, 8; 69.

42 Ibid., 69.

43 Ibid., 70.

44 Ibid.; Blümlein, "Die Gesundheitsversorgung älterer Geflüchteter," 399.

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apies without a clear diagnosis.[45] All of these barriers result in the underutilization of healthcare by migrants,[46] leading to delayed diagnoses with potentially life-threatening consequences. Nonetheless, to demand more restrictive policies for access to welfare and healthcare, politicians uphold the unfounded claim that migrants, and especially asylum seekers, are taking advantage of the social system.[47]

Since its inception, the AsylbLG has been particularly criticized because of its alleged violation of the human right to health. However, this violation is compounded by the AsylbLG's severe neglect of the social determinants to health from a medical perspective.[48] The Act creates insecurity for migrants and healthcare providers alike. The former do not know which services they are entitled to, and the latter are forced to act in an unclear legal territory. Regulating access to health and providing social determinants of health is inconsistent with the criteria for implementing the human right to health.

U.S.A.: Health Status and Borders

Restrictions on access to healthcare in the United States are rooted in a historical tradition similar to that in Germany. Similar to § 87 of the AufenthG, Proposition 187, a 1994 ballot initiative in California prohibited undocumented immigrants from accessing non-emergency healthcare, public education, and other social services. However, it was overturned by the U.S. federal court in 1999.[49] The general notion of exploitation and the need to protect welfare systems was powerfully mobilized during the Reagan administration, as is evident in the

45 There is evidence for higher prescription of sleeping pills and sedatives without medical justification for migrants. Knipper and Bilgin, "Migration und Gesundheit," 67, with reference to Anders Hjern, "High Use of Sedatives and Hypnotics in Ethnic Minorities in Sweden," *Ethnicity & Health* 6, no. 1 (February 1, 2001): 5–11.

46 The drastic effects of migrants' reluctance to use the healthcare system are well illustrated in the campaign Ärzte der Welt e.V., "GleichBehandeln," n.d., https://gleichbehandeln.de.

47 Christian Lindner and Marco Buschmann, "LINDNER/BUSCHMANN-Gastbeitrag."

48 PRO ASYL, "APPELL: Es gibt nur eine Menschenwürde – Asylbewerberleistungsgesetz abschaffen!", January 11, 2024, https://www.proasyl.de/asylbewerberleistungsgesetz/.

49 Encyclopaedia Britannica, "California Proposition 187 | Summary, Effects, 1994, & Facts," August 20, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/California-Proposition-187.

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widely used racializing term "welfare queen." The term was used to create a "public identity,"[50] to attribute "stereotypes and moral judgements,"[51] and to "justify class based sexist and racist assumptions about the presumed behavior and moral failures of welfare mothers."[52] Identifying single mothers in Black communities as 'lazy beneficiaries' of the welfare system who were having children for the sole purpose of receiving welfare benefits led to high birth rates being perceived as a group behavior that had to be controlled[53] rather than as a reproductive healthcare issue. Access to welfare was moralized and tied to prescribed behavioral changes for certain demographic groups. Following demographic changes, groups, such as regular and irregular immigrants become the targets of constructed public identities.[54]

During the campaign and administration of former President Donald J. Trump, immigration became a central political issue. The narrative promoted by the Trump administration was of immigrants being criminal and dangerous. It culminated in the demand to build a physical wall on the border with Mexico. Meanwhile, restrictions to immigration and immigrants were increased. The "public charge" policy – the obligatory test of whether an immigrant might have to rely on public services – was expanded under the Trump administration in 2018. Since then, medical conditions and use of the public health insurance program Medicaid have become reasons to deny Green Cards or visas. Although this policy was relaxed in 2022 under the Biden administration, it created a "chilling effect" that led immigrants to avoid using public programs for fear of negative consequences to their residency status, even when they were legally entitled.[55]

Additionally, the 2019 Presidential Proclamation 9945 ("Suspension of Entry of Immigrants Who Will Financially Burden the United States Healthcare

50 Anne Marie Hancock, *The Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New York: New York University Press. 2004).

51 Ibid., 15.

52 Carly Hayden Foster, "The Welfare Queen: Race, Gender, Class and Public Opinion," *Race, Gender & Class* 15, no. 3 (2008): 162–179, 164.

53 Ibid., 166.

54 Ibid.

55 Jennifer M. Haley et al. "One in Five Adults in Immigrant Families With Children Reported Chilling Effects on Public Benefit Receipt in 2019," Urban Institute, June, 2020, https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102406/one-in-five-adults-in-immigrant-families-with-children-reported-chilling-effects-on-public-benefit-receipt-in-2019_1.pdf.

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System in Order To Protect the Availability of Healthcare Benefits for Americans") required immigrants to have health insurance or to demonstrate sufficient financial resources to be able to pay for "reasonably foreseeable medical expenses."[56] The very name of the Proclamation indicates the logic of constrained resources and creates a binary between U.S. Americans and others. Individuals' financial resources to cover medical costs do not increase the capacity of healthcare or health services. Rather, these factors are instrumentalized in order to reject and exclude individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic fostered a narrative of importing diseases. Despite recommendations by the World Health Organization[57] and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the Trump administration imposed harsh restrictions on the entry of migrants regardless of their status,[58] even if they were trained healthcare workers.[59] In his Agenda47 speech, Trump directly refers to the alleged "pull effect" of the U.S. American welfare system, including "free healthcare," and contrasts the situation of so-called "illegal aliens" with veterans who do not receive any benefits.[60] The alleged burden of migration on hospitals has been further reinforced by the "Secure Borders and Reclaim

56 The original proclamation is not available anymore. I refer to the summary by the National Immigration Law Center (NILC): National Immigration Law Center, "President's Proclamation Requiring Immigrants to Have Health Insurance," October 10, 2019, https://www.nilc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/proclamation-health-insurance-2019.pdf. This Proclamation was revoked in May 2021. White House, "A Proclamation on Revoking Proclamation 9945," May 14, 2021, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/05/14/a-proclamation-on-revoking-proclamation-9945/.

57 Travel restrictions were a common global phenomenon during this period. Catherine Z. Worsnop et al. "The Unintended Consequences of Information Provision: The World Health Organization and Border Restrictions During COVID-19," *International Studies Perspectives* 24 (2023): 39–66; Anne G. Beckett et al. "Misusing Public Health as a Pretext to End Asylum – Title 42," *The New England Journal of Medicine* 386, no. 16 (April 21, 2022): e41.

58 Associated Press, "Pence Ordered Borders Closed After CDC Experts Refused – Los Angeles Times," Los Angeles Times, January 28, 2021, https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2020-10-05/mike-pence-close-borders-cdc-experts-refused.

59 Miriam Jordan and Annie Correal, "Foreign Doctors Could Help Fight Coronavirus. But U.S. Blocks Many," The New York Times, April 13, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/04/13/us/coronavirus-foreign-doctors-nurses-visas.html?searchResultPosition=5.

60 Donald Trump, "Agenda47," donaldjtrump, n.d., https://www.donaldjtrump.com/agenda47.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839474730 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

National Sovereignty"[61] policy point in Trump's 2024 political agenda, which blames immigrants for the domestic burden on hospitals.

Heide Castañeda's 2023 *Migration and Health: Critical Perspectives* is insightful and describes the problems involved in maneuvering different entitlements and restrictions on healthcare for a mixed-status family. The family's health is regulated by three healthcare policies due to its members varying residency statuses: the parents are undocumented, two children were born in Mexico, and three in the U.S. Castañeda illustrates the complexity of maneuvering different types of medical entitlements, resulting in a high investment of time and resources to organize medical treatment for everyone because they are obliged to use different facilities. Such examples show why families are hesitant to use governmental programs, because the effort to seek medical assistance is too high. Castañeda concludes that "[t]here is little doubt that the rise in anti-immigrant policymaking has fostered an unhealthy environment for immigrants and their families."[62] The unhealthy environment results from the complexity of a health system that grants or excludes access based on residency status regardless of medical necessity. The logic behind this can be found in the discourse of sovereignty and immigration.

Historical and ongoing restrictions on healthcare access for immigrants in the United States reflect a pattern of exclusion rooted in economic protectionism and racialized narratives. From Reagan-era policies to Trump administration measures, immigrants are portrayed as the exploiters of the welfare system. This portrayal is used to justify severe limitations on immigrants' access to healthcare and other social services. These policies have created significant barriers for immigrants, exacerbated health disparities, and fostered an environment of fear and avoidance of essential public health programs. The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified these issues. The cumulative impact of these policies has created a profoundly unhealthy and unjust environment for immigrant families, undermining their well-being and integration into society.

61 Donald Trump, "Secure Borders and Reclaim National Sovereignty," donaldjtrump, n.d., https://www.donaldjtrump.com/issues.

62 Castañeda, "Migration and Health: Critical Perspectives," 47.

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Policy Effects: (Un)intended Health Threats

In both Germany and the U.S., immigration policies increasingly reflect a security-centric approach that focuses on restrictive measures meant to protect citizens against the abstract threat of immigrants. This approach aims to curtail immigration, particularly through irregular channels. In Germany, paradoxical policy trends are in place. On the one hand, the government is tightening general immigration controls. On the other hand, it is simultaneously seeking to attract skilled migrants to alleviate local workforce shortages. Conversely, in the U.S., stringent requirements, such as proving financial means for healthcare, inadvertently lead to an increase in people with irregular residency status. This occurs because individuals become "illegalized" by the system. This policy approach in the U.S. demonstrates that people are not inherently "illegal" but are made so by state practices and regulations.[63]

In Germany, the focus is shifting towards delegitimizing migrants who seek social benefits by narrowly interpreting and enforcing immigration laws that exclude individuals from essential services. Contradicting the universal human right to health, these restrictive policies have profound implications not only for the health of migrants but also for public health systems. The health consequences of such policies necessitate a reevaluation of immigration laws, first, to ensure that they align more closely with public health priorities and human rights commitments, and, second, to foster an environment that supports the well-being of migrants as well as the health of the broader community.

Under the Trump Administration, individual health conditions and coverage were made subject to scrutiny by immigration authorities. Even though this is not the case in Germany, both countries locate the relationship between the state and migrants in the domestic territory without acknowledging the extraterritorial effects of policies. Germany is surrounded by so-called safe third countries that belong to the Schengen Border Codex. Therefore, there is little opportunity for asylum seekers to enter the country officially, forcing them to take irregular and unsafe routes. Additionally, the German government supports further EU restrictions on immigration, such as the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) reform, which is expected to result in prison-like border camps with limited infrastructure and questionable health conditions. The standard of accommodations, especially in emergency shelters, is inconsistent

63 Ibid., 15.

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and difficult especially for people with mental health issues. Sharing rooms with strangers, often with less than three-square meters of private space, can exacerbate conditions for traumatized individuals.[64]

During the COVID-19 pandemic, such shelters failed to apply adequate quarantine facilities or infection prevention measures. After the pandemic, conditions in these shelters led to several outbreaks of scabies among the residents, resulting in further quarantines.[65] Strict European border regimes, which often result in illegal returns, and the lack of regular passageways force migrants to take dangerous routes, sometimes traveling for months without access to food or health services. A similar situation can be observed in the U.S., where the border regulations adopted by the Biden administration in 2024 allow for only a limited quota of 2,500 people per day to cross the border. This could lead to a bottleneck in which those who want to cross the border will have to wait in degrading circumstances.

Another striking contrast is the perception of whether someone deserves the same health treatments as regular migrants or citizens. According to the individualistic view, ill health is a personal failure due to behaviors or actions brought against better knowledge. Such a view sees ill health as divorced from national structural problems that make people ill. Death, trauma, or injury are often blamed on migrants themselves, because they decided to risk taking dangerous and illegalized routes of migration against better knowledge. The structure of conditions leading to immigration that render it necessary to accept the sometimes fatal consequences of flight, are rarely addressed by the state.

Economic arguments in favor of restrictive migration policies that promise to reduce the burden on healthcare systems and create vast savings in public spending cannot be substantiated. In the case of asylum seekers, living under stressful conditions in sometimes overcrowded emergency accommodations

64 The initiative "9m² Hamburg" demands higher standards for such accommodations, directly referring to the health infringements produced through the current situations. Kathrin Ganz, "9qm Initiative," 9qm, https://9qm.hamburg/. The situation leads to consequences for asylum seekers' duty to cooperate. The general conditions of constant artificial and bright illumination, noise, and confinement can lead to deterioration of mental health issues and trauma. Tobias Bachmann, "Traumatherapie für Geflüchtete: Alleingelassen in der Wartehalle," TAZ, March 8, 2024, https://taz.de/Traumatherapie-fuer-Gefluechtete/!5993666/.

65 MDR Thüringen, "Lage bleibt angespannt: Thüringer Flüchtlingsunterkünfte wieder überbelegt," MDR, November 16, 2023, https://www.mdr.de/nachrichten/thueringen/fluechtlinge-unterkunft-innenministerium-100.html.

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has an adverse impact on health and may lead to the spread of communicable diseases. The AsylbLG insistence on maintaining inferior care, leads to further disadvantages and delays in preventive and early treatment. Emergency treatment is often more expensive and can have lasting effects on health.[66] Cuts in budgets and services for asylum seekers and refugees have an inverted impact, leading to higher costs.[67] Instead, improving the social determinants of health such as education, basic income, and housing conditions would positively affect migrants' ability to become self-sufficient. Protecting taxpayers and the health system requires the very opposite of what current political discourse demands. What is needed is more inclusive care without discrimination.[68]

Conclusion

Restrictive healthcare policies targeting immigrants in both the United States and Germany serve as tools of governance that reinforce national identity and control immigration flows under the guise of economic and social protection. While these policies claim to alleviate financial burdens and prevent the exploitation of public services, they actually marginalize immigrant populations and mask systemic healthcare issues. The rhetoric of healthcare exploitation is deeply rooted in historical, racialized narratives that perpetuate a misleading image of immigrants as burdens on the system. Empirical evidence contradicts these tropes, showing that immigrants are less likely to use healthcare systems and more likely to suffer from inadequate access to medical services.

The AsylbLG and the Trump administration's healthcare restrictions reveal a pattern of using healthcare as a gatekeeping mechanism to deter immigration. Attendant narratives, patterns, and policies not only undermine the human right to health, but also exacerbate health inequalities and public health

66 Aldo Rosano et al. "The Relationship Between Avoidable Hospitalization and Accessibility to Primary Care: A Systematic Review," *European Journal of Public Health* 23, no. 3 (2012): 356–60.

67 Kayvan Bozorgmehr and Oliver Razum, "Effect of Restricting Access to Health Care on Health Expenditures Among Asylum-Seekers and Refugees: A Quasi-Experimental Study in Germany, 1994–2013," *PloS ONE* 10, no. 7 (2015): e0131483.

68 Louise Biddle, "Extended Restrictions to Health Care Entitlements for Refugees: Negative Health Consequences without the Anticipated Savings," DIW Weekly Report, December 2024, https://www.diw.de/documents/publikationen/73/diw_01.c.897801.de/dwr-24-12-1.pdf.

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risks. By framing health as a privilege rather than a universal human right, these policies contribute to immigrants' precarious existence, forcing many to avoid seeking necessary medical care for fear of deportation or legal consequences.

Ultimately, the politicization of healthcare in the context of immigration reveals deeper issues within Germany and the U.S.A.'s healthcare systems and governance structures. Instead of addressing the root causes of healthcare system overload and financial strain, these countries' policies divert attention to a vulnerable population and foster xenophobia and social division. A shift towards more inclusive and equity-based healthcare policies, which would acknowledge the social determinants of health and uphold health as a human right, is essential for creating a fair and just society that does not marginalize individuals based on their immigration status. While current restrictive healthcare policies toward immigrants in Germany and the U.S. intend to protect national resources, they ultimately harm immigrants and society as a whole.

Looking towards the future, there is an urgent need to reframe discourse on immigration and healthcare in society and politics. Policymakers must recognize that immigrants' health is inextricably linked to the population's health overall. Inclusive health policies that provide equitable access to medical care, regardless of immigration status, are central parts of just and effective healthcare systems. Such policies need to emphasize the social determinants of health and address factors like living conditions, employment, education, and access to nutritious food that significantly influence health outcomes.

Finally, international cooperation and an adherence to human rights frameworks are vital to ensuring that the needs of migrants are met. Countries must uphold their obligations and commitments under international agreements such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), which mandates the right to the highest attainable standard of health for all individuals. Investing in public health infrastructure and services can alleviate many of the pressures on the healthcare systems regularly attributed to immigration. By improving the capacity and resilience of healthcare systems, governments can better respond to the needs of all residents, including migrants. This includes training healthcare providers in intercultural competence, improving language services, and ensuring non-discriminatory practices of healthcare delivery. Employing a human rights framework provides the foundation for a necessary paradigm shift. This shift

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will provide an exit from a zero-sum logic about healthcare and create the basis for policies that target everyone's health.

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Part III: Structural and Ideological Barries to Achieving Diversity

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All About Electability: Women, Power, and the Presidential Elections

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In this essay, I ask the perhaps oldest question regarding diversity and the U.S. American Presidency: Why has the United States not managed to elect a woman President? What are the barriers that have kept and still keep women out of the White House? It is the oldest question because the first candidate who ran for the Presidency and who was not a white male-identified person was Victoria Woodhull in 1872.[1] Since then, women have tirelessly challenged the Presidency as a male institution, but none has succeeded in winning the highest office.[2] The persistence of the U.S. Presidency as an exclusive "boy's club" is particularly striking, because, from its very inception, the U.S. has been a nation in which women have fought actively for political equality on every level. Further, much of the activism and thought of the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 70s emerged in the U.S.[3] Most other Western Democratic nations and over a third of nations world-wide have had or have female heads

1 For an account of Woodhull's life and achievements, see Antje Schrupp, *Vote for Victoria* (Sulzbach: Ulrike Helmer Verlag, 2016). It should be noted that women's attempts to run for the Presidency and the barriers they faced has become a vast field of research, which I can only partly do justice to here.

2 For accounts of women's candidacies, see, for instance, Theodore F. Sheckels et al. *Gender and the American Presidency: Nine Presidential Women and the Barriers They Faced* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2012); Ellen Fitzpatrick, *The Highest Glass Ceiling: Women's Quest for the American Presidency* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press, 2016); Nichola D. Gutgold, *Still Paving the Way for Madam President* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 2022).

3 For a similar account, see Sabine Sielke, "'Stronger Together?' The Seriality of Feminism, the Gender of Misogyny, and the Case of Hillary Clinton," in *Women and US Politics: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*, eds. Julia Nitz and Axel R. Schäfer (Heidelberg: Winter, 2020), 47–68, 47.

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of state,[4] and the U.S.'s neighbor, Mexico, has just elected Claudia Sheinbaum as its first female President. Women in so many other countries have shattered what Hillary Clinton called "the highest and hardest glass ceiling."[5] They have settled the question, once and for all, of whether women are fit for the highest political office. Why not in the United States?

Historically, there are manifold, complex, and interrelated factors that explain women's lack of access to political power. And many of these factors still prevent women from being elected to political office in equal numbers to men at both the state and federal levels. At the time of this writing, only twenty-five of the one hundred seats of the U.S. Senate, for instance, are held by women, and only twenty-nine percent of the seats in the House.[6] Barriers for women to enter politics persist. Yet I argue that since Hillary Clinton's historical candidacy in 2016, all barriers for a woman to be elected President of the United States have fallen – except one: electability bias.

Electability bias, also called pragmatic bias, refers to a particular voting behavior that has been shown to impede women candidates. It refers to voters who would cast their votes in favor of a woman President, and would often prefer women candidates, but do not vote for her in primaries or general elections because they believe other voters do not have confidence in female candidates and will not vote for them. Electability biased or pragmatic voters hence support male candidates instead, because they do not want their vote to be lost on a female candidate who they believe has no chance of winning. This perception of women's candidacies has been central to the primary elections in 2020 and is central to this year's election. In other words, electability bias has in 2020 prevented, and in 2024 most likely will prevent, a woman President.

By why is the electability bias against women so strong? Why has it become the major factor that has prevented women from even being able to run for President in both the 2020 and 2024 elections? I connect the argument about electability bias with an argument that has been made about Trump's gender politics more widely. I suggest that Trump's biggest triumph and damage to

4 Bastian Herre, "Women have made major advances in politics — but the world is still far from equal," Our World in Data, March 8, 2024, https://ourworldindata.org/women-political-advances.

5 CNN Politics, "Hillary Clinton Concession Speech," CNN, November 9, 2016, https://edition.cnn.com/2016/11/09/politics/hillary-clinton-concession-speech/index.html.

6 Center for American Women and Politics, "Women in the U.S. Congress 2024," n.d., https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/levels-office/congress/women-us-congress-2024.

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democracy may be that he has succeeded in re-masculinizing the political field to the point where voters view it as a fight among men and that a woman cannot beat him. At the very moment that women were poised for success – specifically in the 2020 elections – the political field was reconfigured in such a way that suddenly, women seemed unelectable. If Trump's 2016 win can be seen as a backlash against the election of a "post-racial" President of color, it should equally be seen as a backlash against the possibility of a "post-sexist" woman President. And it is not only Republicans who must be faulted for this backlash. Biden's candidacy must be seen in exactly this light. The retake of the Biden-Trump race this year attests to the fact that the Democrats have fully bought into the re-masculinization of the political landscape as reconfigured by Trump.

One may question whether it is really that essential that a woman be elected U.S. President, especially at a moment in U.S. politics when democratic foundations as such are at stake. However, one may argue that it is precisely at these moments that we need to focus on exclusions that political systems create and how they contribute to democracy becoming more exclusive, if not dismantled entirely. Democracy is only legitimate, I would suggest with Sue Thomas, "when all of its citizens are provided with equal opportunities for full participation."[7] Underneath the idea that a democratic politics needs gender diversity lingers the notion of women's difference and that women would do politics differently. As Sabine Sielke has noted, "the assumption that female leaders lead differently cuts two ways: While underscoring the significance of women's political participation, it keeps othering women and reinforces gender stereotypes."[8] Moreover, electing a member of a disadvantaged group into office does not mean that that individual will work towards greater social equality.

Nevertheless, I believe that as long as life in the U.S. – and, truly, anywhere else – is so vastly different for men and women and is structured as such by the political and economic systems, women office holders are more likely to address these differences in rights and advantages. What I also hope to demonstrate is that, since the 1916 elections, gendered performances of candidates have been so closely tied to the politics they stand for that the gendered embodiment of the candidate is relevant, on many levels, to the concrete politics

7 Sue Thomas, "Introduction," in *Women and Elective Office: Past, Present, and Future*, eds. Sue Thomas and Clyde Wilcox (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6–25, 2; see also Sielke, "Stronger Together," 55.

8 Sielke, "Stronger Together," 56.

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they can and will enact. In other words, whether a man or a woman heads the country is not just a symbolic matter. If women consistently do not win that office, this can be read as a symptom of a polity in which inequalities in men's and women's real lives become cemented.

In the following, I first discuss the structural barriers that women have faced and continue to face in running for political office in general and for the Presidency in particular. Data and polls show that almost all structural barriers to women being elected President have been removed. Despite these developments, American politics has arrived at the dynamics of the 2020 and 2024 elections, in which two white men competed and again will compete for the Presidency. To understand how we arrived at these moments, I look at two moments in recent history when a woman almost ran, and then indeed did run, for President for the Democratic Party: Hillary Clinton's campaigns in 2008 and 2016. Clinton ultimately overcame all of the obstacles specific to women candidates and proved that the U.S. is able to elect a woman President, even though she did not win enough votes in the Electoral College.

The Invisible Glass Ceiling and What Is Left of It

The proverbial "glass ceiling" that women run up against is a term that was coined in 1978 by human resources professional Marilyn Rosen during a panel discussion on women's aspirations and their role in big corporations. [9] It is often invoked in the context of women striving for high political office. Hillary Clinton used it in her concession speech in 2016 to describe what her defeat meant for women. In her stump speeches during the 2024 primaries, Nikki Haley claimed that her candidacy was "not about identity politics, I don't believe in that" and that she did not "believe in glass ceilings, either."[10] The "glass ceiling" stands for barriers to career success that women face the higher they climb the ladder of corporate or political power. These are invisible barriers that are structural, not personal – in other words, barriers that are rooted in and

9 Marilyn Loden, "100 Women: 'Why I invented the glass ceiling phrase,'" BBC, December 13, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-42026266

10 Dylan Wells, "Nikki Haley walks fine line on race, gender in appeal to GOP base," The Washington Post, March 21, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/2023/03/20/nikki-haley-race-gender-2024-presidential-gop/.

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upheld by sexism. I want to focus here on barriers in four areas, which are of course interrelated.

When Marilyn Rosen spoke about the glass ceiling in 1978, there was reason to speak about women's disadvantages to enter political office in terms of actual competency. Evidence for entry-level competency for political office is often seen in education and respective degrees. While this was a factor during the 1970s, the educational gap between men and women has since closed, with more women than men now getting college degrees, for instance.[11] The key competency one needs to run for President is experience in political office. Political representation in U.S. federal and state parliaments is by no means near to even. As mentioned above, only roughly a quarter of representatives in Congress identify as women. On the other hand, these numbers have never been higher than today, and a record number of women – twelve, or about a quarter of the total – serve as Governors of their states,[12] which is another key position from which to enter the national political arena. Though they are not represented equally, women have never been more competent to govern than now.

This is also reflected in public opinion on women candidates. In fact, if anything, there is evidence for positive stereotyping of women candidates' competencies. As a recent Pew poll shows, more than fifty percent of voters see women as equally qualified in leadership skills as men, and over thirty percent even tend to see women as more qualified.[13] Leadership skills that the poll asked about included working well under stress and working out political compromises. Competency bias, in short, is a thing of the past.[14]

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11 Statista, "Number of bachelor's degrees earned in the United States from 1949/50 to 2031/32, by gender," Statista, n.d., https://www.statista.com/statistics/185157/number-of-bachelor-degrees-by-gender-since-1950/.

12 Center for American Women and Politics, "History of Women Governors," n.d., https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/levels-office/statewide-elective-executive/history-women-governors.

13 Juliana Menasce Horowitz and Isabel Goddard, "Women and Political Leadership Ahead of the 2024 Election," Pew Research Center, September 27, 2023, https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2023/09/27/women-and-political-leadership-ahead-of-the-2024-election/; specifically, the poll "Majorities say a woman President would be no different."

14 Sabine Sielke has argued that since Trump became President, competency has lost its relevance as a precondition for political office and was replaced by celebrity. While I completely agree with that assessment, women candidates may nevertheless face the criticism that they are not competent enough, and for standard political careers,

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However, women face a number of material and access disadvantages. First, women candidates have historically been disadvantaged when it comes to fundraising. The ability to fundraise and campaign is quite clearly connected to personal wealth and the connections that come with it. Over half of the 535 members of the sitting Congress in 2018 were millionaires, and members' average net worth was roughly a million.[15] In terms of personal finances, Congress clearly does not represent the American people. More importantly for my argument, there is not only a gender pay gap in the U.S. but also a significant gender wealth gap: women own less and have fewer connections to people who are wealthy and own businesses.[16] Women have also traditionally had a much harder time attracting large individual donors and political action committees (PACs). This, too, has changed: In 2018, women candidates for Congress outraised male candidates for the first time. The fundraising gap, at least at the level of Congress is closing.[17] During the current primary race, Nikki Haley outraised Donald Trump in the early months of 2024 and attracted a larger number of new donors in late 2023. [18]

Another disadvantage that women face within the party structure is that men enjoy more party support. Studies have shown that men are two-thirds more likely to be asked by an elected official or party leader to run and to be then backed by the party; they are forty percent more likely to have been en-

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which do not bypass competency via celebrity, qualifications for office are still important, both for male and female candidates.

15 Karl Evers-Hillstrom, "Majority of lawmakers in 116th Congress are millionaires," Open Secrets, April 23, 2020, https://www.opensecrets.org/news/2020/04/majority-of-lawmakers-millionaires/.

16 Ana Hernández Kent, "Gender Wealth Gaps in the U.S. and Benefits of Closing Them," Open Vault Blog, September 29, 2021, https://www.stlouisfed.org/open-vault/2021/september/gender-wealth-gaps-us-benefits-of-closing-them.

17 Sarah Bryner, "Race, Gender, and Money in Politics: Campaign Finance and Federal Candidates in the 2018 Midterms," Peter G. Peterson Foundation, n.d., https://www.pgpf.org/sites/default/files/US-2050-Race-Gender-and-Money-in-Politics-Campaign-Finance-and-Federal-Candidates-in-the-2018-Midterms.pdf.

18 Rebecca Davis O'Brien and Jonathan Swan, "Haley Super PAC Says It Raised $50.1 Million, Eclipsing Trump," The New York Times, January 25, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/01/25/us/politics/haley-fundraising-trump.html; Jessica Piper, Lisa Kashinsky and Meridith McGraw, "Haley's money surges after debates. Trump's spikes when he's indicted," Politico, February 2, 2024, https://www.politico.com/news/2024/02/02/trump-haley-donors-00139243.

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couraged by a spouse, relative, friend, or colleague.[19] The "encouragement gap" between men and women feeds directly into what has been described as the ambition gap. Over the past two decades, women have consistently been sixteen percent less likely to consider running for office, with the numbers for 2021 being even slightly higher.[20] Support for women to run for any office, in other words, has not increased over the past twenty years. Another major issue is incumbency and retention rates in higher office. This mainly concerns women's access to seats in the Senate and the House of Representatives, as well as to such seats at the state level. Women have a much harder time winning such seats and hence occupying positions that are prerequisite offices to campaign for the Presidency.[21]

More fundamentally, the question of why fewer women than men hold political office is not only about who has the money, party, or familial support, but also about who has the time to enter politics in the first place. This aspect is understudied in research on women and political office, but I want to stress it here because it is so fundamental. As of 2020, women in the U.S. spend thirty-seven percent more time on care work than men.[22] In practical terms, this means that most women who are mothers and who are professionally qualified to run for office statistically work two jobs at the same time, care work and paid work, while, on average, men who are fathers do not invest as much time in care work. This imbalance puts women at a disadvantage in terms of their resources for public service, especially during a period in their lives – their twenties to forties – when they would need to invest the most time in politics if they wish to build a career.

19 Carah Ong Whaley and Kylie Holzman, "Why Haven't We Had a Woman President," The Center for Politics, September 27, 2023, https://centerforpolitics.org/crystalball/why-havent-we-had-a-woman-president/; Jennifer L. Lawless and Richard L. Fox, "Running for office is still for men—some data on the 'Ambition Gap,'" Brookings, February 8, 2022, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/running-for-office-is-still-for-men-some-data-on-the-ambition-gap/.

20 Ibid.

21 Whaley and Holzman, "Why Haven't We Had a Woman President."

22 Cynthia Hess, Tanima Ahmed, and Jeff Hayes, "Providing Unpaid Household and Care Work in the United States: Uncovering Inequality," Institute for Women's Policy Research, January 2020, https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/IWPR-Providing-Unpaid-Household-and-Care-Work-in-the-United-States-Uncovering-Inequality.pdf.

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There is also a point to be made that the idea of who can best represent the nation to make it to the White House hinges on the heteronormative family. Every President of the twentieth century has fathered one or more children. Throughout the late eighteenth and the nineteenth century, James Polk remains the only President who did not father, adopt, or assume guardianship over children.[23] A single man moving into the White House is almost inconceivable, and the pressure to conform to the standard of the heteronormative family presumably increases for women candidates. There is evidence of this pressure, for instance, in the fact that in Hillary Clinton's first quasi-campaign autobiography *It Takes a Village* (1996), she made it clear that she would have liked to have had more than one child, but encountered fertility problems.[24] Similarly, Kamala Harris, who does not have biological children, is careful to pose with her husband's children and to stress her caring relationship with them.[25]

I would hazard to say that the pressure for candidates to present a traditional family alongside other credentials when running for the Presidency has even increased since World War II. On the one hand, I see this as related to the dynamics that have been described as the decreasing separation of church and state that began during the Eisenhower era,[26] and, on the other, to the increasing importance of visual media and journalistic coverage of politicians' private lives. In light of the gender care gap, this demand to present a child or children to the American public disadvantages women once again.

The notion that candidates running for political office need to project a certain image of themselves that makes them likeable to voters is directly related

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23 Wikipedia, "List of children of presidents of the United States," Wikipedia, n.d., https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_children_of_presidents_of_the_United_States.

24 Hillary Clinton, *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 2.

25 Her official White House portrait suggests that Harris and her husband Emhoff "have a large blended family that includes their children, Ella and Cole," which may be read as masking the fact that they are not Harris' biological children. The White House, "Kamala Harris," n.d., https://www.whitehouse.gov/administration/vice-president-harris/. However, her projection of a 'blended' family can also be read more progressively. Jessica Bennet, "Kamala Harris Will Make History. So Will Her 'Big, Blended' Family," The New York Times, January 17, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/17/us/kamala-harris-doug-emhoff-family-inauguration.html.

26 Annika Brockschmidt, *Amerikas Gotteskrieger* (Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2021), 42–44.

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to the third major area in which women candidates face particular structural barriers: media and the framing of their personalities and appearance. Personality and appearance are often measured in terms of the degree to which they cohere with traditional ideas of femininity and are seen in relation to candidates' competence to fill a position of power. Statistical data shows that gender, appearance, and personality traits are mentioned in news coverage of female candidates at a much higher rate than male candidates.[27]

When commenting on women's personalities, it is important to note that women are subject to the so-called likeability bias. Not only do they need to seem competent and presidential in the eyes of voters, but also likeable as people. This bias does not apply to male candidates, or does so to a far lesser extent.[28] Stereotypically, women should be likeable and pleasing, even when they lead. Recent studies show that women candidates are often characterized as un-likeable, as "nasty," "angry," or "strident,"[29] and as lacking warmth.[30] As the Center for American Women an Politics notes, in 2020, "women candidates and commentators alike pushed back against these characterizations more overtly than in past presidential contexts, both justifying their passion … and pointing out the gendered roots of these attacks."[31] Thus, while women still have to work harder on their images than male candidates do and are more likely to face attacks on their characters, their ability to counter these attacks has also increased as public awareness and rejection of sexism has increased.

Next to personality, physical appearance is central to a candidates' public image. Despite the data that shows that women candidate's physical appearance is commented on much more frequently than men's,[32] some recent studies and articles have claimed that men face very similar criticism. Such studies suggest that men and women candidates are currently evenly matched

27 Erin Cassese et al. "Media Coverage of Female Candidates' Traits in the 2020 Democratic Presidential Primary," *Journal of Women, Politics & Policy* 43, no. 1 (2021): 42–63; John Kohn Bowden, "Female 2020 candidates attacked online more than men: analysis," The Hill, November 5, 2019, https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/468991-female-2020-candidates-attacked-online-more-than-men-analysis/.

28 Center for American Women and Politics, "Tracking Gender in the 2020 Presidential Election," n.d., https://womenrun.rutgers.edu/2020-presidential/.

29 Ibid.

30 Cassese et al. "Media Coverage of Female Candidates' Traits."

31 Center for American Women and Politics, "Tracking Gender in the 2020 Presidential Election."

32 Cassese et al. "Media Coverage of Female Candidates' Traits."

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in the kinds of humiliating comments and gender stereotyping they have to bear, overlook, or actively confront and ideally dispel.[33] Remarks about Chris Christie's weight, Ron DeSantis' choice of boots, and Pete Buttigieg's youthfulness are cited as cases in point.[34] Candidates who were elected President had to bear demeaning treatments of their bodies, too. Obama was seen as having too skinny legs to govern. [35] Trump's hands were repeatedly commented on as too small, an insult directly related to Stormy Daniels' description of his penis as "mushroom shaped" on Jimmy Kimmel.[36]

Men's appearances, their bodies and sartorial choices, may matter more today than some decades ago. But I want to stress that when "bodies are interpreted as sites of leadership,"[37] men's bodies are clearly measured against an ideal of the broad-shouldered ruler and statesman, and sexual prowess is connected to political power. Women's appearances, by contrast, are measured up against their sexual desirability as seen by men. Sexual desirability is connected not to their potential political power but to their sexual submission and availability to men. In other words, commentary on a male candidate's appearance may be negative and thereby make the candidate look less able to govern, but commentary on a female candidate's appearance, whether positive or negative, almost always makes her look less able to govern, as it reduces her to the question of desirability.

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33 Diane Bystrom et al. *Gender and Candidate Communication* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Danny Hayes and Jennifer L. Lawless, *Women on the Run: Gender, Media, and Political Campaigns in a Polarized Era* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

34 Kathleen Dolan and Jennifer Lawless, "Gender Bias in Primary Elections? Survey Says No," National Capital Area Political Science Association's American Politics Workshop, June 6, 2023, https://www.dannyhayes.org/uploads/6/9/8/5/69858539/dolan_and_lawless_ncapsa_paper.pdf, 2.

35 Greta Olson, "Weighing in on Obama: Connections between Embodiment, Class, and Masculinity in the United States and Germany," in *Obama and the Paradigm Shift: Measuring Change*, eds. Birte Christ and Greta Olson (Heidelberg: Winter, 2012), 105–39, 106–109.

36 Nate Hopper, "Why You Shouldn't Laugh at Donald Trump's Hands," Time, October 20, 2016, https://time.com/4539487/donald-trump-small-hands/; Matt Wilstein, "Stormy Daniels Picks Trump's Tiny 'Mushroom' Penis From a Lineup on Kimmel," Daily Beast, October 3, 2018, https://www.thedailybeast.com/stormy-daniels-picks-trumps-tiny-mushroom-penis-from-a-lineup-on-kimmel.

37 Ryan Neville-Shepard and Meredith Neville-Shepard, "The Pornified Presidency: Hyper-Masculinity and the Pornographic Style in U.S. Political Rhetoric," *Feminist Media Studies* 21, no. 7 (2021): 1193–1208, 1198.

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Examples of objectifying commentaries on women candidates abound. I will take up some that were made about Hillary Clinton, Nikki Haley, and Kamala Harris later to show that women candidates are increasingly and successfully pushing back against such objectification. Polls shows that such pushback resonates with voters because they are increasingly aware of and opposed to sexist reporting. A Pew research poll found that American voters are highly aware of the difference in coverage of male and female candidates. Sixty-two percent of those polled said that there was too much focus on women's appearance, while only thirty-five percent saw reporting on men to focus too much on their appearance; forty-seven percent said there is too much focus on women's personality, while thirty-nine percent said so for men. It is not clear how much sexist media framings actually hurt candidates once they run because a large percentage of voters consciously rejects a focus on personality and appearance and is aware of the gender differences in reporting. This is corroborated by the instances in which Clinton, Haley, and Harris were subjected to sexist commentary, pushed back against that commentary, and received public praise for pushing back.

In summary, first, actual competency and funding disadvantages for women candidates have largely disappeared. Second, other structural problems persist, like party support, incumbency rates, and resources such as time. Third, sexist media framings may increasingly cut two ways in the sense that a part of the electorate may see through them and support a female candidate even more strongly when they become the victim of such attacks. What this means is that the barriers for a woman to become President of the United States are largely entry-level barriers. At lower levels of the federal and state governments, fewer women run and gain access to politics. Women are thus less well represented in Congress, and fewer are able to take the prerequisite career steps for a candidacy. Yet, what is important to note is that, at state and Congress level, "*If* women run, they win."[38] When women have surmounted the entrance level obstacles, neither fundraising challenges nor sexist attitudes and media reporting make them less successful in winning seats in state governments or Congress than their male counterparts. The vexing issue is that in presidential primaries and races over the past two decades, women have run, but have *not* won.

This relates to the fourth area in which women candidate are subject to disadvantages, which is, as I have suggested above, the publics' views on their

38 Thomas, "Introduction," 6.

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electability. At the level of presidential primaries and races, it is electability bias that has prevented women candidates from succeeding. Electability bias is tied to concerns about competency, and there are two points worth mentioning. First, as long as there are no role models for women's presidential success, women who run have to wage two campaigns at once, one for their specific platform and one to make the case that they can be President as a woman.[39] Second, electability bias is tricky because it is not about whether voters actually believe a woman candidate is fit for office and should be President, but about what voters believe other voters believe. Even when voters personally support a woman candidate, if they doubt that others will support her and that she cannot win, they tend not to vote for that candidate for fear that their vote will be lost.

Recent studies show that electability bias is very much present among current voters. Women and candidates from minorities are perceived as less electable and thus less likely to win; ideologically extreme candidates are, similarly problematically, perceived as more electable.[40] So-called 'magic wand' surveys in the 2020 primaries showed that if voters could magically pick a President, more voters would have chosen Elizabeth Warren and Amy Klobuchar than would have voted for them in the actual elections. The 'magic-wand gap' between the desired candidate and the candidate voters would actually vote for widened between the polls conducted in January 2020 and those conducted towards the end of the primary races in July 2020. This signals that electability bias becomes more influential as the general election gets closer, and the question of victory or defeat for one's party's candidate, becomes more prominent.

At the same time, Joe Biden benefitted immensely from electability bias in 2020. Many more voters said they would vote for him than wished for him to magically become President, and that gap, too, increased in his favor between January and June of that year.[41] Other studies were similarly able to link

39 Center for American Women and Politics, "Tracking Gender in the 2020 Presidential Election."

40 Hans J.G. Hassel and Neil Visalvanich, "Perceptions of Electability: Candidate (and Voter) Ideology, Race, and Gender," *Political Behavior* (Berlin: Springer Link, 2024), https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11109-023-09909-3; Center for American Women and Politics, "Tracking Gender in the 2020 Presidential Election."

41 Mark White, "Ambivalent Support, Part 2: Supporting A Non-Preferred Candidate," Data for Progress, February 3, 2020, https://www.dataforprogress.org/blog/2020/2/3/ambivalent-support-part-2-supporting-a-non-preferred-candidate.

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electability bias to voting behavior in the 2020 presidential primaries.[42] Robb Willer and his team were able to show that electability bias is not reduced when voters are presented with evidence that a woman is ready to serve as President, but only when they are presented with evidence that she would receive as much support from voters as male candidates. Electability bias or, as one commentary has it, "groupthink" appears to be the key factor that prevents women candidates from becoming their party's nominee and running for the Presidency.[43]

Hillary Clinton's Candidacies in 2008 and 2016

In order to understand how American politics arrived at a political climate in 2020 in which, in theory, things never looked more promising for electing a woman President, it is important to go back to Clinton's trailblazing campaigns and understand how the typical barriers to women's success played out in her case. When Hillary Clinton campaigned in the Democratic primaries in 2008, it was perhaps the first moment in American politics in which a female candidate stood a chance to win the primaries and rise to the Presidency. She had been First Lady of the United States from 1992 to 2000, and United States Senator of New York since 2001. She combined the highest possible level of name recognition on the federal level from her husband's presidency with all the baggage that came with that not-so-unproblematic legacy. It is no coincidence that the first woman who stood a chance could not truly do this in her own right, but relied on or was inadvertently connected to her husband's achievements. Historically, it is not uncommon that access to political office for women comes via their husbands, as women have often gained seats in Congress that were previously held by their husbands. As late as 1978, Nancy Landon Kassebaum became the first woman who was elected to the Senate without her husband having preceded her.[44]

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42 Christianne Corbett et al. "Pragmatic bias impedes women's access to political leadership," *PNAS* 119, no.6 (2022); Melissa De Witte, "Groupthink gone wrong: Stanford scholars show how assumptions about electability undermine women political candidates," Stanford Report, February 2, 2022, https://news.stanford.edu/stories/2022/02/groupthink-gone-wrong-assumptions-electability-undermine-women-political-candidates.

43 Melissa De Witte, "Groupthink gone wrong."

44 Sielke, "Stronger Together," 10.

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During her campaign, Clinton had to face issues of likeability and sexist attacks on both her competency and appearance. One of the key moments in her campaign was a New Hampshire rally in January 2008, when two rally participants held up a huge sign that said "Iron My Shirt." Clinton took on this interruption directly by saying, "Ah, the remnants of sexism – alive and well." She continued, "As I think has been abundantly demonstrated, I am also running to break through the highest and hardest glass ceiling," and joked later that, "If there's anyone left in the auditorium who wants to learn how to iron a shirt, I'll talk about that."[45]

This incident is evidence of how sexist attacks on women candidates cut two ways and do not necessarily work towards the candidate's disadvantage any longer. The rally participants who display sexism openly and demand that Clinton stay in what they consider a woman's proper place, such as behind an ironing board in the service of men, are a reality and may find sympathizers among the other participants and across the political spectrum. However, by 2008, Clinton was able to call out the protesters as sexist and deflate their ideas as backwards and absurd. The applause that followed Clinton's rebuttal to the rally participants and the later public debate about the incident confirms the idea that a majority of voters are aware and critical of sexism in politics. Paradoxically, such incidents may boost women's candidacies at least as much as they hurt them because they work to rally supporters closer around their cause.

In 2008, Senator Barack Obama ultimately won the Democratic nomination. The reasons for his win are multiple and have to do with the individuals competing in the race and not just structural issues of gender. Clinton went on to become Obama's Secretary of State and, in 2016, to win the Democratic primaries against five other candidates, including Bernie Sanders, who scored particularly well with younger Democrats. She thus overcame the biggest obstacle for women running for the nomination of their party: electability bias. Despite eight years of a Democratic White House, economic and political factors made it look like the U.S. would elect another Democratic President, which

45 Sarah Wheaton, "'Iron My Shirt,'" The New York Times, January 7, 2008, https://archive.nytimes.com/thecaucus.blogs.nytimes.com/2008/01/07/iron-my-shirt/; bellantoniwashtimes, "Clinton to 'Iron my shirt' protester: Sexism rampant," YouTube, January 7, 2008, https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=df7DEw13VqM&eurl=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nieuwnieuws.nl%2Farchives%2Fvideo%2F2008%2F01%2Fman_tegen_clinton_strijk_mijn.html, 2:10; For an account of that incidence, see also Fitzpatrick, *The Highest Glass Ceiling*, 1–3.

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would have been an unusual feat in itself. Over the past 150 years, no Democratic President has succeeded another Democratic President except after the deaths in office of Franklin D. Roosevelt and John F. Kennedy. Given this pattern, it was particularly noteworthy that Americans voted, by a majority of almost three million votes, for Hillary Clinton.

It is true that she did not become President, and her defeat in the Electoral College lingers on problematically in the minds of voters and continues to shape electability bias. But her winning is important to my argument, because it demonstrates that all barriers to a woman becoming President had been done away with by 2016, including the electability bias. Americans were convinced a woman could do the job and also believed that their fellow voters shared that conviction. As breakdowns of 2016 voting behavior according to gender, race, age, and class show, the Americans who made Clinton's success possible were overwhelmingly women of color.[46] Generally, women decide elections because their turnout is consistently higher than men's by about three percentage points.[47]

Clinton carried states like California and New York, where the individual vote counts less towards the Electoral College, and Trump won almost all smaller swing states, like Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania.[48] What breakdowns of the vote also demonstrate is that Trump secured these wins in the swing states because he scored high with white older men – traditionally Republican voters – but also with white younger men.[49] As has been widely discussed, Trump managed to attract younger white working-class men in Midwestern states in addition to mobilizing traditional male voters, because

46 Pew Research Center, "An examination of the 2016 electorate, based on validated voters," Pew Research Center, August 9, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/.

47 Center for American Women and Politics, "Gender Differences in Voter Turnout," n.d., https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/voters/gender-differences-voter-turnout#GGN.

48 Dale R. Durran, "Whose votes count the least in the Electoral College," The Conversation, March 14, 2017, https://theconversation.com/whose-votes-count-the-least-in-the-electoral-college-74280.

49 Alec Tyson and Shiva Maniam, "Behind Trump's victory: Divisions by race, gender, education," Pew Research Center, November 9, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2016/11/09/behind-trumps-victory-divisions-by-race-gender-education/; Robert D. Francis, "Him, Not Her: Why Working-class White Men Reluctant about Trump Still Made Him President of the United States," *SOCIUS Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 4 (2018): 1–11, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2378023117736486.

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he spoke to their interests and fears.[50] Often without college degrees, this group of young white voters was increasingly economically insecure but also felt culturally insecure. It was experiencing a crisis of masculinity in identitarian terms.[51] What Trump offered was a vision of hegemonic masculinity, the idea that white, cisgender, heterosexual men would be in charge of the country again, from the White House down to the kitchen table, and that men would regain and exercise their authority over women, LGBTQ+ people, People of Color and other perceived minorities through (physical) dominance and aggression.[52]

It is crucial to understand these dynamics through which Trump won white male voters and through them, the Electoral College. Trump was able to widen his base during the 2024 primaries via a spreading sense of a loss of authority and power among young men. This time around, he is increasingly attracting Black and Latinx male voters on the basis of his projection of hegemonic masculinity as a principle for political and private governance. Throughout the 2016 campaign, Trump engaged in blatantly sexist attacks on Clinton, including the rallying cry "Trump that Bitch," and behaved in a dominant masculinist way towards Clinton, such as when he physically stalked her on the debate stage. He modelled dominant masculine behavior for his prospective male voters.

The release of the Access Hollywood Tape in October 2016, one month before the election, did not turn voters off Trump, as Democrats had hoped, but instead solidified the "hypermasculine image of leadership" that he cultivated and that some voters view as aspirational.[53] In 2016, grievances among the electorate perceived to be related to shifting power relations between men and women in the U.S. contributed significantly to Trump's winning the election by way of the Electoral College. This happened at the moment when gender bias

50 Nicholas Carnes and Noam Lupu, "The White Working Class and the 2016 Election," *Perspectives on Politics* 19, no.1 (2020), https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/perspectives-on-politics/article/abs/white-working-class-and-the-2016-election/CAA760DEB0CC41BA02ADF2131EFA508F; Stephen L. Morgan, "Trump Voters and the White Working Class," *Sociological Science* 5 no., 10 (2018): 234–245.

51 Myra Marx Ferree, "The Crisis of Masculinity for Gendered Democracies," *Sociological Forum* 35 (2020): 898–917. Ferree also offers an overview over the literature on the subject to date.

52 Theresa K. Vescio and Nathaniel E.C. Schermerhorn, "Hegemonic Masculinity Predicts 2016 and 2020 Voting and Candidate Evaluations," *PNAS* 118, no. 2 (2021), https://www.pnas.org/doi/abs/10.1073/pnas.2020589118.

53 Neville-Shepard, "The Pornified Presidency," 1194.

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and gender barriers that had prevented women from winning the Presidency had been overcome by Clinton in the popular vote. The desire of white, often economically disadvantaged male voters to vote for a strong man and to be like that strong man decided the election.

The Propitious Moment of 2020

In the eyes of many voters, 'strong man' Trump created quite a mess out of his Presidential term. In consequence, it never looked more likely that a Democrat would be elected president than in 2020, and that it would be a woman. What made it seem so likely was, first, that feminist issues were front and center the moment Trump became the new "pussy-grabbing" President. The day after Trump's inauguration in January 2017 saw the Women's March on Washington, the largest feminist protest in U.S. American history. And the #MeToo movement became an important factor in public discourse.[54] Second, in 2020, a record number of six women entered the Democratic primaries – Tulsi Gabbard, Kirsten Gillibrand, Kamala Harris, Amy Klobuchar, Elizabeth Warren, and Marianne Williamson. All six women reached the offices they held based purely on their own achievements. They could not and did not fall back on name recognition and popularity by virtue of their husband's achievements – a marked departure from Clinton's earlier trailblazing candidacies. This record number of women entering the race was important to political culture also insofar as they offered not just one, but six models of women in power who campaigned in very different ways.[55] For instance, Elizabeth Warren campaigned on the basis of her record in consumer protection and also on the basis that she could 'do it all' having worked full-time while raising children.

None of these women won the nomination. Although Elizabeth Warren stayed in the race and drew seventy-nine votes at the Convention in August, the primary race came down two white men, Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders. The fact that more women ran for the nomination than ever before is evidence that female Democrats had been emboldened by Hillary Clinton's winning the popular vote. Still, voters did not seem convinced that it would be a good idea

54 Center for American Women and Politics, "Tracking Gender in the 2020 Presidential Election."

55 Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839474730 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

to vote for a woman. As R.J. Miller, a National Democratic committee member, said, "Democrats have internalized the Hillary Clinton lesson: that a woman can't win."[56] Miller's phrasing suggests that, since the 2020 elections, the question of women and the Presidency has focused entirely on whether they can win, and not at all on whether they are competent to govern, or, in short, on electability. In 2020 as well as 2024, electability revolves around the question of who can beat Donald Trump.

In 2020, Biden eventually carried the nomination and went on to win the general election. Nevertheless, the moment still looked promising for women: Biden nominated Kamala Harris as his Vice President. This nomination carried symbolic weight, because she was the first woman, and the first Black American and South Asian American woman to become Vice President. Moreover, her Vice Presidency seemed to promise that the elderly President would soon make space for the first woman President. That did not happen, nor did Biden step aside from his candidacy last year to allow Harris to run for their party's nomination. Nor has he, at this moment of writing, stepped aside after the disastrous debate on June 27, 2024. Once again, the idea that a woman cannot win stands behind Biden's clinging to power, at least in part. Specifically, a woman cannot win against Trump.

Where Are We Now? The 2024 Primaries and the Re-Masculinization of U.S. Politics

In 2023 and 2024, the female contenders for the Republican and Democratic Party candidacies were Nikki Haley and, indirectly, Kamala Harris, as well as outsider candidate Marianne Williamson. Both Haley and Harris have had to deal with sexist attacks and stereotyping. Haley ran on the basis of representing a new generation of leaders. She offered voters a different image than the "two grumpy old men"[57] vying for the nomination, not only based on her age

56 Christopher Cadelago, "New poll goes deep on Kamala Harris' liabilities and strengths as a potential president," Politico, June 12, 2024, https://www.politico.com/news/2024/06/12/kamala-harris-favorability-poll-00162093.

57 The Haley campaign used a meme that showed Biden and Trump and included the line "grumpy old men," see Paul Steinhauser, "Haley targets Biden and Trump in 'Grumpy Old Men' spoof," Fox News, January 31, 2024, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/haley-targets-biden-trump-grump-old-men.

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but also due to her gender and ethnicity. In keeping with conservative Republican principles, however, Haley denied that her gender had any relevance to her campaign. Haley represented an alternative to Trump within the Republican spectrum. Yet she could not go against the aversion to identity politics that is part of the larger playing field of the culture wars and which has exacerbated political polarization. On the other hand, she also tried to play to Republican women voters, who are more likely than men to want to see a woman in the White House,[58] by way of tough talk, saying that it was simply time to elect a "badass woman" and playing the Sheryl Crow song "Woman in the White House" at her rallies.[59]

Haley was subject to sexist attacks, too. "[S]he wasn't in her prime either," CNN reporter Don Lemon opined after Haley had criticized Trump and Biden as old men. Lemon made things worse by discussing at what age women can be considered to be in their 'prime.'[60] While Haley's campaign attacked Biden and Trump for their age-related diminishing mental qualities, Lemon spoke about physical attractiveness as if these were equal measures of leadership potential, thereby treating Haley as a sex object rather than a candidate.

I cite the incident, because like the "Iron My Shirt" attack on Clinton in 2008, it can be seen as cutting two ways. On the one hand, Haley quite seriously pushed back against the sexist attack by saying, "By the way, I am in my prime. Don't let anyone tell you otherwise" at the next rally.[61] She thereby, at least implicitly, related the notion of one's 'prime' to political and professional capabilities and not to appearance. On the other hand, in 2023, a statement like Lemon's was recognized as so blatantly and outrageously sexist by a large part of the public that Haley could make fun of it. Her campaign sold drink koozies

58 Menasce Horowitz and Goddard, "Women and Political Leadership Ahead of the 2024 Election."

59 Dylan Wells, "Nikki Haley walks fine line on race, gender in appeal to GOP base," The Washington Post, March 20, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/elections/2023/03/20/nikki-haley-race-gender-2024-presidential-gop/.

60 Michael M. Grynbaumand John Koblin, "Uproar Hits CNN as Don Lemon Is Rebuked for Comments About Women," The New York Times, February 17, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/17/business/media/cnn-don-lemon-apology.html; Maya King, "On the Trail in South Carolina, Haley Says, 'Yes, I Am in My Prime,'" The New York Times, May 5, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/05/us/politics/nikki-haley-campaign.html.

61 Wells, "Nikki Haley walks fine line on race, gender in appeal to GOP base."

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that read "Not in my prime?" and then demanded "Hold my Beer!" on the reverse side to point out how preposterous Lemon's comment was, thus rallying supporters around Haley by casting CNN's sexist reporter as the enemy.

Kamala Harris' public image has been even more fraught with negative stereotyping. Harris' low approval ratings and her lack of likeability have been commented on continuously, and various factors have been mentioned as possible causes: her racial identity, her assignment to difficult policy issues such as immigration, and supposedly actual blunders in office.[62] In March of 2024, Kathleen Parker went as far as to suggest that "For the country's sake, Harris should step aside" in *The Washington Post*. Among many potentially valid arguments, Parker criticized Harris' laugh as a "cackle" and painted her as aggressive and careless in the face of serious politics.[63] The suggestion that Harris is aggressive and unethical is a pattern of negative stereotyping that researchers in media representations of women candidates have shown across the board.[64] Like Haley, Harris pushed back. In an interview with Drew Barrymore, Harris called out the criticism of her laugh as sexist and expressed her pride in belonging to a "community of women with big laughs."[65] Again, media framings of Haley and Harris in 2024 show that sexism is "alive and well," to use Clinton's 2008 words, but specific incidents can also work in women candidates' favor.

The most important fact that surveys and research on voting behavior over the past four years agree on is that a candidate's gender has little impact on electoral behavior once they are running. In today's polarized political

62 Peter Slevin, "The Increasing Attacks on Kamala Harris," The New Yorker, February 27, 2024, https://www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-increasing-attacks-on-kamala-harris.

63 Kathleen Parker, "For the country's sake, Harris should step aside," The Washington Post, March 15, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2024/03/15/kamala-harris-quit-biden-2024/.

64 Center for American Women and Politics, "Tracking Gender in the 2020 Presidential Election," n.d., https://womenrun.rutgers.edu/2020-presidential/; Cassese et al. "Media Coverage of Female Candidates' Traits."

65 Post Editorial Board, "Kamala Harris' cackling is Joe Biden's job security," New York Post, August 28, 2021, https://nypost.com/2021/08/28/kamala-harris-cackling-is-joe-bidens-job-security/; Katelyn Caralle, "Kamala Harris says people are still getting used to a woman VP and suggest making fun of her laugh is misogynistic," Daily Mail, April 28, 2024, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13359913/kamala-harris-vice-president-woman-laugh-misogynistic.html; Northwestern Institute for Policy Research, "Are Voters Biased Against Women Candidates," January 24, 2023, https://www.ipr.northwestern.edu/news/2023/are-voters-biased-against-women-candidates.html.

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climate, the "political party has become the primary determinant of vote choice."[66] Voters vote for their party, Democrat or Republican, no matter whether the candidate is a woman or man. Voter turnout similarly does not hinge on whether one's party's candidate is a woman or a man. Gender does not matter in elections rely not only on voter surveys, in which voters tend to reply with what they think are desirable answers, but also in actual elections. A 2024 study of primary races for open Democratic and Republican Senate seats demonstrated that women were as likely to be elected as men.[67] Again, nothing prevents women from reaching political office now when they run – except electability bias.

The reason why women candidates have not managed to overcome electability bias in 2020 and 2024 is, I suggest, Trump's gendering of politics. By projecting leadership as leadership through hegemonic masculinity, Trump has succeeded in setting up the electoral competition as a vote on competing masculinities. If this competition is a given, then women – even after decades of assimilating to or negotiating masculine-defined models of leadership – are out of the race and simply cannot win. They are, on principle, not seen as electable. Trump's setting up masculinity as *the* measure for leadership competency works on the basis of the electability bias and is the reason why Democrats did not feel that they could let a woman try to take on Trump in the primaries.

In 2024, Trump's model of hegemonic masculinity has gained in appeal for young Black male and Latinx voters, from whom Trump is currently drawing his largest increase in support. In June 2024, a couple of days after Trump was convicted of felony crimes in New York, he made his first public appearance at an event of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), which took place in New Jersey. He announced that he would be there on X, and supporters flocked to the event. Trump's appearance in New Jersey illustrates how he communicates a gendered model of leadership to his supporters and re-masculinizes the political arena as a whole. The UFC is an almost exclusively male event: men compete, and men make up most of the audience. The physical, masculine-coded dominance performed by the athletes is the kind of unapologetic

66 Kathleen Dolan and Jennifer Lawless, "Gender Bias in Primary Elections? Survey Says No," National Capital Area Political Science Association's American Politics Workshop, June 6, 2023, https://www.dannyhayes.org/uploads/6/9/8/5/69858539/dolan_and_lawless_ncapsa_paper.pdf, 3.

67 Dolan and Lawless, "Gender Bias in Primary Elections? Survey Says No."

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masculinity that Trump offers vicariously to his supporters – a masculinity to proudly aspire to.[68]

Commentators have stressed how skilled Trump has been at pointing out how the 'left' supposedly attacks traditional masculine identity, and he casts men as victims in the culture wars. This sense of victimhood, of loss of authority, is what he exploits when he poses as a fan of performances of aggressive, unapologetic dominance, such as at the UFC. Shortly afterwards, during a rally in Pennsylvania on July 13, 2024, Trump raised his right hand and mouthed the words "Fight! Fight! Fight!" after being shot at. He played right into the image of the fighter who literally stands up to anyone who attempts to dominate him, physically or otherwise. In the context of these intense performances of hegemonic masculinity on Trump's part, it is not surprising that female secret service members were instantly blamed for the supposedly lax security that made the assassination attempt possible.[69] The kind of dominance that Trump performs serves as an aspirational model for many men. Sidelining women is part of that hegemonic masculinity.

In a slight shift of perspective, media scholars Ryan and Meredith Neville-Shard explain Trump's re-masculinization of the political field as a "pornification" of the field. Republican voters' appreciation of Trump's open sexism certifies his "authenticity as a rule-breaker"[70] and his anti-establishment mojo. They suggest that Trump's sexism and rule-breaking has to be seen as taking place in a political climate in which actors increasingly draw on "narratives, metaphors, images, and frames culled from the realm of pornography."[71] Trump successfully asserts a "hypermasculine image of leadership" that is not only modelled on warriors and fighters, such as those at the UFC, but "that combines the kind of sexism and machismo found in pornographic culture."[72] When applied to politics the "pornification frame" leaves little space for women other than in the roles of those subordinated to hypermasculine dominance and sexual aggression. While that frame erodes women's

68 Michelle Cottle and Carlos Lozada, "The 'Empty Suit' of Trump's Masculinity: Three men of Opinion debate Trump's appeal," The New York Times, Podcast, June 7, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/06/07/opinion/trump-biden-men-masculinity.html.

69 Catie Edmondson, "After Trump Assassination Attempt, Right Points Finger at Female Agents," The New York Times, July 16, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/07/16/us/politics/secret-service-female-agents.html.

70 Neville-Shepard, "The Pornified Presidency," 1194.

71 Ibid, 1195.

72 Ibid.

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electability by rendering them as sexual objects, it casts men in positions of power and thus creates what Ryan and Meredith Neville-Shard call "vicarious empowerment."[73] Historical evidence of the power of this frame can be found in how Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky played out in the 1990s. Like the release of the Access Hollywood tape for Trump, such a sex scandal should have collapsed Clinton's Presidency according to traditional political mores. Yet Clinton's poll numbers instead surged. The affair turned Clinton's public image from a soft, emasculated husband into what one commentator admiringly called "a walking erection."[74]

Whether we speak of the re-masculinization or the pornification of Presidential politics, it is clear that within these frameworks, women are simply unelectable. At a moment when all barriers to the glass ceiling had disappeared, backlash culture reconfigured politics in such a way that electability bias kept women out of the races. What would it then take to combat electability bias in the current political landscape? What would it take to make what is thought of as impossible possible – a woman winning the Presidency? It takes collective action. In fact, it takes the collective belief that "yes, we can" elect a woman President.

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As this book goes to press, Joe Biden has stepped down from his candidacy for the nomination of the Democratic Party and has endorsed Kamala Harris as the new nominee. The next days will show whether we will witness an open Convention in August because too many delegates question Harris' electability, or whether the Democrats will indeed rally behind Harris. In the spirit of this essay, I hope for the latter. While I believe that a woman cannot win in Trump's game, I also hope that Harris will be able to change the rules – with a "yes, we can" nation behind her.

73 Ibid, 1196.

74 Ibid.

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Donald Trump and Truth Social: Media Platforms Making Exclusionary Worlds

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Let me begin with a fantasy, an analogy of sorts. Children are playing soccer on a football field in their neighborhood. They are playing a game and are joined by a boy they do not know well yet – a new kid on the block. He asks to be in the game and is welcomed. But soon it turns out that while playing, he has a tendency to kick other children on the shins, really hard and on purpose. It is a feature of how he plays, and, of course, street soccer can be rough. Yet this kid plays unusually ferociously, and his violence is only thinly disguised as accidental or part of the game. So, after a while, some of the older kids call a time-out to address the matter of sportsmanship. An accident can always happen, but this is foul play, they say. The new kid defends himself: He did not do anything wrong, did not hear any complaints, he scored. The other kids must be jealous. And after a while he turns around and says: "My dad made me a professional soccer court with the best facilities. Who wants to come along and play there without these sissies?" Nearly half of the kids decide to give it a try.[1]

What is the story here? It is a thinly disguised analogy, of course, for the rise and attraction of Donald Trump, whose use of social media I want to explore in this essay through the lens of *play*. What I want to think about in particular is how Donald Trump engages in overturning all the traditions of U.S. American constitutional democratic politics through playing in and with social

1 This metaphor was originally conceived of by Frans-Willem Korsten in a private conversation in the context of the NWO Project "Playing Politics: Media Platforms Making Worlds." He used it to outline the distinction between *play* and *game*. I want to thank him in particular, as well as my fellow researchers on the project team (Frank Chouraqui, Alex Gekker, Bram Ieven, Saniye Ince, Sybille Lammes, Eleni Maragkou) for their inspiring thoughts and input. I am grateful to Greta Olson for urging me to write and present this essay, and to Tazuko van Berkel for her editing and encouragement in the process.

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media platforms. I contend that Trump is effectively replacing the old political world that was drawn up by the U.S. Constitution and a range of rules, norms, and democratic U.S. American political traditions with a world driven by his own whims and interests. He draws up this world on social media.

In this essay, I would like to do three things:

1) Explain what I mean by *play* and how play can function as a technique for making a *world*;
2) Think about the role of social media platforms both in *playing* and in *worlding*. This includes questions of: How can you play on social media? What kinds of soccer fields are social media platforms? And, how can a soccer field, particularly the soccer field of social media conjure up a *world*?
3) Look at Donald Trump's own soccer field, Truth Social, and notice how it helps him create a world that resembles in some ways the exclusionary U.S. American white-supremacist worlds from the past.

This essay takes its cue from a piece in *The Washington Post* to which Greta Olson addressed my attention: "How Trump's allies amplify his Truth Social messages to the wider world."[2] In this piece, Sarah Ellison and Clara Ence Morse take a deep dive into Donald Trump's social media communication platform Truth Social. This is the platform that Trump that set up in 2021 after he was thrown off Twitter, Facebook, and other mainstream social media platforms in response to his role in instigating the January 6th Capitol Insurrection in Washington.

Trump was let back onto Twitter after Elon Musk bought it in October 2022. Twitter was previously his favorite platform, where he had over eighty-seven million followers. Yet he never returned and stuck with his own platform Truth Social. Despite its being far smaller and him having only about a twentieth of the followers that he had on Twitter, Truth Social functions as a bully pulpit that he owns and controls entirely. Ellison and Morse trace the dissemination of Trump's posts on this platform, and show how his messages are, nevertheless, rapidly spread across more mainstream platforms and media by his supporters. This effectively protects Trump in a number of ways. Through working

2 Sarah Ellison and Clara Ence Morse, "How Trump's allies amplify his Truth Social messages to the wider world," The Washington Post, May 8, 2024, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2024/trump-truth-social-posts-amplifiers-right-wing-media/.

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in this way, and, for instance, posting messages and then removing them after a few hours, he is protected from the legal consequences of his doxing of the law clerks involved in some of the cases against him and his revealing their personal data, such as their home address and phone numbers.

What I want to do here is theorize Trump's use of his own social media platform in the context of *playful worlding*. Eventually the claim I want to make is that with and through Truth Social, Trump *plays* his own world into existence. In a new, online digital manner, Trump's *playing* on social media reinstates the much older U.S. American institution of the whites-only country club. In this club, decisions are taken for a much larger world without engaging with those who will suffer from the consequences.

Play and Worlding

Let me start by saying something briefly about my definition of *play*. Play is an indeterminate social process and a practice linked to change.[3] This means that play is something people do, everywhere, all the time, in all phases of life and in all kinds of situations and spaces. Even when you play alone, it is often a social and socializing practice. Play hinges on ambiguity: It is serious even when it is frivolous, and potentially transgressive even when rule-bound.[4] In the soccer vignette, we saw that the violence involved in shin kicking can be part of the game. Or, it can be something 'real,' in the sense of consequential, also in the world beyond the play world: actual non-play violence happens under the cover of being part of the game. For the purpose of this text, I consider play to be any activity that is imaginative, inviting, participatory, improvisational, and autotelic. Play is autotelic because it is for its own sake. It has itself as its aim, but this does not mean that play is inconsequential or harmless. In fact, play can often have very real consequences that are obscured by their being caused by play.

When I was four years old, my best friend cut off all of my hair as part of a game. At the time, it seemed to be an entirely fun and innocent activity that we played for the sake of playing. Yet the result was irreversible in the real world: I

3 Thomas M. Malaby, "Anthropology and Play: The Contours of Playful Experience," *New Literary History* 40, no. 1 (2009): 205–218.

4 Brian Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 2.

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was bald for months afterwards. This brings me to another aspect of play. Play creates a Magic Circle within which a *play world* exists with its own set of rules. This *play world* can become real if enough players are sufficiently engrossed in it.

I want to emphasize that this is an analytical definition. I have created this definition of play out of a variety of elements that I think are worth focusing on and that have previously been flagged as important by scholars in the field of game and play studies.[5] It is not the only definition, nor is it a definition that includes everything that could possibly be understood as play. An example of a more inclusive definition would be: "Play is an appropriation of an external activity towards shared engagement."[6] Even this definition does not necessarily include every kind of play. For example, "shared engagement" seems to demand that more than one participant is involved. I have chosen to define play as an indeterminate social process hinging on ambiguity and a practice linked to change that is imaginative, inviting, participatory, improvisational, and autotelic. This definition guides our focus to specific aspects of play that I think are particularly important to attend to when we want to understand what is now happening with one of the current presidential candidates.

Play, in common usage, tends to be associated with fun and games, but it is important to realize that politics is also full of play – for instance, playful political maneuvering, improvisation, performative 'battles' between different political factions and interest groups. I think it is crucial to understand that Trump is really *playing*. He is constantly sending out ambiguous messages and invitations to his followers and the media to play with these messages, whether intentionally or not. (I personally do not think that it is relevant to know what goes on in Trump's mind.) He invites people into a conversation that imagines a world where the 2020 elections were in fact stolen from him, and in which the United States can be "great again" along the lines of conservative, white-supremacist fantasies. This process of playing is fundamentally participatory

5 For example, Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: Proeve eener bepaling van het spel-element der cultuur* (DBNL, 1938); Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Champaigne: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Sutton-Smith, *The Ambiguity of Play*; Miguel Sicart, *Play Matters* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2014); Leland Masek and Jaakko Stenros, "The Meaning of Playfulness: A Review of the Contemporary Definitions of the Concept across Disciplines," *Eludamos, Journal for Computer Game Culture* 12, no.1 (2021): 13–37.

6 Alex Gekker, *Playing Politics: Life After Social Media*, chap. "Introduction" (London: Routledge, forthcoming).

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and improvisational, if you are invited and choose to join the game. Belonging to Trump's world is about bluffing your way along in the game and then deciding with others collectively that this *is* the real world, that is, the world that matters.

Here the notion of the Magic Circle comes in. This concept is much older and was coined by the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga in 1938.[7] Johan Huizinga observed that when people are playing, they conjure up a Magic Circle within which their play-reality, co-constructed by themselves and the game, is dominant, although they still know, of course, that they are playing. An example can help to illustrate this idea. If we play that we are knights and imagine that this room is our castle, within our Magic Circle it *is* our castle. We know on some level that it is an ordinary room, but within the game, it really is a castle. This feature of play is, I think, extremely important to Trump. One thing that he does in almost any situation is invite people to play with him in a castle, or a soccer field, that does not yet exist but that fits his interests, and that he refuses to acknowledge is not real.

A famous example of this occurred following Trump's Inauguration in January 2017, where he falsely claimed more people attended that had ever attended an Inaugural Address, a suggested later backed up by Trump spokesperson Kellyanne Conway, as "alternative facts." People come into the game thinking that they are playing, knowing that they are in the Magic Circle. Yet, in a sense, really transformative things then do happen. Even if people know they are playing, their engagement with the game transforms their experience of politics and of the world beyond the game – and Trump's offer to fans to play in a world in which different rules apply, makes him attractive to many people. The play world he invites them into can become reality.

Social Media Platforms in Play and Worlding

Both for contemporary forms of play and the making of worlds, digital media have taken on very important functions, because of the many things these media can do and the many ways in which you can interact with them. Pokémon GO is an interesting example. The mobile game invites you to collect digital Pokémon, little pocket monsters that players can battle against each other,

7 Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, 39.

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which can be found in a variety of locations in the material world.[8] Players have to physically walk to a location with their digital character following in the Pokémon-populated game world. Thus, the game overlays that world with an augmented reality, and people go to places to collect digital creatures. These worlds can collide in unfortunate ways, for instance, when rare Pokémons that many people are eager to collect are hidden in cemeteries.

One term that I find useful in thinking about how digital media, and especially social media platforms, make worlds is "affordance." As James Gibson, who introduced and popularized the concept of affordance, defines it: "An object's affordances are the 'possibilities of acting' that we perceive when we look at it." [9] That an affordance is perceived is very important, since affordances are fundamentally relational and more than just "objectively given" possibilities of action that are offered by the environment. Gibson's "affordances" refers to the environment of the action and the human executing the action simultaneously, the physical (part of the world of matter) as well as phenomenal (part of the world of the mind).[10] "Affordances" is often used in design studies, where students may, for example, be invited to design 'sit-ability' rather than 'a chair.' The affordances of social media platforms comprise, for example, whether you are able to 'like,' 'share,' or 'repost' other posts, or whether there is a limit to post lengths, as Twitter was famous for. Affordances also include how selective the access to the platform is, and how visible posts are. Many of these affordances are or can be playful in the sense that they invite players to make things that become an invitation to others to continue the game. For example, Twitter's character limit – set at 140 characters until 2017 – invited users to be playfully simplistic in their messaging, and also to focus on sharing links or images rather than textual messages. This pushed the prevalence of meme sharing.

Memes are often funny and playful in themselves. But they also tend to snowball across platforms, because they are shared and reposted, and because people can easily add a layer to the joke, by making a small change to a given meme.[11] For instance, when Trump started to spread memes about his intention to build a border wall ("The Wall Is Coming"), using a font associated with

8 Larissa Hjorth and Ingrid Richardson, "Pokémon GO: Mobile Media Play, Place-Making, and the Digital Wayfarer," *Mobile Media & Communication* 5, no.1 (2017): 3–14.

9 James J. Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Boston: Houghton and Mifflin, 1979), 160.

10 Ibid.

11 Limor Shifman, *Memes in Digital Culture* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2013).

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the popular HBO fantasy television series *Game of Thrones*, other internet users instantly began to make and spread memes based on this association, adding a references to particular episodes and characters from the series. One way of thinking about play is to see it as a search for affordances. Social media platforms have all kinds of constraints and provide numerous possibilities for playing. When he was still active on Twitter, Trump was a master at generating tweets with affordances for play. Remember the time that he claimed to be a "stable genius,"[12] or when he tweeted about "the negative press covfefe …"?[13] The internet went wild with people playing around with these posts. Both Trump haters and lovers wanted in on the game.

Many voices in mainstream media[14] dismissed Trump's 2021 launch of Truth Social and Elon Musk's 2022 acquisition of Twitter as inconsequential. Musk then proceeded to change Twitter beyond recognition and renamed it X. Particularly left-leaning pundits framed these actions in terms of "boys and their toys."[15] Drawing on concepts of play, I argue that these critics were wrong to dismiss Trump's and Musk's moves as silly and as nothing but a game that does not relate to reality. For when powerful people like Trump and Musk own playspaces that they treat as toys, and they shape these spaces according to their wishes and rules, and invite others to play with them, this can have an enormous influence on how millions of people spend their time, who they connect with online, what information the algorithms expose them to, and to what kinds of political beliefs and conspiracy theories they can be exposed.

After he bought up Twitter/X, Elon Musk used it to post his own conspiracy theories, which are pumped around by the algorithm with special zeal, because he is able to determine the rules of engagement on this platform and invisibly skew the supposed level playing field. Not only does social media have

12 Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), "To President of the United States (on my first try)," Twitter, January 6, 2018, https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/949619270631256064.

13 Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), "Who can figure out the true meaning of 'covfefe'??? Enjoy!" Twitter, May 31, 2017, https://x.com/realDonaldTrump/status/869858333477523458?lang=en.

14 Mainstream media comprises more traditional, often less clearly interactive, not natively digital platforms, such as newspapers, radio and television broadcasts, and also journalistic news websites.

15 For example, Ian Bogost, "The Ugly Honesty of Elon Musk's Twitter Rebrand," The Atlantic, July 31, 2023, https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2023/07/twitter-x-rebrand-juvenile-internet-style/674875/.

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many affordances for play but it invites play that can have consequences beyond the Magic Circle. Hence, social media platforms constitute perfect places for worlding.

Referring back to the Magic Circle, it becomes clear that a social media platform is a space somewhat outside of but also closely connected to the rest of the world. Particularly within their own bubbles, people can imagine a world in which they cannot be torn out of their castle. In fact, if more and more people come to adhere to a version of the world as it exists on social media, this will have political implications outside the platform. This phenomenon was very apparent during the early years of the (first) Trump presidency. Whenever Trump said something blatantly untrue on Twitter, news media would nevertheless report on it, because the president's saying something is by definition newsworthy. Even the process of fact-checking Trump's Tweets contributed to them appearing more true, or more likely to be true than they were before.

There are even more dangerous examples, for instance, of Trump tweeting that he did not want trans people in the U.S. army.[16] From the moment of Tweeting, and before this change in policy was legally or otherwise formalized, trans people were de facto barred from the armed forces, even if they had been employed there for years.

Truth Social as an Exclusionary World

Ellison and Morse's work for *The Washington Post* is very important for our understanding of why Trump has such a wide social media reach, even though his own platform is relatively small and inaccessible. Yet based on their analysis, it is hard to see why Truth Social is more than just Trump's alternative to Twitter. For one thing, Trump's campaign makes money from his social media posts and the responses in a way that Twitter has not generated. Much more importantly, play and worlding are implicitly acknowledged in Ellison and Morse's analysis, but do not come to the fore. In fact, play and the worlding that it produces are the major products of Trump's social media activity that make it important in the first place.

16 Matt Thompson, "How to Spark Panic and Confusion in Three Tweets," The Atlantic, July 26, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/01/donald-trump-tweets-transgender-military-service-ban/579655/.

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Not only does Trump use Truth Social to spread his messages at a lower risk, but he earns more money from his own generated content there than on Twitter, as Ellison and Morse show. The mediation of Trump's content by others is the first step in the process of getting others to use, invest in, and help shape a playspace that is conditioned by Trump's needs and interests. In turn, this playspace contributes to shaping the traditional political world offline too. I use playspace in the sense of Eugen Fink's definition of the term (in German, *Spielraum*). This term refers to both the literal English translation as well as to the leeway or wiggle room, that is, the space in which a politician has to maneuver and manipulate.[17]

For Trump, Twitter was already a playspace that allowed him to inhabit a world in which he was the king and the emperor of an imaginary castle long before he actually became president. Truth Social is an especially interesting case, as it is a social media platform that constitutes a world made up by Trump and his supporters. Truth Social openly functions as Trump's campaign platform and communicates that its users have ultimate freedom and, following the platform's programmatic name, that what they say is by definition 'the truth.' Play is still important, at once in the ironic tone of the platform, and in the way Trump tends to very explicitly invite members to tinker with and to spread his messages on their own accounts and through their own channels. Yet it is also a world that in some ways has already been realized, and now only needs to be extended to other domains, too.

Taking a look at Truth Social, we can see that it cannot be accessed without having an account on the platform. Yet you can make an account, also in Europe, if you are willing to share your personal data including your date of birth, email address, and phone number; the latter two are then verified. Subsequently, you get a confirmation email welcoming you with "Hey Truthsayer." Simultaneously, you sign up for the Trump campaign's email lists and text messages. This is both an obvious campaign strategy, and a tongue-in-cheek gesture, expanding and shortcutting an increasingly common practice for platforms of requiring a large amount of personal data to feed users political messages according to their advertising-driven algorithms. Yet platforms rarely funnel you directly into a political campaign or address their members in the joking propagandistic manner that is initiated with a "Hey Truthsayer."

17 Eugen Fink, *Play as Symbol of the World: And Other Writings*, trans. Ian Alexander Moore and Christopher Turner (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 11.

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In the past, I have considered how particular hashtags or communities on social media platforms such as 4chan, Reddit, or Twitter can mobilize a political constituency online.[18] But here, the political constituency is already assumed to exist. You cannot use the platform unless you agree to also receive the campaign messaging. If you are willing to play by those rules, you are automatically addressed as and understood to be "a Truthsayer." Everything outside of this realm is by implication at least potentially false, fake, and not real.

Traditional White Supremacy in a New Shape

For centuries and up until today, the United States has had a tradition of supporting white-supremacist coteries that create isolated bubbles for themselves in schools, universities, and gated communities, and whites-only country clubs. Next to being a terrorist organization, the initial Ku Klux Klan can be understood as a white-supremacist coterie that was surrounded by secrecy and special procedures for admission, and whose members played a ritualistic game. The Ku Klux Klan's mode of playing and using costumes and rituals functioned to disguise and render more palatable its barbaric violence to its victims and its intimidation of millions of others back into a racial caste system that had been temporarily interrupted by the abolition of slavery and the early phases of Reconstruction in the U.S. South. However, being a Klan member was for many also, no doubt, truly play – imaginative, inviting, participatory, improvisational, and autotelic. Indeed, the Klan's reliance on ambiguity – of presenting actual violence as playful and performative – is part of what made its actions work as play. The ensuing worlding was a product of the fact that this play did hugely impact the reality that surrounding people inhabited particularly in the South, especially for those people who were not participants in the game.

In the 2010s, Trump invested a great deal of his Twitter energy into decrying the fact that then president Barack Obama played golf. Trump had consistently sought to delegitimize Obama's presidency by claiming falsely that Obama had not been born in the U.S. Seen in this light, Trump's insistence that Obama ought not to play golf carried strong racist overtones. The

18 Sara Polak and Anne Zwetsloot, "'And Then I See the Disinfectant Where It Knocks It out in a Minute': Donald Trump as Patient Zero and Superspreader of Covid-19 Cartoon Logic," *European Journal of English Studies* 26, no. 3 (2022): 377–398.

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obvious underlying sentiment that Trump tapped into was the racist notion that a Black man should neither be allowed to play golf nor be president of the United States. A kind of reverse engineering was essential here. To delegitimize Obama as president, Trump playfully began to kick around other arguments about why he should not play golf such as that he should be too busy to play the game. Trump did not overtly attribute Obama's alleged unfitness to his race, but argued, implicitly, that Obama was a racial impostor, transgressing boundaries. Implicitly, Obama's involvement with golf was part of his trying to 'pass' as white.

The idea that Black men should not be involved in politics or in sports other than in very muted and politically inconsequential ways has always had currency in the U.S. In 2016–2017, when Trump was president, NFL football quarterback Colin Kaepernick regularly took a knee during the national anthem to protest racist police violence as part of the #BlackLivesMatter movement. In reaction, Trump called for him and other protesting Black players to be "fired."[19] At once, this statement playfully embraced Trump's trademark phrase from his television show *The Apprentice* and demonstrated Trump's very real political conviction that white football team owners should be able to make their Black players play and not protest.

Although in many ways a quite new iteration of an old idea, Truth Social renders a world in which only Trump and his cronies can play real in a novel manner.

19 Associated Press, "Trump says NFL should fire players who kneel during national anthem," Los Angeles Times, September 22, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-trump-nfl-anthem-20170922-story.html.

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Part IV: Planetary Justice and Democracy

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A Politics of Shredding: The Far-Right's Ecocide Spectacle and the Battle against Fake Knowledge

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1. Shredding as a Meme

In November 2016, Marc Marano, a founding member of the U.S. non-profit organization called CFACT (Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow), disrupted a UN climate summit in Morocco by brandishing a life-size image of President-elect Donald Trump and waving a copy of the UN Paris climate agreement. He proceeded to ritually destroy the document using a shredder.[1] This shredder performance could be seen as another instance of (supposedly) funny cartoon logic, a concept that Sara Polak identifies in relation to Trump's distinct representational style in his tweets and memes.[2] Such a cartoon logic is at work, for instance, in that Trump's incoherent political maneuvers display similarities to cartoon characters recovering from fatal errors or simply reverting to their original narrative positions. In this context, Polak states: "Whereas the cartoonesque formerly aimed at making politicians ridiculous, now the ridiculous acquires serious political impact."[3] Such an impact also includes the non-seri-

1 Rebel News, "Marc Morano censored for shredding Paris agreement in Marrakech," Rebel News, YouTube, November 16, 2016, 3:27, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afiUGWXDBP0; Jean Chemnick, "U.N. evicts skeptics for shredding Paris Agreement," CLIMATEWIRE, November 17, 2016, https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/eenews/1060045887.

2 Sara Polak, "Posting the Presidency: Cartoon Politics in a Social Media Landscape," *Media, Arts, and Law Review* 22, no. 4 (2019): 403–419; Sara Polak and Anne Zwetsloot, "'And then I see the disinfectant where it knocks it out in a minute': Donald Trump as Patient Zero and Superspreader of Covid-19 Cartoon Logic," *European Journal of English Studies*, 26, no. 3 (2022): 377–398.

3 Polak, "Posting the Presidency," 16.

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ous violence often depicted in cartoons. The shredder performance is paradigmatic in this context. While it might appear funny or even absurd on the surface, it also carries a serious undertone and, as we argue, implies a form of symbolic violence.

If the tearing apart of political documents symbolizes the dissolution of a contract, what does shredding climate policies into bits and pieces symbolize exactly? Our response to this question will be structured along four aspects. First, we establish the context and *implications* of the politics of shredding displayed through its memeification. Second, we focus on its aesthetic *appearance* and argue that it relies on the logic of the spectacle. By this we refer not only to the spectacular campaigning strategy of far-right politicians but also to the position of the passive spectator, as when Western audiences witness climate disaster events much like in science fiction films. Third, we analyze the often obscured underlying political and material *interests* that drive the spectacle and politics of shredding. Focusing on the far right's close ties to the fossil fuel industry and factory farming, we will juxtapose Trump's climate change denialism with the eco-antagonism of the new right-wing Dutch government. Last, in light of the dramatic loss of biodiversity stemming from an entrenched 'plantation-logic,' we discuss the consequences arising from the knowledge produced by a politics of shredding and the clash between competing knowledge paradigms. Here, shredding represents the violent destruction of agreements that contain shared knowledge on climate developments.

The significance of Morano's ritual act of shredding could have easily faded soon after its performance. However, it went viral and became a meme instead. This significantly influenced the campaign strategies of the populist Dutch Party for Freedom (PVV), which used the shredder meme to underscore its rejection of climate policies. In February 2019, the party's sole member and leader, Geert Wilders, officially presented a motion in parliament:

> [C]onsidering that climate folly, whether from the left or the right, will hit citizens full force in their wallet; considering that climate policy is unpayable and nonsensical; requests the government to pull the climate agreement through the shredder and proceeds with the order of the day.[4]

4 In the original: "overwegende dat de klimaatgekte, linksom of rechtsom, de burgers keihard in hun portemonnee zal raken; overwegende dat klimaatbeleid onbetaalbaar en onzinnig is, verzoekt de regering, het klimaatakkoord door de shredder te halen, en gaat over tot de orde van de dag" (tranlation by the authors if not otherwise indicated); Geert Wilders, "Motie van het lid Wilders over het door de shredder halen van

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The motion lacked the formal conventions typical of parliament motions, but it was not meant to be taken seriously by the administration. Its informal and seemingly humorous wording was meant to appeal to PVV voters. Wilders' request to put the climate agreement through the "shredder," using the English word rather than the Durch equivalent, was an unmistakable reference to the meme. His sentiment was reiterated in the party's program, which contributed to Wilders' success in the 2023 parliamentary elections that ultimately lead to coalition negotiations for the government that took office in June 2024: "The Climate law, the Climate agreement, and all other climate policies will immediately be put through the shredder."[5] Unsurprisingly, the PVV party program's title also included another direct reference: "The Dutch again on number 1," echoing Trump's "America First" slogan.

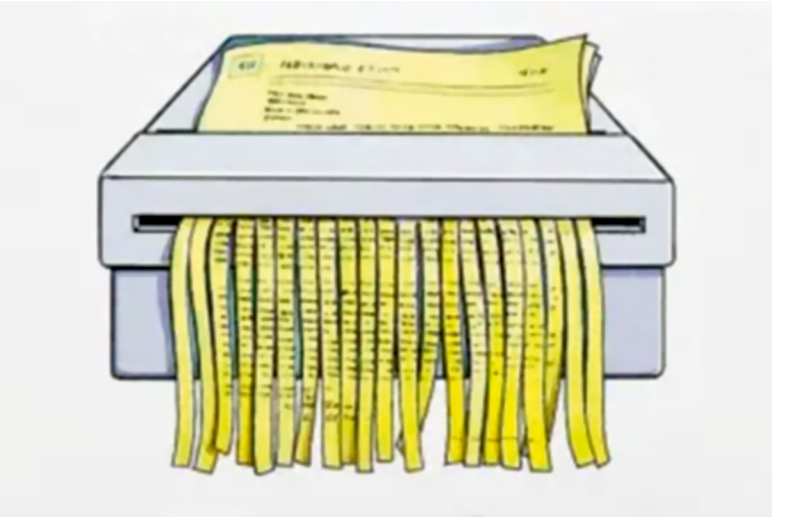

Figure 6: "The New Politics of the Shredder" [6]

het klimaatakkoord," Tweede Kamer, https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/moties/detail?id=2019D04724&did=2019D04724.

5 In the original: "De Klimaatwet, het Klimaat- akkoord en alle andere klimaatmaatregelen gaan direct door de shredder," PVV *Partijprogramma*, 2024, 22.

6 For the image, see Jan van Friesland, "De nieuwe politiek van de shredder," Climate Gate, https://www.climategate.nl/2023/11/de-nieuwe-politiek-van-de-shredder/.

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The shredder meme and the slogans denote the end of solidarity and shared responsibilities in the face of climatological disaster. The act of shredding offers, first of all, relief from the shared responsibilities concerning the preservation of multiple lifeforms to which international parties have pledged themselves. Second, for Trump and Wilders, the act of shredding is never followed up on with a viable alternative to internationally agreed upon climate policies. Shredding does not inscribe itself in a political effort to mitigate the long-term consequences of humanity's war against natural environments. On the contrary, the act of shredding frees actors to do with nature whatever is deemed economically productive in terms of the nation's interest. Third, the shredder meme elevates the momentary to the absolute. In the act of shredding, only the present moment counts.

Tearing up contracts may refer to an annulment that could be undone. Yet the bits and pieces produced by the shredder cannot be reconstructed into a whole. During the first 2024 presidential debate, Biden's statement that "things were in chaos literally" after Trump left office and that Biden "had to put things back together again"[7] optimistically overlooked the fact that some of the shredded elements from Trump's tenure cannot easily be "put together again." Some destructive outcomes are irreversible in the domain of climate change. Others, like those in the realm of productive rights, are difficult to reverse. Here, the momentary nature of shredding constitutes the opposite of a temporality that demands long-term perspectives on future developments. At the same time, the momentary can have lasting consequences.

As for the future, the act of shredding symbolizes an automated solution, mechanically realized by machines. The shredder ostensively connotes a technical 'solution' to a problem. Machines and mechanics without human interference, as the act of shredding suggests, can do all the necessary work. The far right's imagination of shredding inscribes itself in a retro-modernist glorification of what machines can make possible. It does so in a context that is defined, as we will argue, by the logic of the spectacle.

7 The Wall Street Journal, "Full Debate: Biden and Trump in the First 2024 Presidential Debate," YouTube, June 28, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qqG96G8YdcE, 1:38:18.

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2. Shredding and the Logic of the Spectacle

The symbolic force of the performance of shredding is not just an issue of ideologically informed rhetoric or representational tactics. The shredding of agreements suggests a farewell to politics proper and the dynamics of various parties confronting one another while being committed to the process of engaging with each other. The shredding of agreements is instead an aggressive expression of brutal power. However, to read this only in the light of narcissistic leaders who will shred anything they do not like is to miss the point. The specific agreements shredded, however weak, are still official documents that exert some sort of legal force. Shredding them opens up not so much a field of lawlessness but, instead, paves the way for a distribution of legal responsibility and irresponsibility. In the end, for Trump and his likes, legally underpinned corporate and private interests should reign paramount over any other interest, let alone environmental ones. If legal protections of the multiplicity of life still pose challenges for Trumpists, they overcome these challenges with the aggressive ritual of shredding.

The manual tearing apart of paper contracts belongs to the domain of everyday reality. By contrast, the shredder, although found among ordinary office equipment, has a quasi-magical or hyperreal force. Used in a public performance, the shredder easily becomes an instrument of spectacle. The French Situationist Guy Debord describes the contemporary spectacle as a political and cultural logic that manifests itself aesthetically through medialized images and tropes, by means of which market economies maintain passive approval and social dominance. The "society of the spectacle," according to Debord, exhibits itself not only through memes and bewildering media images but also operates on the level of societal reification and the alienation from nature. Through the spectacle "c'est la vie la plus terrestre qui devient opaque et irrespirable" – "it is *life most earthly* that becomes opaque and unbreathable."[8] The spectacle provides not so much an escape from the dull routine of everyday life. Rather, everyday reality is no longer critically scrutinized in terms of what makes contemporary life "unbreathable." The spectacle puts its beholders into a passive but also a bewildering position, because of which they cannot be cer-

8 Our emphasis. Guy Debord, *La société du spectacle*, infokiosques, n.d., https://infokiosques.net/IMG/pdf/La_societe_du_spectacle-60p-A4-fil.pdf, §20; see Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Ken Knabb (Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2014).

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tain whether what they witness is true or false. This logic finds its expression in the current phenomenon of fake news.

A mesmerizing transformation produced by a spectacular act of shredding was evident when Banksy's work "Girl with Balloon" was sold at Sotheby's in 2018. "Girl with Balloon" showcases a classical, framed image of a girl holding a balloon. Suddenly, at the moment the work was sold, half of the image was shredded, producing an artwork that was complete on the top half, and cut into pieces on the other. The act of shredding itself, however, was hidden from sight and paradoxically formed a gateway to the force of the spectacle. Some audience members were ignorant of what was happening because they were using mobile phones to report on the painting's estimated price, while others were mesmerized and in doubt about what was happening. With hindsight, what they were looking at was a work of art that had been created momentarily and as a result would gain in value as expressed in contemporary art market prices. Whereas the not-yet-shredded artwork sold in 2018 for £1.4 million, the shredded one was resold in October 2021 under the new and ironic title, "Love is in the Bin," for £18,582,000 – not a bad profit for a trashed work of art.[9] Seen in this light, the trope of the shredder is not only about irrevocable destruction but also concerns the economic and cultural production of value.

In the ecological context, the spectacular and mesmerizing capacity of the act of shredding can be traced in the imaginary creature of the Sandworm, or Shai-Hulud, in Frank Herbert's novel *Dune:* a fantastic animal with a mouth that is a circular version of a shredder, swallowing and shredding anything that crosses its path. It recently reappeared on the big screen as a powerful special effect in Denis Villeneuve's film adaptation of the novel. In the film's post-climate change setting, the Sandworm arises spectacularly out of the sand as a faceless creature that, in shredder-like centripetal motion, uproots and recreates the surface of the planet. In the story's political ecology, however, the Sandworm's larvae also produce a coveted raw material called "Spice," around which the planet Arrakis has built an extraction industry. The much-desired "Spice-Melange" is a "highly addictive" substance, used to navigate space and allowing for "safe interstellar travel."[10] In this light, *Dune* depicts a feudal capitalist

9 Sotheby's, "Banksy Brings Down the House at the Contemporary Art Evening Auction," October 14, 2021, https://www.sothebys.com/en/articles/banksy-brings-down-the-house-at-the-contemporary-art-evening-auction?locale=en.

10 *Dune*, dir. Denis Villeneuve (Warner Bros., 2021), 2:35:00.

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and orientalist society that, even after catastrophic climate change, remains hooked on a fossil fuel-based economy.

Already in the 1980s, geochemist Wallace Broecker, who also coined the term "global warming," warned against passive-aggressive political attitudes that consist in the refusal to seriously consider a transition from a fossil fuel addicted situation to fossil free infrastructure. He contended that "[t]he climate system is an angry beast, and we are poking it with sticks."[11] Four decades later, humans have not stopped poking. In *Dune*, readers and viewers can reassuringly witness how the Sandworm has been domesticated. The creature can be summoned with a thumper, a device that produces a drumming sound on the sand, which sounds like falling raindrops. In the desert, this natural phenomenon must be artificially simulated. The desert people, called Fremen, use the thumper to call on the Sandworm when they want to ride it, assuming the position of the ruler over tamed nature. But what kind of nature is this? Humanity, or what is left of it, has installed itself as a master in a desert of nothingness. The black hole into which the shredded pieces disappear when swallowed by the Sandworm symbolize a post-apocalyptic void.

In this regard, environmental journalist Fred Pearce argued that what climate scientists call "tipping points" appear like special effects in science fiction films.[12] The tipping points mentioned by Pearce refer to the critical thresholds in the climate system where a small change can trigger irreversible environmental changes, leading to global warming, disappearing islands, rising sea levels, and mass extinction, thus forming an existential threat to the human species. As tipping points show, the temporality of climate change does not unfold gradually. Or, as Pearce puts it, crossing these tipping points thresholds can "awaken" violent and capricious "climate monsters."[13]

The far-right politics of shredding, like the thumper in *Dune*, indeed summon such images of climate beasts. However, current scientific models also suggest that humans will not be able to domesticate these monsters or put them back to sleep. Already beyond scenes from futuristic disaster films, we can watch almost in real time how islands like Tuvalu are being swallowed up by the ocean because of rising sea levels, whilst each year an area of the size

11 Quoted in Fred Pearce, *With Violence and Speed. Why Scientists Fear Tipping Points in Climate Change*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 15.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

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of Poland is turned into a desert.[14] Given the current ecological collapse, if the far right gains power and if the politics of shredding becomes the norm, what we will witness will captivate audiences with the force of a spectacle and leave them either mesmerized or in a state of debilitating disbelief about whether what they are witnessing is real or not.

In the next sections, we focus on what the spectacle simultaneously reveals and masks, namely, the underlying political and economic interests that actively prevent the implementation of more environmentally sustainable policies. We attempt to explain why particular right-wing populists appeal to voters with eco-unfriendly proposals, and why they gain traction with these proposals, despite the uncontested scientific consensus that climate change constitutes the most imminent existential threat to humanity and life on this planet.

3. Trump's Politics of Shredding: America First!

Similar to the inhabitants of the desert Planet Arrakis in *Dune*, "our addiction to fossil fuels is pushing humanity to its brink. Either we stop it – or it stops us."[15] This was the warning that UN Secretary-General António Guterres gave at the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference. As a result of the abandonment of international climate policies that has been provoked by the far right in Europe and the United States, the fear that the option may materialize of our being pushed to the brink is shockingly realistic. This is how Oliver Milman and Dharna Noor describe the scenario of Trump's potential reelection in *The Guardian*:

> The United States's first major climate legislation dismantled, a crackdown on government scientists, a frenzy of oil and gas drilling, the Paris climate deal not only dead but buried. A blueprint is emerging for a second Donald

14 The World Counts, "A third of the world's land surface is threatened by desertification," n.d., https://www.theworldcounts.com/challenges/planet-earth/forests-and-deserts/global-land-degradation.

15 António Guterres, "'Either we stop it – or it stops us,' UN Chief at # COP26 / Climate Change," United Nations, November 11, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=caGfZWpY6xM, 9:42.

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> Trump term that is even more extreme for the environment than his first, according to interviews with multiple Trump allies and advisers.[16]

The article is entitled "'In a word, horrific': Trump's extreme anti-environmental blueprint." Indeed, in the event of a second term for Trump, there will be no cold-turkey withdrawal from fossil fuels. Meanwhile, Trumpism has already left its stamp on the current President's most recent fact sheet. On May 14, 2024, the *White House* announced a new economic plan that includes heavy tariff barriers on renewable energy technology from China, with tariffs of up to 50% on solar cells and up to 100% on electric cars.[17] While Biden had previously criticized Trump's protectionism and argued that tariff barriers would primarily harm U.S. American producers and consumers, the President's new approach now echoes Trump's campaign motto.[18]

Aimed at protecting "American Workers and Business against China's Unfair Practices," Biden's plan is likely to deal another blow to the transition from a fossil fuel-based economy to a decarbonized one. Supposedly aimed at aiding the development of a competitive industry for renewable energy technology in the United States, Biden's economic approach will above all else benefit the fossil fuel industry. Needless to say, if Trump wins the 2024 elections, the alliance between the fossil industry and the extreme right will grow even stronger. Trump was quite explicit about how he will support and promote the aggressive expansion of fossil fuel companies if they provide his election campaign with a gift of $1 billion.[19]

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16 Oliver Milman and Dharna Noor, "'In a word, horrific': Trump's extreme anti-environment blueprint," The Guardian, February 6, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/feb/06/trump-climate-change-fossil-fuels-second-term.

17 The White House, "FACT SHEET: President Biden Takes Action to Protect American Workers and Business from China's Unfair Practices," May 14, 2024, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/05/14/fact-sheet-president-biden-takes-action-to-protect-american-workers-and-businesses-from-chinas-unfair-trade-practices/.

18 Jacob Pramuk, "Joe Biden slams Trump's trade war even as he calls to 'get though' on China," CNBC, July 11, 2019, https://www.cnbc.com/2019/07/11/joe-biden-slams-trump-china-trade-war-in-foreign-policy-speech.html.

19 United States Senate Committee on the Budget, "Budget, Finance Committees Launch Joint Investigation into Donald Trump's Quid Pro Quo Offer to Big Oil," May 23, 2024, https://www.budget.senate.gov/chairman/newsroom/press/budget-finance-committees-launch-joint-investigation-into-donald-trumps-quid-pro-quo-offer-to-big-oil-.

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What appears to frighten political leaders like Trump is not so much the unleashing of climate monsters but rather the 'visitation' of the roaring beasts of foreign competitive industries, predominantly from China. International market competition, trade wars, and nationalism prevent the adherence to international agreements that seek solutions to global problems, such as climate warming, that can only be solved through supranational collaboration and solidarity. This nationalistic attitude, based on economic protectionism, echoes far-right economic approaches of the past. In this regard, we are convinced that it is no coincidence that Trump retweeted a quote from Mussolini, or that his current campaign team baptized Trump's United States as "a unified *Reich*," even if this reference was quickly deleted as a "mistake."[20] Arguably, the "America First" campaign operates on the basis of the old fascist distinction between presumably parasitic, international capital, and productive, national capital.[21] For Trump, China represents the parasite that is to blame for everything that harms the United States' market competitiveness: climate change, COVID-19, and unfair business practices.

Inspired by the ideological separation between 'bad' and 'good' markets, Trump pledged to support an independent U.S. American agricultural industry and restore employment to American coal miners. Trump perceived the Obama administration's 'free-market' approach that was particularly evident in the TTIP negations with Europe as a severe detriment to U.S. American industry, which would, according to Trump, be brought to its knees by foreign regulations. Consequently, the 45th U.S. President solidified the alliance with the American multinational fossil industry despite renewable energy currently being cleaner and cheaper.[22] Yet even if supporting the expansion of fossil fuel extraction seems illogical from an economic and an environmental perspective, this is not necessarily the case considering it from the perspective of market competitiveness.

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20 See also Sara Polak's arguments about how Trump plays with the conventions of social media in this volume. Chris Cameron, "Trump Posts, Then Takes Down, Video Online with Headlines about a 'Unified Reich,'" The New York Times, May 22, 2024, https://www.nytimes.com/2024/05/20/us/donald-trump-reich-video.html.

21 Gottfried Feder, *Das Manifest zur Brechung der Zinsherrschaft* (Dießen: Verlag Joseph Carl Huber, 1919).

22 Victoria Masterson, "Renewable energies were the world's cheapest source of energy in 2020," World Economic Forum, July 5, 2021, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/07/renewables-cheapest-energy-source/.

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Due to the current lack of storage technology and transmission lines for renewable energy, green sources of electricity cannot meet the demand for the constant availability of energy supply that heavy industry requires. The call for a decarbonized economy brings with it a significant slowing down of production in certain industries, thus making a country less attractive for foreign investment and decreasing its GDP. This is why the transition to renewable energy constitutes a serious risk to the mark-ups of large corporations and stakeholders; it destabilizes the domestic economic climate as an important business location.

In response to this peril, big entrepreneurs are turning to the far right to rescue their property and business interests, and not for the first time. Theories of "Bonapartism" that explain the rise of fascism in Europe during the 1920s and 30s are helpful to understand the turn to right-wing autocrats, who undermine liberal economic approaches.[23] According to this theoretical framework, whenever the economic elite feels threatened by revolutionary mobilizations – and climate mitigation demands a revolution –, they relinquish their political power to authoritarian leaders in order to safeguard their profits and property.[24] The turn to authoritarianism entails a partial suspension of democratic rights. We have witnessed such an abrogation with the judicial elimination of the right to abortion, Trump's rejection of democratic elections results in 2020, and the ensuing Capitol riot on January 6, 2021, by the so-called "Trumpenproletariat."[25]

In this context, the post-climate change dystopia depicted in *Dune*, which is no longer ruled by democracy but by feudal-capitalism, primitive extraction industries, and colonization, is more imminent than the latest Hollywood science fiction film might suggest. The nightmare of a world shredded into pieces and transformed into a desert will not take millennia to materialize. For considerable parts of our planet, this development has already transpired, and

23 Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (New York: International Publishers, 1975), 15.

24 August Thalheimer, "On Fascism," Marxists Internet Archive, n.d., https://www.marxists.org/archive/thal heimer/ works/fascism.htm.

25 Francis Levy, "The Final Solution: The Trumpenproletariat," HUFFPOST, August 17, 2017, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-final-solution-the-trumpenproletariat_b_5995a670e4b055243ea1364f. On the issue of the Lumpenproletariat in contemporary circumstances, see Bennett D. Carpenter, *Lumpen: Vagrancies of a Concept from Marx to Fanon* (PhD diss., Duke University, 2019).

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2024 was the hottest year ever recorded globally, exceeding the predictions of scientific models.[26]

Next to the carbon emissions that contribute to global warming and desertification, agriculture constitutes the most unsustainable industry. Nitrogen and methane emissions, artificial fertilizers and pesticides, and cruel animal treatment, such as chick culling, only make the actual shredding of up to seven billion male chickens per annum a detail.[27] Under the rubric of market efficiency, natural cycles of production deliver ever more crops per acre as supplemented by ever-growing numbers of livestock.

Since the United States is the biggest exporter of agricultural products in the world, it does not come as a surprise that Trump promised to protect the interests of commodity farmers and big agricultural corporations against foreign competitors. However, Chinese tariffs on U.S. American agricultural products in response to Trump's trade war came down hard on commodity farmers and the big agricultural entrepreneurs, who had supported Trump in the 2016 elections. As a compensation, the former President pledged billions of dollars in bailout payments to the agrarian sector. Direct farm aid has grown by the year under Trump, rising from $11.5 billion in 2017, to more than $32 billion in 2020.[28] In 2019 and 2020, a staggering 40% of farm income came from federal subsidies. Needless to say, two thirds of the bailouts went to the largest farm corporations and agricultural producers.[29] Such measures benefit mostly unsustainable large-scale agriculture producers and have a disastrous effect on ecosystems.

Globally, unsustainable farming is indeed the most heavily subsidized sector – a circumstance that reveals two things. First, subsidies are legitimized on the basis of a supposed need to secure the national food supply. Trump hails

26 Gavin Schmidt, "Climate models can't explain 2023's huge heat anomaly – we could be in uncharted territory," Nature, March 19, 2024, https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-024-00816-z, 467.

27 Jonathan Moehns and Undark, "Billons of Day-Old Chicks are Shredded, Gassed and Suffocated," The Atlantic, March 21, 2021, https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2021/03/chick-culling-cruel-wasteful-and-tough-stop/618348/.

28 Ryan McCrimmon, "'Here is your check': Trump's massive payouts to farmers will be hard to pull back," Politico, July 14, 2020, https://www.politico.com/news/2020/07/14/donald-trump-coronavirus-farmer-bailouts-359932.

29 Lisa Held, "How four years of Trump reshaped food and farming," Civil Eats, November 2, 2020, https://civileats.com/2020/11/02/how-four-years-of-trump-reshaped-food-and-farming/.

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"our farmers, our great farmers" as the hardworking caretakers of the nation's land and values.[30] Because farmers are exposed to considerable financial risks due to unstable crop yields, volatile market prices, and tariffs, it seems logical to offer them subsidies to prevent their disappearance altogether. However, this pattern shows that for average farmers, agriculture is not a very lucrative or reliable business. Second, if a commercial industry requires subsidies in order to compete with export products on the world market, this also means that the sponsor – in this case the state – reserves the right to set the terms under which production is, or should be, sufficiently profitable. The U.S. American agrarian sector, which is the largest globally, receives subsidies for global exports more than for securing the national food supply.

Ecologically sustainable agriculture yields significantly fewer crops per acre due to smaller scale production and restrictions on aggressive biocides and fertilizers. Therefore, it challenges the lucrative business model of big agrarian corporations. For this reason, the magnates of agribusiness, like fossil fuel tycoons, turn to the far right to secure their profits, effectively embracing the shredding of environmental regulations that will eventually destroy their market dominance. Smaller farmers motivate their turn to the far right on the basis of similar arguments. Since state leaders often present "our great farmers" as essential producers to the nation, farmers wrongly assume that their governments maintain a particular sense of responsibility for their well-being.

What currently makes authoritarian figures so attractive to farmers is the far right's unfiltered attack on the so-called political establishment and its accusations that a 'globalist' elite participates in a conspiracy against the U.S. American nation and its diligent farmers. Climate change is perceived either as a hoax, produced by foreign hostile competitors like China, or as a left-wing conspiracy against domestic farmers that uses climate policies as the primary instrument through which to increase left-leaning cosmopolitans' global power. Such perceptions can swiftly turn into a repudiation of state legislation and jurisdiction. In Europe, farmer protests have resulted in violent highway blockades that showcase an arsenal of agricultural equipment. Tractors with fork carriers were resolutely steered towards EU government buildings

30 Grady McGregor, "Trump claims at debate that China is paying for farm subsidies. In fact, U.S. taxpayers are footing the bill," Fortune, October 23, 2020, https://fortune.com/2020/10/23/trump-debate-china-farm-subsidies-pays/.

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and through police blockades, with their drivers demanding a relaxation of European environmental legislation.

4. The Dutch Politics of Shredding: The Netherlands Second!

European farmer protests did not go unnoticed in the United States. Recently, Tucker Carlson conducted a short interview with Eva Vlaardingerbroek, who is well-known in the Netherlands for her anti-feminism and climate denialism, on Fox News.[31] In the interview, she comments on the Dutch farmers who protested the government's aim to reduce extremely high nitrogen emissions that result out of intense cattle farming. Proposed legislative measures include the reduction of the cattle stock by 50% and plans for farm buyouts. Explaining the situation to Fox's viewers, Vlaardingerbroek asserted that "hard-working," "god-fearing," and "self-sufficient" Dutch farmers were being brutalized by the government. She claimed that the administration had fabricated a nitrogen crisis to "steal our famers' lands," and added that the government needed these lands to accommodate new immigrants. In her view, "there is only one term that we can use for the things that our government under Mark Rutte is doing right now, and that is communism."[32] The monsters of communism, immigration, and climate activism were all called upon by Vlaardingerbroek to suggest that they had infiltrated Dutch government and had forged a conspiracy against Dutch farmers. Spectacular!

The fact that Vlaardingerbroek appeared on Fox News was no coincidence. After the United States, the Netherlands is the biggest global exporter of agricultural products. In this case, it is "America First" and "The Netherlands Second!" A comparison between the two countries demonstrates economic and ecological similarities. Both countries use about half of their land surface for agriculture: 54% in the Netherlands and 46% in the United States.[33] Comparing the Netherlands and the U.S. makes it possible to follow up on our analysis

31 Charles Kreitz, "'Green' governance is a new 'guise' for mercantilism, will lead to global instabilities: Heritage President," Fox News, July 25, 2022, https://www.foxnews.com/politics/environmental-stewardship-new-guise-mercantilism-lead-global-instability-heritage-president.

32 Ibid.

33 M. Shahbandeh, "Total area of land in United States farms from 2000 to 2023 (in 100 acres)," Statista, May 24, 2024, https://www.statista.com/statistics/196104/total-area-of-land-in-farms-in-the-us-since-2000/. Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, "Hoe wordt

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above and to explain the far right's international rise to power more systematically.

Alongside the anti-environmental stance of Dutch populists like Geert Wilders, a second political campaign against environmental protection was launched by a new party: the "Farmers Citizen Movement" (*Boeren Burger Beweging*, or BBB). Having won the provincial elections in all twelve provinces of the Netherlands in 2023, the BBB now has significant influence on Dutch agricultural legislation. The party claims to represent the interests of Dutch farmers by opposing all measures aimed at transitioning to more sustainable agrarian practices.

Before joining Wilders' coalition, BBB party leader Caroline van der Plas supported the farmer protests and pressured the former government to abandon plans to halve nitrogen emissions by 2030 in order to meet Paris Agreement targets. As a coalition partner in the new government, the BBB launched a crusade against EU climate policies, including the Natura 2000 legislation aimed at protecting biodiversity in European natural reserves[34] and the Nature Restoration Law.[35] On top of that, van der Plas has pledged to urge the EU to renew the exception that allows for a higher nitrate limit in the Netherlands. Dutch farms' above-average emissions result from a livestock population that is mostly fed with imported soy from Brazil, including 100 million chickens, 11.4 million pigs, 3.8 million cows, 480,000 goats, and 850,000 sheep.[36] The reduction of biodiversity is closely linked to the overproduction of manure by the meat industry. Its nitrogen emissions damage ecosystems and transform them

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de Nederlandse bodem gebruikt?" Nederland in cijfers, n.d., https://longreads.cbs.nl/nederland-in-cijfers-2020/hoe-wordt-de-nederlandse-bodem-gebruikt/.

34 EUR-Lex, "Protecting Europe's biodiversity (Natura 2000)," February 21, 2017, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/protecting-europe-s-biodiversity-natura-2000.html.

35 European Commission, "Green Deal: pioneering proposals to restore Europe's nature by 20250 and halve pesticides use by 2030," EU Press Release, June 22, 2022, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_22_3746.

36 Figures are from 2020 to be found at Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, "Import sojabonen uit Brazilië 40 procent hoger," September 30, 2020, https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2020/40/import-sojabonen-uit-brazilie-40-procent-hoger.

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into biodeserts dominated by grass and stinging nettle. But then again, as van der Plas reassuringly notes, stinging nettle "is also nature."[37]

Ignoring devastating EU reports on deteriorating ecosystems and echoing Wilders' claim that nitrogen regulations should be shredded, Van der Plas dismisses EU regulations as "non-sense."[38] Conversely, she frames her anti-environmental stance as "common sense" politics, or in Dutch *politiek van het boerenverstand*, a "politics of peasant wisdom."[39] This so-called wisdom is questionable given the Dutch agricultural industries' discharge of nitrogen and pesticide use that have poisoned the soil and surrounding waters. As a result, only 4% of the waters in Dutch ditches and canals is now considered healthy by EU standards.[40] This is hardly surprising, as soil pollution does not remain confined. It either washes into canals or enters the domestic water supply through groundwater in an interconnected system.

Another polluting factor in the Netherlands and in the United States is the intense use of biocides, the chemicals used to eliminate mice, rats, bacteria, or fungi. In the EU, approval for the use of the biocide glyphosate was renewed for another ten years in 2024[41] because the Netherlands and five other key member states did nothing to stop the extension of its use. However, recent studies strongly suggest that glyphosate is not only carcinogenic but also linked to a rise in Parkinson's disease, particularly among farmers.[42] The renewed ap-

37 Harm Ede Botje, "Hoe de stadse Caroline van der Plas de stem van de boer werd," Follow the Money, March 11, 2023, https://www.ftm.nl/artikelen/portret-caroline-van-der-plas.

38 Op1, "Talkshow met wisselende presentatieduo's, live vanuit Hilversum," NPO Start, June 5, 2024, https://npo.nl/start/serie/op1/seizoen-5/op1_498/afspelen, 54:56.

39 SGP-jongeren, "SGPJ café met Caroline van der Plas (BBB) – Politiek van het Boerenverstand," YouTube, April 22, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R109j2eVGDg, 1:41:18.

40 European Commission, "Water Framework Directive since 2000," last update December 2023, https://environment.ec.europa.eu/topics/water/water-framework-directive_en. See also the Dutch Water quality portal "Waterkwaliteitsportaal," n.d., https://www.waterkwaliteitsportaal.nl/.

41 Ctgb, "Glyfosaat: de stand van zaken," n.d., https://www.ctgb.nl/onderwerpen/glyfosaat.

42 Iemaan Rana et al. "Mapping the Key Characteristics of Carcinogens for Glyphosate and its Formulations: A Systematic Review," *Chemosphere* 339 (October 2023): 1–20; Bastiaan R. Bloem and Tjitske A. Boonstra, "The Inadequacy of Current Pesticide Regulations for Protecting Brain Health: The Case of Glyphosate and Parkinson's Disease," *The Lancet Planetary Health* 7, no. 12 (2023): 948–949.

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proval of this unsafe biocide exemplifies the politics of shredding, as its negative impacts on biodiversity and human life quality are nearly irreversible.

The renewed approval of glyphosate also represents a clear example of how scientific evidence is either ignored or viewed as an inconvenience. Within this context, the current Dutch government's significant cuts to university funding across all of the disciplines makes sense, at least from a right-wing perspective.[43] When questioned about these cuts in parliament, liberal leader Dilan Yeşilgöz stated that science is also being developed by corporations outside of universities.[44] Right. The politics of shredding includes not only international agreements, then. Certain forms of knowledge and attitudes that coincide with them are also seen as too constraining, which is why they need to be cut.

5. Shredding, Monoculture, and the Struggle for Knowledge

In a struggle to capture the disruptive human impact on the Earth System, scholars have proposed concepts like anthropocene, urbanocene, and capitalocene.[45] These labels represent various attempts to define the scale of planetary change. They all reveal one thing: The enormous acceleration of climate change has been driven by human-made technological, economic, demographic, and industrial developments. In line with the arguments presented in this text, we prefer the term plantationocene. Donna Haraway uses this concept to refer to the reconfiguration of natural environments into var-

43 Naomi Oreskes and Eric M. Conway, *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming* (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2010); Erik MN. Conway and Naomi Oreskes, *The Big Myth: How American Business Taught Us to Loathe Government and Love the Free Market* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).

44 Redactie, "Noodoproep van universiteiten krijgt weerklank in eerste debat met kabinet Schoof," Scienceguide, July 4, 2024, https://www.scienceguide.nl/2024/07/noodoproep-van-universiteiten-krijgt-weerklank-in-eerste-debat-met-kabinet-schoof/#:~:text=Noodoproep%20van%20universiteiten%20krijgt%20weerklank%20in%20eerste%20debat%20met%20kabinet%20Schoof,-Nieuws%20%7C%20de%20redactie&text=4%20juli%202024%20%7C%20De%20oppositie,de%20regeringsverklaring%20van%20kabinet%20Schoof.

45 Jason W. Moore (ed.), *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016): 1–11.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839474730 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

ious forms of plantations.[46] The plantationocene emphasizes the ontological link between coloniality and modernity that has driven the development of climate change.

Most evidently, the plantationocene has shaped modern race relations through the creation of industrial agriculture, which relied heavily on the expansion of the transatlantic slave trade to supply forced labor. It became the economic foundation of the United States, especially in the South, where the cultivation of cash crops led to destructive monoculture practices for the environment and enslaved people working on plantations. The consequences of these forced labor practices are still being felt in present-day phenomena such as climate change, monoculture practices, and racial inequality. In many rural areas in the United States, agriculture affects not only the health of the soil but also the health of working-class Black people, who are exposed to a significantly higher premature mortality risk than wealthier people living in metropolitan areas.[47,48]

Perhaps less conspicuously, the plantationocene has its historical roots in a type of internal colonization that was marked by the Enclosure of the Commons. Enclosures involved excluding peasants from communal lands and forcing them to work as wage-laborers on the private estates of wealthy landowners. The Dutch landscape, famous for its artificially constructed polders, is a paradigmatic outcome of this development. The Commons of Holland's vast lakes were eliminated when the lakes were almost all dry-milled, a process that started in the seventeenth century and continued until the twentieth. The lands that fell dry were then neatly and mathematically cut up and divided by geometrically organized ditches and canals. Here, the Enclosure of the Commons and technological inventions went hand in hand to produce privately owned plantations, worked by hired workers. As such, Dutch polders exemplify an early form of agricultural industry and its ensuing monoculture, leading to the concentration of landed property in increasingly fewer expanding agricultural companies.

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46 Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," Environmental Humanities 6, no. 1 (2015): 159–165.

47 Gopal K. Singh and Mohammad Siahpush, "Widening Rural-Urban Disparities in All-Cause Mortality and Mortality from Mayor Causes of Death in the USA 1969–2009," *Journal of Urban Health* 91 (2013): 272–292.

48 Jeralynn Crossman et al. "The Differential Effects of Rural Healthcare Access on Race-specific Mortality," *SSM Population Health* 3 (2017): 618–623.

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The practice of enclosing land does not belong to the past. Between 2000 and 2023, the total number of agricultural businesses in the Netherlands was cut by half, while the number of companies with an annual output above €500,000 doubled.[49] The promotion of monoculture and the loss of biodiversity relate intrinsically to social inequality. When the Dutch National Court of Audit noted that "one in five working millionaires is active in agriculture," it failed to mention that 36% of active farmers earn wages *below* the legal minimum and are burdened by high levels of debt.[50] Public taxes will have to pay the bill for the nitrogen crisis and support farmers in the necessary transition to more ecological practices. Simultaneously, the Rabobank made €4.3 billion in private profits in 2023 by issuing loans to unsustainable farms.[51]

The expansion of agriculture, the emergence of industrial production, and the increase of social stratification necessitated substantial investments in knowledge production in the service of producing ever more efficient monocultures. In the face of climate disaster, knowledge claims are increasingly challenged by various social, political, and scientific actors, leading to contradictory perspectives. To counter this, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) was a 1988 initiative of the World Meteorological Organization and the United Nations Environment Program meant to address existential ecological threat. The IPCC maintains complex reviewing processes for making scientifically supported analyses and predictions, which have influenced international agreements on the environment and climate. These agreements are not simply the outcomes of negotiations. Rather, they result from the development of knowledge via struggles between various groups in society, including scientists from various disciplines, think tanks, NGOs, government ministries, corporate lobbyists, protesters, and consumer unions. Accordingly, international agreements have an archival force: they

49 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, "Minder landschap, meer bebouwing," March 6, 2017, https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/nieuws/2017/10/minder-landschap-meer-bebouwing-1950-2015; Compendium voor de Leefomgeving, "Bedrijfsgrootte en economische omvang landbouwbedrijven, 2000–2023," May 16, 2024, https://www.clo.nl/indicatoren/nl212213-bedrijfsgrootte-en-economische-omvang-landbouwbedrijven-2000-2023.

50 Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, "Miljonairs naar vermogenspositie en leefstijl," June 25, 2019, https://www.cbs.nl/nl-nl/maatwerk/2019/26/miljonairs-naar-vermogen spositie-en-leefstijl-2017.

51 Kristen Graumans, "Rabobank: kredietverlening aan boeren voor verduurzamen stokt," Boederij, Feburary 8, 2024, https://www.boerderij.nl/rabobank-kredietverlening-aan-boeren-voor-verduurzamen-stokt.

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testify to years, sometimes decades of knowledge production and the actions to which acquired knowledge should lead. The shredding of such agreements constitutes the destruction of the remains of an extremely complex archive, and the elimination of clashes and compromises between different forms of knowledge.

The far right's aggression towards the multiplicity of life is provoked by the constraining climatological measures that aim to protect this multiplicity. The far right promises relief from such restrictions in order to protect businesses rather than the diversity of life. In addition to the underlying economic factors for these actions, we also have to identify the epistemic-affective basis for the politics of shredding. As we have seen, these actual reasons for shredding are consistently masked by media-produced spectacles.

As Debord reminds us, spectacles replace social and biological life forms with representations that effectively reduce natural life forms to consumable commodities. When commodified, knowledge production follows the logic of the spectacle, it results in medialized and alienated forms of knowledge and gives rise to pseudo-knowledge, as in fake news and conspiracy theories, and to fragmented, often opposing, knowledge claims. In this context, the populist idea of a 'peasant wisdom,' as accompanied by images of happy farmers taking care of cows in green meadows, is intended to evoke an ideal of knowledge that has been handed down through the generations. Such images disguise the fact that farmers and cows do not live in harmony with nature anymore but have been reduced to underpaid workers and milking machines in an industry that is, in every reality, dependent on high-tech scientific, chemical, and genetic institutes and corporations.

The success or failure in halting the aggressive appropriation and destruction of natural environments hinges largely on how hegemonic interests are articulated and are influenced by various affectively charged modes of knowledge production. Streams of daily information shape our perceptions of social, cultural, and climatological phenomena and determine our responses. For this reason, business magnates and far-right politicians exploit information channels to garner public support for their policies. If unable to control social institutions that produce knowledge, they resort to labeling the resulting information as 'fake news,' thus alienating scholars, scientists, and investigative journalists.

Currently, the strained relationship between right-wing politicians and conventional information platforms significantly influences the definition of newsworthiness by major media outlets. This leads to practices of self-

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censorship, misrepresentation, and even the suppression of scientific data. A recent case in Dutch media exemplifies this phenomenon. The climate expert for Dutch national public television news resigned after he was pressured to no longer discuss critical climate tipping points such as the collapse of the Gulf Stream, which could drastically alter Europe's mild climate and make agricultural activity nearly impossible.[52]

Arguably, the suppression of climate science is a global issue. Following the 2016 elections in the United States, Columbia University's Sabin Center for Climate Change Law introduced the "Silencing Science Tracker," which monitors instances when governments and media distort scientific research, interfere with education, or restrict the publication of scientific findings.[53] Predictably, climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic are among the most frequently scrutinized topics. While biased reporting on climate science is often associated with the far right, Maxwell Boykoff and Jules Boykoff demonstrate that such tendencies existed prior to the Trump presidency.[54] They examine leading newspapers like *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, revealing that ostensibly balanced coverage has downplayed the human role in global warming, too. This widespread tendency in media coverage serves to support the status quo and to encourage passive information consumption among the public, thus smoothing over discrepancies in media coverage as well as natural landscapes.

The concept of the plantationcene, introduced earlier in this section, extends beyond historical and local origins. It represents a symbolic order where advancements in controlling nature have established a knowledge regime that restricts access to shared information, experiences, values, and social activities. Efforts such as climate change policies, scientific reports, artistic and activist initiatives, aimed at educating or raising awareness about climate disasters, reflect collective endeavors to acknowledge the 'beasts' of climate challenges while preventing further escalations. Eradicating or suppressing these

52 Rolf Schuttehelmn (@RolfSchuttenh), "Bijgevoegd een foto van een penseelkever. Omdat het de taak is van journalisten het beestje bij de naam te noemen," X, July 10, 2024, https://x.com/RolfSchuttenh/status/1810970587755401372.

53 Columbia Law School, "Silencing Science Tracker," n.d., https://climate.law.columbia.edu/Silencing-Science-Tracker.

54 Maxwell T. Boykoff and Jules M. Boykoff, "Balance as Bias: Global Warming and the US-Prestige Press," *Global Environmental Change* 14 (2004): 125–136.

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repositories of knowledge is tantamount to dismantling an entire intellectual reservoir. An archive is being destroyed by the politics of shredding.

The consequences of such loss of knowledge contribute to a sense of helplessness in forming long-term perspectives on environmental progress. The targeting of current and historical climate literacy obscures human responsibility in climate change and privileges the immediate over the long-term. This approach downplays the urgency of climate issues and allows politicians and voter constituencies to evade collective responsibility to address climate disasters. To make matters worse, the dystopian reality in which digital replicas have replaced actual life forms has now transcended science-fiction fantasies. Vanishing Pacific islands like Tuvalu are being digitally copied and will be uploaded to the metaverse once they vanish entirely. In an age of digital reproduction, even archives become spectacular and hyperreal.[55] The political challenge is twofold, then. First, it is important to counteract efforts by the far right to obstruct the documentation and dissemination of climate science knowledge. Second, we need to ensure that climate denialism does not lead to the further shredding of biodiversity and the further loss, fragmentation, and degradation of diverse life forms worldwide.

55 TUVALU, "The First Digital Nation," Tuvalu TV, n.d., https://www.tuvalu.tv/#.

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Part V: LGBTQIA+ Rights and Advocacy

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How to Make an Enemy: Transmisogyny and the 2024 Presidential Election

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Building the Wall

"Something there is that doesn't love a wall." This is the first line of the 1914 poem "Mending Wall," by the American poet Robert Frost, known for his philosophical meditations on ordinary rural New England scenes.[1] The poem is at first glance a simple reverie on the stone wall that separates the narrator's property from his neighbor's. The winter has passed, and the time has come to reset the stones, to "set the wall between us once again."

The two neighbors walk, each on one side, until they come to a place where from the narrator's perspective, the wall doesn't need to be there. After all, his pine trees and the neighbor's apple orchard don't pose a threat to each other. However, the neighbor doesn't see it that way. "'Good fences make good neighbors,'" he says. The narrator ruminates on this statement, and eventually asks himself, but "*Why* do they make good neighbors?" It would make sense if there were cows who might wander away, but there aren't any cows. He observes his neighbor laboring with difficulty, utterly absorbed in his unnecessary task, and he comes to the conclusion, that "Before I build a wall I ask to know / What I was walling in or walling out, / And to whom I was like to give offense." He begins to see his neighbor differently, as one who "moves in darkness," like his father and grandfather before him. "Something there is that doesn't love a wall, / That wants it down," Frost writes. However, there is no swaying him. The neighbor simply repeats "good fences make good neighbors," and the scene ends quietly.

On the one hand, the poem is about property and ownership, what is shared and what is not. It is also about identity: apple orchards and pine trees, and

1 Robert Frost, "Mending Wall," in *The Poetry of Robert Frost*, ed. Edward Connery Lathem (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), 33–34.

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what divides "me" from "you," and then "us" from "them." More broadly, it is about the human tendency to build walls rather than to dismantle them. It is not a question of *someone* but of *something* that wants the wall to come down, as though the definition of human depends upon wall building; to be human is to build a wall – a great wall – and to guard that wall with your life.

What is this indelible line between "us" and "them" other than a wielding of power? And what does "love thy neighbor" mean in a world of walls?

As Donald Trump was running for president in 2015, he made this promise:

> I would build a great wall, and nobody builds walls better than me, believe me, and I'll build them very inexpensively, I will build a great, great wall on our southern border. And I will have Mexico pay for that wall.[2]

Beyond its grotesque material presence – a gash across the desert, a human and environmental tragedy – the Wall is a symbol of his worldview, of a country and a world divided into an "us" and a "them," of the passion for separation, and for a world of winners and losers.[3] The legacy of the first Trump presidency is the endless manufacture of an enemy.

To whom do I give offense? What am I walling in or walling out? Frost asks. Trump's Wall is an extreme variation on the neighbor's delusion that the apple orchards will "eat the cones under his pines." It is also a symbol of an unfinished project, which Trump and his base are determined to complete.

However, there is no finishing such a project.

Making the Enemy

Trump and his Republican loyalists pose a grave threat to the United States and to the world. To know this, we first can recall the constant chaos and tragedy

2 Glenn Kessler, "A History of Trump's Promises That Mexico Would Pay for the Wall, Which It Refuses to Do," The Washington Post, January 8, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/live-updates/trump-White-house/live-fact-checking-and-analysis-of-president-trumps-immigration-speech/a-history-of-trumps-promises-that-mexico-would-pay-for-the-wall-which-it-refuses-to-do/.

3 From here on, I will capitalize "Wall" when referring to the symbolic Wall that Trumpism represents, in contrast to the material wall at the southern border of the United States.

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brought by his first administration. At the southern border, the site of his infamous wall, children and adults were held in cages, some standing room only, and subjected to prolonged detention that violated federal guidelines.[4] A report issued by the Department of Homeland Security cited these extremely overcrowded conditions, and yet Trump refused to acknowledge the existence of these camps.[5] As is well known, at least 5,000 families were separated at the border during Trump's term, and some 2,000 have never been never reunited.[6] During the COVID-19 pandemic, he disregarded – or misplaced – detailed pandemic response plans left by the Obama administration, which led to tens of thousands of unnecessary deaths.[7] He humiliated the government's own public health experts, whose lives were then threatened by his supporters. He refused to enact the Defense Production Act which would have ramped up manufacturing of desperately needed supplies, and he withdrew from the World Health Organization.[8] Trump also claimed that bleach and ultraviolet rays killed the COVID-19 virus.[9] White House briefings disappeared, leaving many of his actions to occur in the shadows. While for a time his open admiration of autocrats – Vladimir Putin, Kim Jong Un, Jair Bolsonaro, among others – provided comic relief for some, his actual autocratic attempt cast a shadow on this humor.[10] He was serious when he compared himself to fascist dictators of the 1930s, and his incitement of a violent coup d'état on January 6, 2021, simply confirmed his contempt for democracy.

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4 Masha Gessen, *Surviving Autocracy* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2020), 158–159.

5 Gessen, *Surviving*, 159.

6 Piper French, "Family Separation," New York Magazine, February 27, 2024, https://nymag.com/intelligencer/article/separated-families-border-trump-zero-tolerance-immigration.html.

7 Brynn Tannehill, *American Fascism: How the GOP Is Subverting Democracy* (Transgress Press, 2021), 95.

8 Gessen, *Surviving*, 27; Tannehill, *American Fascism*, 100.

9 Bradley Onishi, *Preparing for War: The Extremist History of White Christian Nationalism – And What Comes Next* (Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2023), 148.

10 Citing the Hungarian sociologist Bálint Magyar, Masha Gessen describes how autocratic transformation proceeds in three stages: autocratic attempt, autocratic breakthrough, and autocratic consolidation. Gessen believes that this terminology applied to the United States under Trump, and that these described our reality better than any existing words in the American political lexicon (*Surviving*, 6); Bálint Magyar and Bálint Madlovics, *The Anatomy of Post-Commmunist Regimes: A Conceptual Framework*, prepublication manuscript, Fall 2019.

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The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) 2024 report notes that with this year's election, the United States is at a potential turning point.[11] It will be highly consequential if Trump wins, they say, both considering how he undermined American democracy in his previous administration, and the actions he threatens to take if elected, all of which are clearly outlined in the far-right policy, personnel, and training program, Project 2025, crafted by the Heritage Foundation, the Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), and an array of other extremist organizations[12] His anti-democratic statements are "innumerable," but include calling his opponents "vermin" during campaign speeches.[13] He says that he wants to purge the Department of Justice of those he finds to be disloyal, dismantle the FBI, pardon himself of federal crimes, and have journalists arrested. Because the United States plays a key role in world affairs, they conclude, this election could have ramifications for democracy internationally.

Given all of this, and more, it is hard to believe that the American media and the public have legitimized his candidacy. Restrained neutrality in journalism continues to produce a kind of amnesia, and most of the public approaches this election as normal.[14] As Susan Glasser wrote in *The New Yorker* in June 2024, Trump's actions while in office are in danger of being forgotten.[15] He is now a convicted felon, but the outrage is simply not there. Why?

The question is complicated, but one reason I offer is an all-pervasive American exceptionalism, what legal scholar Sanford Levinson calls "The American civic religion," based on the idea that the United States Constitution is a perfect blueprint for democracies all over the world, and that it will never,

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11 Marina Nord et al., *Democracy Report 2024: Democracy Winning and Losing at the Ballot* (Gothenburg: University of Gothenburg: V-Dem Institute, 2024), https://www.v-dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf.

12 Paul Weyrich, one of the initiators of the modern conservative movement, started both the Heritage Foundation in 1973, a conservative think tank and counterpart to the Brookings Institute, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), a state-level policy machine that is responsible for formulating bills and policies for proposal and ratification at the state-level. The ADF is an anti-abortion, anti-LGBT rights organization formed in 1993.

13 Nord et al., *Democracy Report 2024*, 42.

14 Gessen, *Surviving*, 145.

15 Susan Glasser, "Fighting Trump on the Beaches," The New Yorker, June 6, 2024, https://www.newyorker.com/news/letter-from-bidens-washington/fighting-trump-on-the-beaches.

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ever fail.[16] American exceptionalism runs through the veins of U.S. society. Much of my research has been driven by a desire to divest of this exceptionalism, but I still fall prey to it, especially because I am White and middle-class. It is an attitude of entitlement that is part of the White American subconscious.[17]

However, it is imperative to get beyond this denial, and to realize that Trump and his loyalists promise a return to a Manichean worldview based on the building of Walls, both symbolic and material. In 2024, the enemy – specifically, the internal enemy – has once again become the perennial subject of Trump's speeches, interviews, and social media rants. Forty-eight hours after a New York court found him guilty of thirty-four counts of falsifying records, in a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 election, Trump spoke to "Fox News and Friends":

> I talk about the enemy on the outside and the enemy from within. You have Russia, you have China, but if you have a smart president, you always handle them quite easily. Actually, we have a lot of advantages. But the enemy within. They are doing damage to our country.[18]

In this interview, with his use of words like "sick" and "deranged" to describe these enemies within, his politics can be described as Schmittian, that is, echoing the theories of Carl Schmitt, Weimar-era critic of liberal parliamentarian-

16 Gessen, *Surviving*, 9; Sanford Levinson, *Constitutional Faith* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

17 In this chapter, I capitalize both "Black" and "White." Some like Mike Laws of the *Columbia Journalism Review* contend that Black should be capitalized because it is an ethnic designation, but White should not because it describes "merely" skin color for those whose ethnic origins can be traced back to a handful of European countries. I agree with Daniel D. Miller, author of *Queer Democracy: Desire, Dysphoria, and the Body Politic* that such a description of white is naïve (New York: Routledge, 2022), 9–10. "White" is not merely descriptive, but rather has fluctuated historically, particularly in the United States. For example, Eastern Europeans in the early twentieth century were not considered White automatically but had to assimilate into Whiteness. In conversation with Miller, I capitalize White to "capture the ideological, social, and political significance of White identity constructions" (10). This commitment to Whiteness as ideology is central to understanding how White Christian nationalism creates ever-evolving boundaries around who can reap the benefits of Whiteness and who cannot.

18 Donald J. Trump, interview by Will Cain, Rachel Campos-Duffy, and Pete Hegseth, "The Will Cain Show, Fox News," Fox News, June 3, 2024, https://www.foxnews.com/video/6354224797112.

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ism. In fact, Schmitt might have applauded Trump and the Republican agenda intent on war, predation, and racial and civilizational divide.[19] Schmitt, too, saw politics as a battle against an enemy who must defeated at all costs. Once the sovereign leader decides that a state of exception exists outside of the legal order, all citizens become combatants.[20] Without the division between friend and enemy, and the possibility of war against the enemy, Schmitt believed the world would descend into rogue violence, creating the conditions for more, not less, conflict.[21] If an enemy did not already exist, then one would have to be invented. For the U.S., the enemy of the state has always been both external and internal, as shown through the extermination of indigenous peoples during colonization, the brutal enslavement of Africans until the mid-twentieth century, legalized segregation under Jim Crow, and today's mass incarceration. Trump says in this interview and elsewhere that he is fighting for the Constitution, as many of his loyalists will do, but we also know that as an authoritarian, his inclination will be to invoke the state of exception, and to make that exception permanent.

While immigrants, and their so-called Democratic enablers, are a primary "enemy within" for Trump, trans people are often referenced in the same breath. During this "Fox News and Friends" interview, directly after stoking fears of immigrants sleeping in children's parks, Trump asks,

> Who really thinks that men should be playing in women's sports? It is something I mention all the time [and it] gets one of the biggest applause … when I first heard about it I actually thought they were kidding. I thought you know this was just a funny joke but they're actually serious about it. They're actually committed to it and who would want that? Who would want open borders?[22]

19 Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America's Long War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 171.

20 Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*, trans. George Schwab (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1986), 5.

21 Carl Schmitt, *The Concept of the Political*, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 35.

22 Donald J. Trump, interview by Will Cain, Rachel Campos-Duffy, and Pete Hegseth, "The Will Cain Show, Fox News."

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The fact that these derogations of trans people, what he refers to as "common sense," earn him "the biggest applause" tells us the central role that trans people, connected here to the threat of "open borders," play in this election.

These words likely garner praise from many of his admirers, but White Christian nationalists, specifically evangelical extremists, at the center of his campaign and of his previous administration, are one group that embraces this anti-trans rhetoric with fervor. While the reporting on this steadfast source of support has often been lacking or incomplete, the agenda evangelical extremists push was already at the heart of the overturning of Roe v. Wade, the subsequent passage of draconian abortion law, the bans in Republican-led states on healthcare for trans youth, bathroom bills, bans on trans athletes, book banning, and more. I have come to believe that evangelical extremists pose the greatest threat to trans *existence* in the United States – not to *citizenship*, but to existence. They would like to ban trans people, particularly trans women, from existing in public and from accessing medical care, and under another Trump administration, they will be politically empowered to do so.

To gain a full understanding of the social and political context of transmisogyny in this election, we have to understand the evangelical extremists' worldview, and how their teachings on the body, sexual sin, and the family all lead to their demonization of trans women and transfeminine persons. One of the primary drivers of transmisogyny among this highly mobilized segment of his base is the need to secure the definition of "woman" as biological and based in reproduction. Religious motivations supercharge the more generalizable wave of transmisogyny in contemporary U.S. society. Julia Serano defined transmisogyny as the specific way in which trans women are linked to sexual deviance and subjected to punitive violence.[23] It is a homophobic and sexualizing response as well, tied to fears of sodomy, which explains why transness in general has been linked to the "sexual predator" and "pedophile" tropes used to target gay men in the mid-twentieth century and beyond. For evangelical extremists, masculinity depends upon a rigid definition of "woman," because it strengthens and validates their position as political powerbrokers, breadwinners, and warriors for God.

The dehumanization of trans people is not new but is rather recycled on a continuous loop – by Trump, far-right news media, and so-called online activists. Gessen recalls that in 2016, Trump vowed his base a return to

23 Julia Serano, *Whipping Girl* (New York: Seal Press, 2007).

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> an imaginary past in which their jobs and daughters were safe from brown-skinned immigrants, in which the threat of what Trump calls 'radical Islamic terrorism' was vanquished or had never existed, in which White people did not have to treat African Americans as equals, women didn't meddle in politics, gay people didn't advertise their sexual orientation, *and transgender people didn't exist.*[24]

He fulfilled this last promise through a list of laws, including in 2017 a ban – by tweet – on trans people joining the military. Trump declared that the United States would no longer "accept or allow" trans people to serve, citing "tremendous medical costs and disruption."[25] The ban was not implemented until April 2019, and it did allow trans personnel already in the military to continue their duties, barring only new recruits. However, what is striking about this ban is its symbolic content, because it established an opposition between the military – *the* sign of American dominance in the world – and trans people.[26] Even while the Trump administration claimed at the time this was a financial and not a human rights decision, the ban suggested that trans people compromised American security, because of their so-called costly bodily and mental health needs, rendering the trans body a problem that can only be solved through erasure and non-existence. In 2024, Trump promises his followers that that they will live in a society free of so-called transgenderism, in which their *existence* will no longer trouble them. A constellation of legal and social developments should tell us their plans to turn trans people – particularly trans women – into personae non gratae.

White Christian nationalism, transmisogyny and the 2024 election can be understood through two figurations – the vigilante and the world crusader. The vigilante construct has its own dark history in the United States, conjuring the internal war against Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. Here, the vigilante is the person who is emboldened to take the law into their own hands. It is an outcome of what I am calling political trans(homo)phobia, in conversation with Meredith J. Bosia and Michael J. Weiss, which is manufactured to legit-

24 Gessen, *Surviving*, 171, emphasis added.

25 BBC, "Biden Overturns Trump transgender military ban," January 25, 2021, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-55799913. Biden overturned this policy in January 2021.

26 Gessen, *Surviving*, 216.

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imize corrupt governments and to concentrate power in the hands of elites.[27] Evangelical extremists, who feel they must battle – literally – for the soul of the nation, encourage online bullying and actual violence against trans people and the LGBTQ+ community more broadly. Their battle is not confined to the United States, however. They have for decades envisioned themselves as world crusaders, as shown by the evangelical influence on Nigeria, Kenya, and Uganda, which passed in 2023 one of the cruelest anti-LGBTIQ+ laws in existence.

One Nation under God

Much attention has been paid to Trump's autocratic ambitions, but what has not been taken as seriously are his deep ties to the Christian right, with White evangelical extremists at the forefront of the movement.[28] While evangelicals weren't the only White Christian group to support Trump, they have comprised the largest voting bloc in the GOP since 1988.[29] 81% of White evangelicals voted for Trump in 2016.[30] Political scientist Ryan Burge of Eastern Illinois University found that in 2018, 35.3% of voters registered with the Republican party identify as White and evangelical.[31] This statistic becomes more significant when read alongside 2023 PRRI data which shows that only 13.6% of 40,000 survey

27 Meredith L. Bosia and Michael J. Weiss, "Political Homophobia in Comparative Perspective," in *Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression*, eds. Meredith L. Bosia and Michael J. Weiss (Champaigne: University of Illinois Press, 2013).

28 As Brynn Tannehill explains, conservative Catholics also influence politics, but they represent a minority in a divided Church where most members support same-sex marriage, reject religious rights to refuse service, support birth control, and other issues, in contrast to the clergy. Mormons have similar views to evangelicals, but only represent 2% of the population. Their power is concentrated in states like Utah and Idaho, where they are overrepresented in the GOP (*American Fascism*, 113).

29 Ibid., 114.

30 *Evangelicals: From Faith to Power*, Episode 1, "The World Crusade," ARTEFRC, dir. Thomas Johnson, April 4, 2023, Apple TV, https://tv.apple.com/us/episode/the-world-crusade/umc.cmc.1uvh7w0nu5wbzd2e4ebjj0ge6?showId=umc.cmc.6ij909rdmivsx4znjtxl3them.

31 Tannehill, *American Fascism*, 113.

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respondents identified as White evangelical Protestant.[32] This means that despite that they are a minority in the country, for the first time, Trump gave evangelical extremist leaders a center of gravity in the White House, and in return, Trump validated their self-perception as a persecuted group lacking religious freedom. Together, they have set an agenda that will restore White supremacy and traditional family values to a country that in their minds is crumbling before their eyes. The eradication of transness is part of a spiritual war to regain control of the country, and they do not mean figurative war. They mean armed struggle – defeat of the enemy through any means necessary. And nowhere was this deadly struggle more visible than on January 6, 2021.

I've presented on the January 6th insurrection many times, and I include some discussion in my book *Masculinity in Transition*, but I am going to do something most academics won't. I'm going to admit that my analysis was incomplete – not only about January 6th but about the centrality of White Christian nationalism to gender constructs in the United States more broadly. Why did I, and so many investigators, scholars, and journalists, continue to overlook or downplay the homegrown, White Christian nationalist threat, culminating in, but not subsiding with, January 6th? Bradley Onishi, a professor of theology and religious studies at the University of San Francisco, offers two possible explanations. First, for many more secular Americans in particular, conservative Christians are the "default demographic," what he calls "the pesky but harmless moralists of a nation founded on religious principles."[33] Some also fall into what I would call the "Ned Flanders effect." Onishi points to the assumption that the irritatingly pious Ned Flanders from *The Simpsons*, with his banal "okleedokely" refrain, cannot also be Mr. Burns, the power-grabbing capitalist authoritarian, who is also besieged and victimized, caring little for other human beings. However, anti-pluralist, White supremacist, Christian nationalist beliefs have become mainstream, and their proponents have no use for dialogue and debate. Onishi sees January 6th as in essence a White supremacist religious ritual motivated by a crusade against the internal enemies of the United States.[34]

32 PRRI, "2022 PRRI Census of American Religion: Religious Affiliation Updates and Trends," February 24, 2023, https://www.prri.org/spotlight/prri-2022-american-values-atlas-religious-affiliation-updates-and-trends/.

33 Onishi, *Preparing for War*, 219–220.

34 Ibid., 177.

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The separation of Church and State, something vital for democracy, has eroded significantly in the United States since 2016, and it is hard to overestimate the effects. It was clear from the very beginning of his administration that White Christian nationalists had finally achieved the foothold in government they had been looking for since Richard Nixon became their first "sponsored" president in the 1970s. Trump's spiritual advisor, Paula White, even delivered the invocation on inauguration day, January 20, 2017, becoming the first religious person in history to swear in a president. White is heavily influenced by the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR), a movement that was marginal until Trump came to power. The NAR has spread the belief that a spiritual battle is taking place on the "seven mountains" of family, government, the church or religion, education, business community, entertainment, and popular culture. Deeply embedded in the White House, she was appointed to establish a religious network at the core of the government via Trump's newly established Faith and Opportunity Initiative at the Office of Public Liaison. She was charged with placing a faith director in every department and every agency, something unprecedented, and heretofore unimaginable.

She is also a prosperity gospel preacher and charismatic pastor, and one of the most popular and wealthiest evangelical extremists in the United States. The prosperity gospel spreads the idea that parishioners ensure their own wealth by giving money to the church, and that individual failing, not systemic racism, or gender and sex discrimination, are to blame for the so-called misfortunes of marginalized groups. This dangerous gospel of capitalist enterprise and White supremacy connects any belief in social justice to communism. As Onishi writes, in their minds, "real Christians don't focus on feeding the hungry. They feed hungry souls."[35]

The history of conservative evangelicalism is also embedded in anti-Black racism. Particularly in the American South, White evangelical extremists fought bitterly to save both slavery and the practice of legal segregation, known as Jim Crow. In *White Too Long*, Robert P. Jones talks about the active role of White, Christian leaders, institutions, and lay people in the construction and maintenance of White supremacy in their local communities. White churches were the "connective tissue" that assembled leaders from other parts

35 Ibid., 10.

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of society, and through what he calls a carefully crafted Christian theology, they established divine justification for their resistance to Black equality.[36]

For these believers, Trump is the Old Testament king who will save the country for God. He is often compared to King Cyrus, a pagan Persian King who God used to allow the Israelites to go back to Jerusalem, an example where God used someone ungodly to accomplish his purposes.[37] This helps explain why for them, it still does not matter that he is a thrice divorced candidate, and now a convicted felon, facing an additional fifty-six charges in three remaining criminal proceedings. As Religious Studies scholar Anthea Butler explains, Trump's evangelical extremist supporters do not care about his moral stances or issues, or what he says: they care about Whiteness and *their* Whiteness.[38] For them, the United States is like Israel in the Hebrew Bible. "Christian nationalists hold the keys, in their own minds at least," Onishi writes, "to what God wants, what he commands, and who is to blame when the nation gets 'punished.'"[39] Reestablishing strict gender norms and eradicating transness is part of their racialized project.

We're Going to Need More Wall

For years now, political scientists have been sounding the alarm that the United States is close to civil war, in large part because the glue of racism and xenophobia has led to a partnership between the Alt-Right, who want a White ethno-state, and evangelical extremists, who want patriarchy and Christian hegemony in a Christian nation. As Onishi observes, both groups "mourn a mythological America they see as lost to the throes of pluralism, immigration, the expansion of civil rights for people of color and the LGBTQ+ community, and the changing racial demographics of the country."[40] White Christian nationalism has since become an umbrella for a wide coalition. The Alt-Right are offered a religious cover in return for their movement and ideology, which

36 Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster), 32–33.

37 Interview with Stephen Strang, *Evangelicals*, "World Crusade."

38 Interview with Anthea Butler, *Evangelicals*, "World Crusade."

39 Onishi, *Preparing*, 19.

40 Ibid., 112.

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means that the bibles and Christian symbols waved in the air on January 6th only served to legitimize their mission.

If a wall is not enough to keep your neighbor away, you can simply move, isolate yourself from the cities and college towns that are destroying America with their decadence, moral relativism, and dismissal of traditional family values. This exodus is what has been named the American Redoubt by James Wesley Rawles, a former U.S. military intelligence officer.[41] For over a decade, a patchwork of the far-right, including numerous evangelical extremists, have been leaving states like California for Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Eastern Washington, and Eastern Oregon. "Redoubt" means stronghold or fortification, which is fitting for a movement that seeks geographical consolidation, de facto succession, and preparation for "the collapse of the United States and the chance to rebuild a theocratic state."[42] This development worries scholars like Barbara Walter, who sees this election not as a contest for electoral majorities or policy initiatives, but as a test of democracy's endurance against an apocalyptic threat.[43]

I join Onishi and a small choir of voices who believe that in such a crisis point, the time for measured discourse in academia or restrained neutrality in journalism has passed. [44] The question once again that concerns this chapter is not the threat this election poses to trans *citizenship*, but to trans *existence*. This is what I examine through the vigilante and the world crusader figurations.

The Vigilante

Trump actively promotes Schmitt's idea that every citizen must become a combatant once the enemy has been flagged. As a result, ordinary people see themselves as vigilantes responsible for helping to identify, track and defeat the enemy figure. We could see them as accomplices in erecting and guarding the Wall that contains the intruders. When the trans woman became enemy #1 in

41 Ibid., 200, 205. In a blog post, he called for all freedom-loving conservative Americans to relocate in advance of impending economic and political doom (James Wesley Rawles, "The American Redoubt – Move to the Mountain States," Survival, March 24, 2021, https://survivalblog.com/redoubt/).

42 Onishi, *Preparing*, 214.

43 Ibid., 215; Barbara F. Walter, *How Civil Wars Start: And How to Stop Them* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2022).

44 Onishi, *Preparing*, 215.

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2016, vigilantes began an all-out assault on social media and in public spaces. This battle has assumed both legal and extra-legal dimensions. The racist history of the vigilante construct and the violence of current American policing also convey how the consequences of White Christian nationalist policies manifest exponentially for trans and queer people of color.

What is striking about this battle against transness is that it takes place in the most banal of locations: the seedy environs of public toilets and gym locker rooms. In March 2024, the discount gym chain, Planet Fitness, received bomb threats at forty franchises after the notorious far-right account "Libs of TikTok" compiled and shared numerous customer complaints about their trans-inclusive locker room policy.[45] Two videos came from a White, late middle-aged cisgender woman in Alaska. In the first video, she announced that she caught a person whom she perceived to be a trans woman shaving in the women's locker room. She also claimed that their presence was threatening to a young girl of about twelve "sitting in the corner with a towel wrapped around her."[46] She told her viewers, "I realize he wants to be a woman, he gets to be a woman, I love him in Christ … He doesn't like his gender, so he wants to be a woman, but I'm not comfortable with him shaving in my bathroom."[47] A picture she took of the individual was posted alongside the video, but because taking pictures of other clients without their permission violates Planet Fitness policy, her membership was revoked.

After discovering she had been "cancelled" by the gym, she made a second, more irate video, stating that Planet Fitness "is defending the man in the women's locker room, the man with the penis, rather than the child sitting in the corner with the towel wrapped around her."[48] She urges her (assumed) assigned female viewers to be aware of this imminent danger, and to use their au-

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45 Lauren Aratani, "Planet Fitness outlets receive bomb threats after far right derides gym policy," The Guardian, April 13, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/apr/13/planet-fitness-bomb-threats-libs-of-tiktok.

46 Libs of Tik Tok (@libsoftiktok), "UPDATE: The woman who exposed a man shaving in an Alaska Planet Fitness women's locker room with a 12-year-old present just had her membership revoked. Why is @PlanetFitness prioritizing a man with a p*nis using a woman's private space over women's and girls' safety?" X, March 11, 2024, https://x.com/libsoftiktok/status/1768306476374716793.

47 Ibid.

48 Libs of Tik Tok (@libsoftiktok), "Why is @PlanetFitness prioritizing a man with a p*nis using a woman's private space over women's and girls' safety," X, March 14, 2024, https://x.com/HEisGathering/status/1770211271486415272.

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thority to stand up for themselves and to "stop these shenanigans." The woman declared that this locker room at Planet Fitness was now an "unsafe space," and that her next action would be to report "him" to the police. The video received 12.1 million views on X alone and was re-posted 21,000 times. [49]

Here we see the ugly face of transmisogyny emerge within the context of religious beliefs. We see the structural and all-consuming nature of transfeminine hatred, even while it is not clear that this person identifies as a trans woman. The fear of transfemininity is present nonetheless as a very specific category of deviance. As trans historian Jules Gil-Peterson argues, the historical and present-day targeting and separating out of transfeminine individuals involves a spectacle of violence meant to restore moral and relational order, in alignment with state power.[50] A transfeminine person's presence automatically is perceived as an aggression and a threat.

One should not accept as genuine the gym client's love for "him" in Christ when she simultaneously misgenders, humiliates, and degrades them to an audience of millions. However, she enacts a common double move for White evangelical extremists. On the one hand, they are told to love the "sinner," but if they persist in parading their sinful existence about in public spaces, they should be prosecuted, regardless of their *actual* actions. Online sermons help clarify the messaging. In one example, Paula White explains the "love the sinner" viewpoint when she tells her congregants that "[God] doesn't hate the transvestite. God doesn't hate the angry murderer," and if we want to get right with God, we need to stop judging the sinners.[51] This may seem like a somewhat positive message on the surface. However, the "transvestite" and "murderer," are mentioned in the same breath, suggesting these two "sins" are on the same plane. Her use of the historical term "transvestite" also shows how one doesn't have to identify as a trans woman to be targeted, as terms appear in these sermons interchangeably. A transfeminine individual is viewed

49 It must be noted here that X in particular has become an extremely hostile and unmonitored space catering to anti-trans activists since Elon Musk bought the company on April 14, 2022.

50 Kendall Seismier, "Why Do Trans Women Face So Much Violence," June 6, 2024, in *At Liberty*, produced by the ACLU, podcast, MP# audio, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/at-liberty/id1396174920?i=1000658017326, 38:00.

51 Pastor Paula White, "Galatians: The Most Controversial Subjects of the Christian Faith," YouTube, September 10, 2023, https://youtu.be/v6-UrF9w0oY?si=YOQo1KYJXOXoXyTY, 1:14.

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as a sexual aggressor regardless of how they identify or how calm or non-threatening their presence.

Online religious figures reproduce and reframe Trump's transmisogynistic rhetoric. One such pastor is Dutch Sheets, also associated with the NAR. In one of Sheets' sermon, "hate the sin" takes on a diabolical, and political dimension in which Christian nationalism (the title of the sermon) will be forced to compete with "an irreligious nationalism, an unprecedented Satanist theocracy, a transgender dominionism."[52] As in many of these online rants, Christians are portrayed as the victims of a global cabal, and as a result, Sheets, like the woman in Alaska, believes that Christians are being "cancelled." Ideas from the prosperity gospel filter in here, too, in other parts of the sermon. Intersectionality is seen as a threat to "our" God-given equality, because he surmises, it establishes a person's worth as based on how many minority groups they belong to with "trans being Superior to all others." The communist left wants to impose what he calls a "transgender nationalism."

Within this fear of a hostile transgender takeover, transfemininity takes on a specific set of meanings. First, protection of young people from sexual sin is of prime importance for evangelical extremists. The ideology on Godly marriage maintains that sexual purity before marriage, for both girls and boys, secures the entire family line and realizes the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. This ideology comes from the psychologist James Dobson, who founded a parachurch organization called Focus on the Family in 1977, which is still active today. Prior to this, Dobson trained with the eugenicist and original propagator of the Great Replacement theory, Paul Popenoe, whose ideas on the segregation and forced sterilization of "waste humanity" inspired leaders of the Third Reich.[53] Dobson's views on gender, however, came from another twentieth-century conservative, George Gilder, who believed that men are naturally sexually destructive beings and need a wife to tame their uncontrolled instincts. In what religion scholar Sara Moslener describes as a containment theory, without sexual satisfaction and stability, men cannot access produc-

52 Dutch Sheets, "What Is Christian Nationalism? | Give Him 15: Daily Prayer with Dutch," YouTube, May 29, 2024, https://youtu.be/vB-Qi8wpLfQ?si=oBBAAr2SOQDP9ZLT, 1:45.

53 Audrey Clare Farley, "The Eugenics Roots of Evangelical Family Values," Religion & Politics, n.d., https://religionandpolitics.org/2021/05/12/the-eugenics-roots-of-evangelical-family-values/.

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tively their inherent power and authority.[54] This uncontained male power leads to societal destruction – a doomsday scenario. The complementarian model of marriage relies upon this theory, ensuring that the God-given traits of women and men become the basis for the Godly family.

Dobson also spread the belief that the body does not belong to you, but to God, and any sexual sin is a misuse of God's property. Sexual sin not only angers God and stains the family line, but threatens to destroy our country.[55] Daniel Miller, author of *Queer Democracy*, explains that ideas like these have a very long history, and that the body has often been a metaphor for how nations see their collective character and virtue.[56] In White Christian nationalism, the president must reflect the American social body as straight, White, Christian, native born (English-speaking), and patriarchal. To exist in the United States, people not reflecting this ideal must *know their place*.

Taken together, these beliefs help explain the intense fear and anger that transfeminine bodies elicit. For evangelical extremists who believe these ideas about gender and marriage, the person whom they perceive to be a trans woman is an uncontained man. In my view, trans men or transmasculine subjects do not elicit the same fear, because as assigned female subjects, they are already perceived as weaker and incapable of this inherent power and authority. In the mind of someone like Dutch Sheets, White masculinity can be neither "biologically" nor sociologically approximated. The trans woman/uncontained man's wanton sexual urges make certain their capacity and even intent to rape in bathrooms and gym locker rooms, or anywhere else they may be alone with a vulnerable, mother-wife, daughter, or sister who is, by Godly design, submissive and obedient.

Tampering with the body – which is not yours but God's – via medical intervention is also a *sexual* sin of the highest order, and any attempt to change the terms of the gender contract, set forth in the Book of Genesis, puts the whole world in danger. For White evangelical extremists, these everyday spaces become the battle grounds on which the culture wars are waged. Cisgender women, already on high alert, take pictures or videos of transfeminine bodies, and in so doing violate their privacy, dehumanize them for audiences of mil-

54 Sara Moslener, *Virgin Nation: Sexual Purity and American Adolescence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 96; Onishi, *Preparing*, 110.

55 Onishi, *Preparing*, 103.

56 Miller, *Queer Democracy*.

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lions, expose them to police violence and even create the conditions for mass casualties.

Conspiracy theories since the days of radio talk show host Rush Limbaugh in the 1980s have helped to fan these flames of transmisogyny. The Obama administration saw the biggest rise in such theories, and one gained so much appeal that it amounted to what we would call a new common sense. A story circulating on "mrconservative.com" claimed that then-First Lady Michelle Obama was actually a transgender woman named "Michael."[57] According to an interview with an evangelical Trump voter, the claim was verifiable because there are no pictures online of Michelle giving birth to Malia and Sasha. "Anyone knows that," she said, suggesting both the *de rigueur* nature of the fact and its well-seeded logic.[58] This particular conspiracy theory has had a long life, and it recently resurfaced in a February 2024 Super Bowl post by Donald Trump, Jr., who claimed he found an image of "Michael Obama" playing football for the Pittsburgh Steelers [59]

This insidious lie that Michelle Obama is *really* a Black trans woman conjures two primary fears in the minds of evangelical extremists: the fear of Black men as allegedly by nature programmed to rape White women, and fears of the so-called horrors of the Civil Rights Era. Prior to the fight against abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, the conservative evangelical movement found its footing in their opposition to *Brown v. Board of Education,* which made school segregation illegal. There is still the desire to bring back legal segregation in schools through private school voucher programs designed to shield White families from Black and brown students. This fear of desegregation echoes back to a statement made by President Eisenhower, in support of those who opposed the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling on desegregation. Referring to Southerners specifically, he told Chief Justice Earl Warren, "These are not bad people. All they are concerned about is to see that their sweet little [White] girls are

57 Stephanie McCrummen, "Finally. Someone Who Thinks Like Me," The Washington Post, October 1, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/finally-someone-who-thinks-like-me/2016/10/01/c9b6f334-7f68-11e6-9070-5c4905bf40dc_story.html.

58 McCrummen, "Finally."

59 Alex Bollinger, "Donald Trump Jr. Accuses Michelle Obama of Being Transgender in Bizarre Super Bowl Post," LGBTQNation, February 12, 2024, https://www.lgbtqnation.com/2024/02/donald-trump-jr-accuses-michelle-obama-of-being-transgender-in-bizarre-super-bowl-post/.

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not required to sit in school alongside some big Black bucks."[60] Thanks to the speed of online misinformation, in an instant, Michelle Obama becomes that "big Black buck" in women's clothing, which makes evangelical extremists feel on a very personal and intimate level that there is a "sickness" – an ungodliness – plaguing the national body.

The people who spread these conspiracy theories do not perceive their actions as malicious, or in any way conflicting with the Bible's directive to "love thy neighbor." They believe they are fighting the battle for God against Satan, and that no Wall could ever be fortified enough to contain the threat. They feel it is their obligation to convert trans and queer people and to lead them away from their harmful "lifestyle." However, if they do not submit to persuasion, they must be eliminated from society to protect sexual purity and Godly families and to bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth. They are willing to take up arms in this battle, as they have been persuaded by their pastors to eliminate at all costs the demons that inhabit the bodies of non-believers, especially LGBTQ+ people.

These religious views have also assumed a legal dimension, in addition to the extra-legal violence they produce. Some state-level bills passed on abortion and trans care rely on vigilante justice to accomplish their zero-tolerance goals. A law passed in Tennessee in April 2024 makes it a felony to *help* trans youth seek care, including providing information or maps, in person, by text, or by phone.[61] One can imagine the kinds of vigilantism this will inspire, including eavesdropping on conversations, or tracking the physical movements and social media interactions of a so-called suspect. A companion abortion bill, dubbed the "abortion trafficking law," has similar intent: to embolden like-minded followers to go to any lengths necessary to bring these enablers to justice.

Some of these vigilantes may even find their way into employment in the next Trump administration. Project 2025 is also a recruitment hub where visitors may "apply now" to become part of the database that will be used to fill

60 Micheal O'Donnell, "When Eisenhower and Warren Squared Off Over Civil Rights," The Atlantic, April 17, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/commander-v-chief/554045/.

61 Erin Reed, "Tennessee Senate Passes Bill Making 'Recruiting' for Trans Youth Care a Felony," The Advocate, April 14, 2024, https://www.advocate.com/politics/tennessee-senate-bill-trans-youth-felony.

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positions in the federal government. The imprint of White Christian nationalism is obvious in the questions being asked of applicants. One section on the application form is comprised of eighteen, mandatory statements that are to be marked "agree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree." These include: "The U.S. has the right to select immigrants based on country of origin"; "Life has a right to legal protection from conception to natural death"; "The permanent institutions of family and religion are foundational to American freedom and the common good"; and, finally, "The federal government should recognize only two unchanging sexes, male and female, as a matter of policy."

The intent of this last statement is unveiled in the 920-page "playbook" called *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, in which the word "transgender" is mentioned thirteen times and appears first on page five:

> Pornography, manifested today in the omnipresent propagation of transgender ideology and sexualization of children, for instance, is not a political Gordian knot inextricably binding up disparate claims about free speech, property rights, sexual liberation, and child welfare. It has no claim to First Amendment protection. Its purveyors are child predators and misogynistic exploiters of women. Their product is as addictive as any illicit drug and as psychologically destructive as any crime. Pornography should be outlawed. The people who produce and distribute it should be imprisoned. Educators and public librarians who purvey it should be classed as registered sex offenders. And telecommunications and technology firms that facilitate its spread should be shuttered.[62]

Throughout, this "playbook" makes threats and unsubstantiated claims like this one – preying on people's most basic sense of security in the world. Short, clipped sentences, combined with more erudite, knowledgeable-sounding phrasing, appeal to people who have already been told what to believe. Such readers would be encouraged when they encounter the promise to imprison and register as sex offenders those teachers and librarians who want to inform their students about gender and sexuality – at a level appropriate to their age. They would be reassured to hear that so-called real women will be protected from these alleged predators and rapists. The vigilantism that such a document could inspire is simply terrifying.

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62 The Heritage Foundation, *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* (Washington: The Heritage Foundation, 2023), 5.

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This leads to the baffling part of Trumpism: the lack of conscience, even when hatred of the enemy leads to imprisonment, violence and death. This dearth of humanity has been most evident in the Republican lawmakers who draft and pass this kind of draconian legislation. With few exceptions, these lawmakers vehemently dismiss the views of major medical associations, not to mention the tearful testimonies of parents, friends, and allies of trans youth.[63] Because they are fulfilling God's will, they do not feel they are doing anything wrong when 41% of LGBTQ youth surveyed have considered suicide in the last year, or when parents are forced to seek care in one of the fifteen states that have passed shield laws protecting patient healthcare from out-of-state investigations.[64] They do not feel remorse when families are forced to relocate, with all the shame and financial and emotional hardships that come with such a decision. They don't feel responsible when a trans woman politician in the United States with whom I'm acquainted receives disturbing emails, death threats, and messages explicitly advocating that she kill herself and find the nearest chair and rope, or be fed to a wood chipper, or that she is "a waste of biomass ripe for eradication."

Hannah Arendt once spoke about the banality of evil. Evil, she observed, was not monstrous but rather, the consequence of thoughtlessness and the concern for one's own advancement, the utter inability to see things from the perspective of another human being. Some of history's worst actors, she posited, are unable to comprehend their effect on the people they have judged to be their enemies. It is Arendt's most controversial insight, as it was derived from her reporting on the trial of Adolf Eichmann, the Nazi Lieutenant Colonel who fled to Argentina in 1950 but was kidnapped in 1960 in Buenos Aires by the Israeli Secret Service. She writes:

> It is indeed my opinion now that evil is never "radical," that it can only ever be extreme, and that is possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is "thought-defying" …

63 This includes the American Academy of Pediatrics. See Alyson Sulaski Wyckoff, "AAP Reaffirms Gender-Affirming Care Policy, Authorizes Systematic Review of Evidence to Guide Update," AAP News, August 4, 2023, https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/25340/AAP-reaffirms-gender-affirming-care-policy?autologincheck=redirected#.

64 The Trevor Project, "2023 U.S. National Survey on the Mental Health of LGBTQ Young People," n.d., https://www.thetrevorproject.org/survey-2023/; Reed, "Tennessee Senate."

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> because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing. That is its "banality."[65]

Arendt believed that Eichmann was deeply individually and morally responsible for his crimes, but the "word-and-thought-defying *banality of evil*" that she observed was more significant for her than the crimes themselves or their adjudication.[66] She was adamant that this was the *lesson* from the trial of Adolf Eichmann, and not an explanation, phenomenon, or theory, which means it was to be learned from, beyond historical specificities.[67] She feared that if humanity did not learn this lesson, it was doomed to repeat the circumstances that presented it.

The violent rhetoric of the vigilante reminds me of Arendt's lesson. When politically and religiously motivated transmisogyny spreads rapidly, online and off, like this fungus on the surface, it motivates people to take action in the world. To them, the threat posed by so-called transgender nationalism is real and imminent. The claims echoed by Trump and right-wing, evangelical extremist pastors compels everyday people to experience not just panic, but life-threatening dread, when they see a trans person. While some of us are stunned by this tidal wave of anti-trans hatred, there are those who are hungering for a so-called realignment of society, a return to America's alleged greatness before the cultural movements of the 1960s and '70s, which paved the way for a gender revolution and a Black president.

The World Crusader

For some evangelicals, it is not enough to force your beliefs upon an unwilling majority in your own country. They are determined to stand atop the seven mountains of family, government, church, education, business, entertainment, and popular culture – not just in the United States but all over the world. To restore moral order, the symbolic Wall needs to extend from one

65 Hannah Arendt, "'A Daughter of Our People': A Response to Gershom Scholem," in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 2003), 396.

66 Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 252.

67 Ibid., 379.

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continent to the next, as enemies new and old could appear anywhere. This militarized zealotry has given rise to the world crusader.

These crusaders have been exceptionally proficient at attracting followers, in ways that even shock experts. In 2024, sociologists Matthew Taylor and Paul Zupe surveyed self-identified Christians to see how mainstream these once-fringe concepts had become.[68] Taylor and Zupe crafted the questions in very specific ways to match in word and tone the preachings of the New Apostolic Reformation (NAR). There is a widespread belief, for example, that the world is experiencing a pandemic of demon possession, which is responsible for the rise in "transgenderism." When respondents were asked if "there are demonic principalities and powers who control physical territory," 69% said "yes." When asked if "the church should organize campaigns of spiritual warfare and prayer to displace high-level demons," 66% of self-identified evangelicals said "yes," while a third of non-evangelical Christians also said "yes." The results of the survey stunned these scholars, in part because even those not associated with evangelicals had been convinced. And if you really believe that there are "demons controlling your city, your city hall, your state capital, a whole province in another part of the world," then you will feel it is your responsibility to liberate them.[69] At this point in the election cycle, when people on the so-called left speak, they hear only the "demons speaking through them."[70]

As Taylor posits, the right wing in the U.S. now has a kind of "lingua franca" of warfare that often hides behind a more placid, peace-loving veneer.[71] The battles to displace these global enemies are not rhetorical, but literal. Spiritual warfare language is a step toward warfare in real life. In fact, this is the job description of the contemporary evangelical world crusader.

The first world crusader in America was Billy Graham, who led massive Christian revivals in tents and stadiums for fifty years. Graham sold evangelicalism, family values, and the capitalistic American Dream. At home, Graham was the quintessential postwar husband-father, who is captured on film driving his convertible with his wife and five children, singing Christian hymns as

68 Brad Onishi, "NAR Watch Episode 1: The NAR Is Mainstream, Prophesying a Global Caliphate, and the Apostles 'Saving the Jews from Themselves,'" May 14, 2024, in *Straight White American Jesus*, produced by Axis Mundi Media, podcast, https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/straight-white-american-jesus/id1441649707?i=1000655593573, 32:00.

69 Onishi, "NAR Watch Episode 1."

70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

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they sail along on the newly minted American highway system.[72] Unlike the staid church preachers that people were used to in the 1940s and '50s, Graham was magnetic and in tune with modern problems. His vision was grandiose and set on planetary conversion, as shown in his postwar world tours, which were heavily sponsored by devout Christian oil men who shared his desire for so-called international uplift. They helped fund the first Christian media empire, including a radio show called "Hour of Decision" which attracted twenty million listeners.

At that early point, the separation of church and state began to blur. Under Republican President Dwight Eisenhower, Graham became the first White House chaplain, rapidly sealing the Christian alliance with power.[73] As Onishi phrases it, religion became the vehicle and politics the engine.[74] Thanks to Eisenhower, who was converted by Graham, we now have the words "In God We Trust" printed on dollar bills; the phrase "under God" was tacked on to the pledge of allegiance; and the first prayer breakfast was held between political and religious leaders, an annual event to this day.

Christian nationalism is ascendant around the world. At the United Nations, evangelical extremists work together through coalitions like the UN Family Rights Caucus, an NGO which uses human rights language and pseudoscience to protect *their* traditional family values, including the rights of the unborn.[75] However, the United States has the most influential – and richest – evangelical network in the world; there are around 2,000 megachurches internationally, and of those around 1,750 are in the United States (38 in Houston, Texas, alone).[76] A "megachurch" is the kind of venue most capable of spreading anti-trans views on a mass scale, complete with rock bands, movie theater seating, top-notch sound systems, and the financial ability to send missionaries anywhere in the world. These churches spread the so-called "good news" with mind-boggling efficiency.

Nowhere is this more visible than in Kenya, Uganda, and Nigeria. Since the early 2000s, under George W. Bush, the first President truly sympathetic –

72 *Evangelicals*, "World Crusade."

73 Interview with Philippe Gonzalez, *Evangelicals*, "World Crusade."

74 Onishi, *Preparing*, 41.

75 Austin Dacey, "At the UN, Conservative Christian Agenda Cloaked in Human Rights Language," Religion Dispatches, September 23, 2014, https://religiondispatches.org/at-the-un-an-attempt-to-re-cast-childrens-rights-as-family-rights/.

76 *Evangelicals*, "World Crusade."

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and effective – for evangelicals, Africa, imagined as monolithic and undifferentiated, became the desired unconquered territory. In evangelical extremists' view, here was a captive audience, a poor population ripe for the message of the prosperity gospel and an obscure and terrifying anti-LGBT agenda. Reverend Kapya Kaoma recalls how, in Uganda, preachers like Scott Lively of Abiding Truth Ministries sold this agenda in the most extreme terms. Kaoma, who now lives in the United States, observed Lively's appalling lectures in which he claimed that a "homosexual dysfunction" had taken over the United States, and that Uganda would be next if they did not act now. For Reverend Kaoma, some African countries became the "dumping place for his extreme ideas"; in the United States, "he was a nobody," but in some parts of Africa, "he became the spokesperson of American Evangelicalism."[77] Preachers and politicians built their careers and fortunes from this gospel of hate. Lively also influenced parliament, touching off a hysteria against the new "gay enemy," which led Uganda to eventually pass in 2023 one of the most extreme anti-LGBTIQ+ laws in the world.[78]

In Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, and Ghana, where evangelical missionaries have been the most successful, governments have been able to weaponize what Meredith Weiss and Michael Bosia call "political homophobia," or the conscious use of homophobia as a "political strategy, often unrelated to substantial local demands for political rights."[79] Like the state-level bills in the United States, these laws are modular and easily imposed across the continent.[80] Ayodele Sogunro, writing on homophobic law in Nigeria, insists that if we do not understand the social and political context of these laws, we cannot

77 *God Loves Uganda*, dir. Roger Ross Williams, featuring Pastor Robert Kayanja, Pastor Martin Ssempa, Pastor Scott Lively, Lou Engle and Bishop Christopher Senyonjo (Brooklyn: Motto Pictures and Full Credit Productions, 2013).

78 In upholding the law from a legal challenge in 2024, the court used the Dobbs decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade* in the United States as rationale to defend it. See Julianne McShane, "Uganda Cited Dobbs in an Anti-LGBTQ Crackdown. Americans Should Worry Too," Mother Jones, April 4, 2024, https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2024/04/uganda-dobbs-lgbtq-court-law-dobbs-usa-abortion-rights/.

79 Ayodele Sogunro, "An Analysis of Political Homophobia, Elitism and Social Exclusion in the Colonial Origins of Anti-Gay Laws in Nigeria," *African Human Rights Law Journal* 22 (2022), 493–519; Meredith L. Bosia and Michael J. Weiss, "Political Homophobia in Comparative Perspective," in *Global Homophobia: States, Movements, and the Politics of Oppression*, eds. Meredith L. Bosia and Michael J. Weiss (Champaigne: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 2n1.

80 Bosia and Weiss, "Political Homophobia," 6n1.

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expect to fight them effectively.[81] Inspired by Sogunro, I want to situate transmisogyny within the context of White Christian nationalism, which results in what I would call political trans(homo)phobia. While trans people are not explicitly mentioned in African law, they are the ones targeted first and most viciously. Assumed to be uber-gay men rather than transgender, trans women and transfeminine individuals have the lowest life chances. "Gay" can be used as a catch-all phrase in the United States and Uganda, and many people do not know the difference between "trans" and "gay." Trans people would have to pass seamlessly in society to be safe, assuming they would want to. Additionally, such passing requires access to expensive surgeries and medications. This brings me to a point that needs to be made as clearly as possible: *If we want to know what the United States looks like for trans people under another Trump administration, we should look at these African countries, especially Uganda.*

We could think of political trans(homo)phobia acting as the sharpest edge of a long knife, intended to suppress the claims of any minoritized group that challenges established authority. In Uganda and Nigeria, the combination of control of the media, social exclusion, and extreme political rhetoric leads people to either flee, often to South Africa, or to go into hiding. The end goal is the legitimization of the ruling class, who enact these laws in times of political crisis. In a country like Uganda, where 85% of the people are Christian, the church plays a central role.

When the so-called "Kill the Gays bill" was first passed in Uganda in 2014 (and then later dismissed on a technicality), vigilante-enforcers started to appear on every street corner. David Kato, an LGBTIQ+ activist in Uganda, saw the storm clouds gathering: "They [U.S. evangelicals] forget that they are preaching to people who will just take the law into their own hands."[82] This turned out to be a prophetic statement. Soon after this interview, he was bludgeoned to death by an unknown assailant.

The consequences of U.S. evangelical missionaries have been tragic in Uganda. In the new Trumpian autocracy, we can learn from people like David Kato, and unfortunately, from the fate that befell him. As the documentary *God Loves Uganda* conveys, before this, he was an admired member of the LBGTIQ+ community who made sure that the people in his care had the supplies and services they needed.[83] He knew his life was in danger, and yet he made the

81 Sogunro, "Nigeria," 494.

82 David Kato, interviewed in *God Loves Uganda*.

83 *God Loves Uganda*.

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decision to continue his work anyway. Alongside him was Bishop Christopher Senyonjo whose allyship may seem beyond the reach of most people. It must be granted that these are extraordinary individuals, who display what Arendt means by the radicality of good. However, these good actions do not have to be the exceptions. If evil is rootless and empty, Arendt concluded, like the fungus on the surface, then the good is rich, deep like soil, full of mycelium, roots, and nutrients, complex and alive – that is, within our reach.

Kato and Bishop Senyonjo were what I like to call unruly alliances, bonds across difference that occur between people who come to occupy the same pockets of resistance, often during times of political, economic, and environmental crisis.[84] Unruly alliances escape the imprint of fraternal constructs, transcending the limits of identitarian thinking beyond the realm of heteronormative domestic and familial arrangements. They help us to zero in on moments when conditions are ripe for unlikely coalitions to build and grow.

Bishop Senyonjo and his family suffered tremendously for the stand he took on behalf of the LGBTIQ+ community. He was ex-communicated from the Church of Uganda, but instead of turning his back on them, he developed a street ministry, helping out folks like Kato and lending his support wherever he could. After he vocally opposed the first anti-gay law in Uganda in 2013, a tabloid published pictures, names, and addresses of Uganda's "top homos," with Kato and Bishop Senyonjo featured side-by-side. The paper demanded that everyone on the list be hanged.[85]

These threats against his life did not sway him, however, and when he attended Kato's funeral, he intervened against the homophobic priest of his former church and the angry mob he had incited. As the coffin was carried to the burial ground, Bishop Senyonjo knew that if he did not step in, it would have been the end of the service. So, he said, "No." He walked to the gravesite and said farewell properly to David Kato, much to the relief of the mourners who had just been persecuted by the priest and a chorus of voices shouting "kill the gays!" Bishop Senyonjo proceeded to console a crying young person who knelt at David's grave. "Please don't be discouraged," he told them. "God created you, God is on your side." Later in the car with the camera crew, he said, "I am sad but I have not lost hope. It may take years but there is hope for the future."

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84 K. Allison Hammer, *Masculinity in Transition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 3, 114, 208–9.

85 *God Loves Uganda*.

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Conclusion: Theocratic Autocracy in the United States

If Trump is re-elected, in this brave new world, the manufacture of enemies will not have an end, and there would be little peace or rest. Walls, both material and symbolic, will be constructed in communities everywhere, in cities and towns both small and large. The vigilante/world crusaders would be waiting to catch transfeminine individuals in the act of being themselves. A U.S. Navy veteran, defense researcher, and one of the leading trans voices in American politics, Brynn Tannehill, along with Brad Onishi, Daniel Miller, and others, are making the case for a transformation into not just an autocracy, but a theocracy. This would be a situation in which elections are incapable of changing our reality.[86] Frank Schaeffer, the son of the most notorious anti-abortion preacher in the 1970s, and someone who is the most familiar with the origins and direction of this movement, offers this prognosis. "It may seem far-fetched to non-American audiences," he says, but if they get their way, "Saudi Arabia, Iran, and the United States are going to be the big theocracies."[87]

Adding to this scenario is the question looming over our heads: is January 6th an isolated event, a one-time disruption of the peaceful transfer of power, or will it sprout again? In other words, if the Democratic candidate Kamala Harris is duly elected, are the White Christian nationalists, the various groups comprising the Alt-Right, and other Trump supporters preparing to subvert her presidency? No one knows the answer to this question. However, to prevent such a reoccurrence, we would have needed to pass laws that strengthen democracy (e.g., laws aimed at voter suppression and gerrymandering) and prosecute members of the Trump administration for crimes while in office.[88] The deep networks of right-wing extremists who participated in the insurrection at the Capitol would have to have been brought to justice. Virtually no one has been held individually, morally, or legally accountable for their actions – or at least not to scale. Beyond this, there would have to have been some kind of

86 Brynn Tannehill, "There Are Four Postelection Scenarios, and Not One Is Good," The New Republic, March 22, 2024, https://newrepublic.com/article/179966/four-2024-post-election-scenarios-trump; Tannehill, *American Fascism*, 162.

87 Frank Schaeffer interviewed on *Evangelicals: From Faith to Power*, Episode 2, "Evangelicals in Power," ARTEFRC, dir. Thomas Johnson, April 4, 2023, Apple TV, https://tv.apple.com/us/episode/evangelicals-in-power/umc.cmc.ayu8nysu6xml3t4r470jbmv?showId=umc.cmc.6ij909rdmivsx4znjtxl3them.

88 Tannehill, *American Fascism*, 251.

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national reckoning with January 6th and the entire legacy of the Trump administration, from the dehumanization of trans people, to the family separation policy at the southern border, to the irresponsible, deadly, and avoidable response to COVID-19 – a mourning, in other words, for the autocratic attempt that took place, or at the very least, a consensus on reality, *that it did take place,* and a unified determination for it never to happen again. None of this has come to pass.[89]

And for the enemies of the new state, what does it look like if the door shuts, when the threat of state violence is actual, and when the transfeminine person in the locker room can, and must, be prosecuted for existing in public? If there is no ability to change the system, if the door has shut, then individuals must act according to their own conscience and the limitations of their positions within society. If the United States does become a theocratic autocracy in 2025, hope will be found in the people who can – and will – ultimately say "no."

These people will be those who refuse the hereditary logic of the neighbor in Frost's poem, who decline to rebuild the wall, and instead tear it down, knowing that the consequences may be grave, even lethal. As a gender scholar and trans person who refuses to be silent, I hope that there will be more transnational alliances and strategy sharing coalitions among trans and queer folks surviving in oppressive regimes, as have been forming between advocates in Uganda and in the United States for decades. I hope there will be more efforts like this book to understand what it is like to be an American – and a trans American – at this dark point in history. I like to think that if Trump is elected, and we descend this path toward a theocracy, there will be neighbors who refuse this so-called new common sense and become unruly alliances in the fight for trans existence. We must remember that we have choices. We can choose to erect a bigger, higher wall – more impenetrable than ever before – or we can leave the field unfenced and open – free to be as it is, a wild and unruly place where apple trees and pine trees comingle undisturbed.

89 These laws were HR 1, HR 4, HR 8363, HR 2660, which are voting laws primarily aimed at voter suppression and gerrymandering. These would have helped move the GOP closer to the center, allowing them to ignore their radical wing. HR 1, the "For the People Act," is the only one that passed, with Kamala Harris as the tie breaker in the Senate. For a complete discussion on what could have been done to protect democracy during the Biden Presidency, see *American Fascism*, Chapter 11, "The (Nearly) Inevitable Plunge."

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Entangled Drag/Trans Panics: A Reflection on the Intersections of Anti-Gender U.S. Politics and Recent Attacks on Drag Storytelling in Germany and Austria

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The Year of Drag Panics

2023 will be remembered not only as the year of drag panics in the U.S.,[1] but also in Germany and Austria. A number of right-wing, far-right[2] and conservative Christian groups mobilized fiercely and violently against drag story hours (*Drag Lesungen*) – educational events, for example, in public libraries, where drag performers playfully read stories to children. Drag Queen Vicky Voyage, Drag King Eric BigClit, and Julana Gleisenberg, who do drag storytelling events in Munich, describe their program as follows: "[We read] from picture books that tell the stories of different heroes/heroines: boys in dresses, princesses with a mind of their own, the colors blue and pink, rabbits and foxes, discovering their own freedom and much more."[3] The stated objective of the drag story

1 For an overview of anti-drag bans and respective legislations in the U.S., see New Democracy Maps, "Restrictions on drag performances," Movement Advancement Project, n.d., https://www.lgbtmap.org/equality-maps/criminaljustice/drag_restrictions; Tim Squirrell and Jacob Davey, "A Year of Hate: Understanding Threats and Harassment Targeting Drag Shows and the LGBTQ+ Community," Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2023, https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Understanding-Threats-and-Harassment-Targeting-Drag-Shows-and-the-LGBTQ-Community.pdf.

2 In this article, I use 'far right' as an umbrella term that includes both radical right-wing and extreme right-wing actors.

3 Münchner Stadtbibliothek, "Wir lesen euch die Welt, wie sie euch gefällt. Draglesung für Kinder," June 13, 2023, https://www.muenchner-stadtbibliothek.de/veranstaltunge

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hours is to promote diversity and to inspire children's imaginations through the use of non-stereotypically gendered, diverse, and inclusive storytelling.

Figure 7: Poster against Drag Story Hours by the Alternative for Germany (AfD)[4]

In Germany, the far-right party Alternative for Germany (AfD) has in particular publicly agitated against drag story times for children. For example, the chair of a local AfD group in Bavaria and the organizer of a protest rally against a drag story time event in a public library in Munich, Rene Dierkes asserted that these events constitute a form of "psychological harassment of children" with the intent of "indoctrinating them through gender propaganda and early sexu-

n/details/wir-lesen-euch-die-welt-wie-sie-euch-gefaellt-20505. Where not otherwise indicated, all translations by the author.

4 Firm, "Alternative für Deutschland Wahlplakat Bayern 2023," 2023, archive.

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alization."[5] To advertise this protest rally, the AfD put up billboards and posters throughout the city of Munich in the spring 2023 that depict a drag queen in the background – or, in the AfD's imagination, a 'man wearing make-up' – reaching for a scared little boy seated in the foreground.[6] The slogan "Hands off our children! – Ban gender propaganda!" is displayed beneath the image.[7]

Not only did the posters and billboards portray drag queens and trans people as interchangeable, but also as potential 'pedophiles' and 'groomers.' Further, the images made use of anti-Semitic stereotypes and narratives, such as Jews as child abductors and child murderers. The protests organized by the AfD against a drag story time event in Munich were also supported by the prominent and influential anti-gender organization *Demo für Alle* (the demonstration for everyone). Inspired by the French group *La Manif pour tous*,[8] the German organization *Demo für Alle* was established during 2013 and 2014 in the context of a planned reform of the school curriculum in Baden-Württemberg. The Ministry of Education intended to incorporate "the acceptance of sexual diversity" as a fundamental aspect of school education.[9] *Demo für Alle*, a political coalition of Christian conservatives, right-wing and far-right activists, successfully

5 AfD München, "Wahlkampfauftakt in München – Impressionen und Presse zur Demo gegen Genderpropaganda," June 14, 2023, https://www.afd-muenchen.de/tag/paedophilie/.

6 The billboards of the AfD anti-drag campaign can be viewed at Michael Schulze, "Volksverhetzung: Anzeige gegen AfD gestellt," Queer, June 10, 2023, https://www.queer.de/detail.php?article_id=45887.

7 Ibid.

8 A political organization in France, *La Manif pour tous* ("The Protest for all") was responsible for most of the large demonstrations in opposition to the opening of marriage to queer couples. The name *La Manif pour tous* was taken from the French phrase *Le mariage pour tous* ("marriage for all"), the popular term used in France to promote same-sex marriage. The movement supports heteronormative family constellations, agitates against the teaching of 'gender theory' and sex education in French schools, and opposes LGBTIQ+ rights and inclusive education as 'gender ideology.'

9 Anna Lena Oldemeier et al., "Divergenz, Ambivalenz, Kongruenz: Verhältnisbestimmungen zwischen antifeministischem Diskurs und pädagogischem Feld," in *Antifeminismen. 'Krisen' – Diskurse mit gesellschaftsspaltendem Potential?* ed. Annette Henninger and Ursula Birsl (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 231–264; Frauke Grenz, "Let's (Not) Talk About Sex: Eine Analyse von Unsagbarkeiten in der Debatte um den baden-württembergischen Bildungsplan," in *Jahrbuch erziehungswissenschaftliche Geschlechterforschung*, 17, ed. Susann Fegter, Antje Langer, and Christine Thon (Opladen: Budrich, 2021), 185–200; Imke Schmincke, "'Besorgte Eltern' und 'Demo für alle' – das Kind als Chiffre politischer Auseinandersetzungen," Heinrich Böll Stiftung: Gunda-Werner-In-

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organized protests and public rallies against the school reform, claiming that a LGBTIQ+ inclusive education would promote the "early sexualization of children" and that it was an "attempt to indoctrinate" children with "gender ideology."[10]

In this context, Imke Schmincke sheds light on the distinctive role that 'the child' plays in the mobilization strategies of the *Demo für Alle* and in the anti-gender politics of right-wing and far-right organizations more broadly.[11] According to Schmincke, the image of the child functions as a "cipher … in right-wing conservative and right-wing populist arguments against 'early sexualization' and 'gender ideology,'" because the child "secures attention, lends credibility and, above all, moral weight. In these references, children represent innocence and neediness."[12] The trope of the innocent child that needs protection in order to safeguard the future of 'the family' and 'the nation' has also appeared in more recent statements by the *Demo für Alle*, in which the organization explicitly denounces drag storytelling events. They claim that

> so-called Drag Queen Story Hours (DQSH) are about much more than just harmless reading sessions for children. One of the declared aims … is the 'subversion of gender roles.' The pivotal point is therefore gender ideology, which then drives insecure children into the transgender delusion.[13]

This statement by the *Demo für Alle* strongly resonates with the arguments of Dominik Nepp, the chairperson of the Viennese branch of the Austrian far-right political party, the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), and one of the most vocal opponents against drag story hours for children in Austria. In a press re-

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stitute, July 29, 2016, https://www.gwi-boell.de/sites/default/files/uploads/2016/07/input_besorgte_eltern_schmincke.pdf.

10 Grenz, "Let's (Not) Talk About Sex," 192–193.

11 Schmincke, "'Besorgte Eltern' und Demo für alle.'"

12 Ibid., 4.

13 Demo für Alle, "Wie sich Drag Queens in Kinderherzen schleichen," n.d., https://demofueralle.de/2023/04/24/subversive-ziele-wie-sich-drag-queens-in-kinderherzen-schleichen/.

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lease, he requested that drag readings for children be prohibited in Austria.[14] He argues, that

> there must be an end to propagating to children and young people that transgender or gender reassignment is something completely normal. Because there are only two biological sexes, namely man and woman and nothing else. … Any form of indoctrination [such as drag story times] to the contrary must therefore be kept away from children. [15]

The aforementioned statements in conjunction with the posters in Munich serve to illustrate that the FPÖ and the AfD perceive drag story hours as indications of a dangerous 'normalization of trans' and 'gender transgression,' particularly with regard to children. Both of these conservative parties support the prevailing narrative behind anti-gender movements that presents the innocent child as in danger of becoming permanently damaged in its development due to the blurring of 'natural facts' – the existence of only two sexes/genders – through drag story hours.[16]

Analyzing Drag Panics as Trans(gender) Panics

Recent cases of drag panics in Germany and Austria are inextricably linked to what Sally Hines has termed "(trans)gender panics."[17] Such "(trans)gender panics" are part of a broader anti-feminist and anti-gender landscape that has emerged globally over the past decade in particularized geopolitical manifestations.[18] Anti-gender and antifeminist campaigns comprise a heterogeneous group of actors, and not all anti-gender actors are part of the far-right political

14 FPÖ Wien Rathausklub, "Nepp: Drag-Queen-Lesung verbieten, Kinder schützen: Transgender-Propaganda muss von Kindern und Jugendlichen ferngehalten werden," OTS, April 14, 2023, https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20230414_OTS0048/fpoe-nepp-drag-queen-lesung-verbieten-kinder-schuetzen.

15 Ibid.

16 Marie Wittenius, "The transnational anti-gender movement in Europe," Heinrich Böll Stiftung: Gunda Werner Institute, February 3, 2022, https://gwi-boell.de/index.php/en/2022/02/03/the-transnational-anti-gender-movement-europe.

17 Sally Hines, "Sex Wars and (Trans) Gender Panics: Identity and Body Politics in Contemporary UK Feminism," *Sociological Review* 68, no. 4 (2020): 699–717.

18 Marie Wittenius, "The transnational anti-gender movement in Europe."

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spectrum. Yet the respective ideologies and politics of these actors have become a central element of contemporary (new) far-right and right-wing populist groups, particularly in Austria and Germany.[19] Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, amongst others, argue that an "obsession with gender" has become "an omnipresent mark in right-wing discourse,"[20] especially with respect to the centrality of racialized and "ethnosexist" images of 'white (German/Austrian) women' who need to be protected from 'foreigners.'

Furthermore, the terms "gender ideology" and "early sexualisation" have become highly resonant in right-wing and far-right groups in Germany and Austria and would not have become so well-known without their inclusion in the respective parties' political narratives and campaigns.[21] Within the heterogeneous antifeminist and anti-gender movements, the terms "gender" and "gender ideology" function as "empty signifiers" that can be imbued with various meanings,[22] as Birgit Sauer and Stefanie Mayer contend. "Gender" can stand for the alleged threat that equality policies pose to the natural order of the sexes; it can also stand for the so-called ideology of gender studies, or for the danger that LGBTIQ+ rights and LGBTIQ+ inclusive education supposedly pose to 'normal' families and the future of the nation and children's well-being.

According to Birgit Sauer, this implies that very different topics can be invoked with or against 'gender' and incorporated into a strategy against 'those up there' and against supposed 'others.'[23] However, as Sauer points out, opposition to and mobilizations against 'gender' also have to be understood as part of

19 Juliane Lang and Ulrich Peters, "Antifeminismus in Deutschland Einführung und Einordnung des Phänomens," in *Antifeminismus in Bewegung: Aktuelle Debatten um Geschlecht und sexuelle Vielfalt*, ed. Juliane Lang and Ulrich Peters (Hamburg: Marta Press, 2018), 11–33; Annette Henninger and Ursula Birsl (eds.), *Anti-Feminismen: 'Krisen'-Diskurse mit gesellschaftsspaltendem Potential* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020); Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020).

20 Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth, "Right-Wing Populism and Gender: A Preliminary Cartography of an Emergent Field of Research," in *Right-Wing Populism and Gender: European Perspectives*, eds. Gabriele Dietze and Julia Roth (Bielefeld: transcript, 2020), 7.

21 Wittenius, "The transnational anti-gender movement in Europe."

22 Stefanie Mayer and Birgit Sauer, "'Gender Ideology' in Austria: Coalitions around an Empty Signifier," in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing against Equality*, eds. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 19–30.

23 Birgit Sauer, "Anti-feministische Mobilisierung in Europa: Kampf um eine neue politische Hegemonie?" *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Politikwissenschaften* 13, no. 3 (2019): 339–352.

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a broader struggle for "hegemony" by the far right and within right-wing populism. In this context, not only are gender and sexual relations continuously negotiated but so is the meaning of democracy itself and the relationship between the state and its citizens. [24] At the same time, 'gender' and 'gender ideology' function as a unifying force and a multi-purpose enemy that serves to encourage cooperation between various parts of the political spectrum, especially those on the Christian conservative, right-wing, and far-right end of the spectrum.

Anti-gender discourse and respective key terms such as "gender ideology," "early sexualization," "indoctrination," and "Trans Lobby" provide a transnational, unifying meta-language for diverse political groups and actors.[25] It is therefore evident that contemporary protests against drag story hours in Germany and Austria can be situated within a global anti-trans, anti-gender and anti-feminist discourse, as respective tropes and key terms are mobilized in this context.

Drag Story Hours as Catalysts for Anti-Gender Campaigns

However, I also contend that drag story times serve as a *particular powerful catalyst* for anti-gender campaigns. Several contentious issues that were already targeted in contemporary right-wing, anti-feminist and anti-gender politics in Germany and Austria can *simultaneously* be addressed when agitating against drag storytelling events. On the one hand, drag story hours are portrayed as the *epitome* of the so-called early sexualization of children. On the other hand, they are represented as the *pinnacle* of 'indoctrinating gender ideology,' as they 'target' children while propagating the 'lie' of 'transgenderism' and promoting the destruction of the 'normal family' at a 'family event.' In light of the growing internationalization of anti-gender narratives and movements, critiques of drag readings have proven to be instrumental points of reference for a wide range of political actors from the right-wing, far-right, conspiratorial, and Christian conservative spectrum. Anti-drag rhetoric plays an important role in transnational networks and discourses, while, at the same

24 Birgit Sauer, "Anti-feministische Mobilisierung in Europa."

25 Agnieszka Graff, Ratna Kapur, and Suzanna Danuta Walters, "Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 44, no. 3 (2019): 541–560.

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time, allowing for a "very localized flavour" of protests against drag story hour events.[26] Local far-right and/or anti-gender groups represent these protest as 'protecting' and 'safeguarding' their city, family, and nation.

In addition to the public criticism of drag story times by far-right political parties in Austria and Germany, there have been instances of violence directed against drag story hour events that were framed as protective measures. As early as in 2022, Austrian members of the *Identitarian Movement*, a pan-European, extremist, violent, and anti-democratic far-right organization with connections to the AfD and the FPÖ, blocked the entrance to a public library in Vienna where a drag story time event was scheduled to be part of the library's Pride Month celebrations.[27] A red, white, and red wall in the colors of the Austrian national flag was erected overnight and bore the inscription "#NoPrideMonth." Flyers were distributed, warning against a "state-financed Globohomo-Ideology" and "early sexualization."[28]

The term "globohomo" is used by a wide range of right wing, far-right, conspiracist and (white) nationalist groups in Europe and the U.S. to organize against the alleged threat of a global plot by the LGBTIQ+ lobby that is said to control the world.[29] The term "globohomo" has anti-Semitic connotations and continues to be used by alt-right and far-right extremists in the context of (violent) attacks on drag story time events in the U.S.[30]

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26 Mark Chou, Rachel Busbridge, and Benjamin Moffitt, "The Far Right Goes Local: What the Precinct Strategy and Drag Queen Story Hour Attacks Tell Us about the Far Right's Local Ambitions," C-REX – Center for Research on Extremism, May 28, 2024, https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2024/far-right-goes-local.html.

27 Der Standard, "Wien: Rechtsextreme mauerten vor Dragqueen-Lesung Eingang zu Bücherei zu," June 3, 2022, https://www.derstandard.de/story/2000136283306/wien-rechtsextreme-betonierten-buechereieingang-vor-lesung-einer-dragqueen-zu.

28 Ibid.

29 GLAAD, "Guide to Anti-LGBTQ Online Hate and Disinformation," 2024, https://glaad.org/smsi/anti-lgbtq-online-hate-speech-disinformation-guide/.

30 Advocate, "Neo-Nazis Chanting 'Sieg Heil' Target Drag Queen Story Event," March 13, 2023, https://www.advocate.com/news/ohio-nazi-drag-story-hour.

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International Networks of Anti-Drag Story Time Organizations

More recent research indicates that the German/Austrian *Identitarian Movement*, the AfD, and the FPÖ, have all developed a wide range of international contacts with various groups and parties from the (violent) far-right and alt-right end of the political spectrum; this includes parts of the Republican Party surrounding Donald Trump.[31] These networks are also intertwined with anti-feminist and anti-gender organizations from the Evangelical Christian conservative spectrum that are mostly based in the U.S.[32] In the context of European far-right parties and political movements, Trump has emerged as a particularly important figure. Dawid Aristotelis Fusiek and Cecilia Marconi argue that since 2016, "Trump [has] take[n on] the role of 'international godfather' and inspiration for the European far right," and that he has "become a heroic figure" in respective political contexts.[33]

In their analysis of the same trend, Kofi Arhin, Daniel Stockemer, and Marie-Soleil Normandin also highlight the growing parallels between the Republican Party under Trump and far-right parties in Europe.[34] They posit that Trump has "transformed the Republican Party into a party that closely resembles populist radical right-wing parties in Europe" and that the Trump led Republican Party "has become a prototypical radical right-wing party" with

31 Counter Extremism Project Germany, "Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures," November 2020, https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/CEP%20Study_Violent%20Right-Wing%20Extremism%20and%20Terrorism_Nov%202020.pdf; Rita Abrahamsen, "Nationalist Internationalists? The Strange Paradoxes of the Global Right," Centre for International Policy Studies, September 9, 2019, https://www.cips-cepi.ca/2019/09/09/nationalist-internationalists-the-strange-paradoxes-of-the-global-right/.

32 David Paternotte and Roman Kuhar, "The Anti-Gender Movement in Comparative Perspective," in *Anti-Gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing Against Equality*, eds. Roman Kuhar and David Paternotte (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 253–276; Agnieszka Graff, Ratna Kapur, and Suzanna Danuta Walters, "Introduction: Gender and the Rise of the Global Right."

33 Dawid Aristotelis Fusiek and Cecilia Marconi, "Trumpism and the European Far Right: An Analysis of Trumpism's Impact on the Post-2016 AfD, Lega Nord, and Fidesz," *Środkowoeuropejskie studia polityczne* 12, no. 4 (2021): 61–84, 61.

34 Kofi Arhin, Daniel Stockemer, and Marie-Soleil Normandin, "The Republican Trump Voter: A Populist Radical Right Voter Like Any Other?" *World Affairs* 186, no. 3 (2023): 572–602.

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strong similarities to the Alternative for Germany Party.[35] The similarity between the Republican Party under Trump and the AfD is also demonstrated by the importance of anti-gender and anti-LGBTIQ+ discourse during Trump's presidency from 2016–2021 and is further reflected in his current election campaign.

As Julie Moreau elucidates: "Hostility toward LGBT people" can be analyzed as part of a larger set of anti-gender and anti-immigrant rhetoric "that explains Trump's popularity."[36] Not only was Trump's presidency characterized by its political homo- and transphobia and multiple attacks on LGBTIQ+ and reproductive rights, but Trump has also publicly declared that he plans to roll back a number of LGBTIQ+ anti-discrimination regulations and LGBTIQ+ citizenship rights during his 2024 election campaign. In particular, he has highlighted his opposition to gender-affirming care – or what he has called "transgender insanity" in minors.[37]

Additionally, a number of Republican politicians have been engaged in efforts to prohibit drag performances in front of children, or in public spaces, more generally.[38] Since 2023, over forty discriminatory anti-drag bills have been drafted with the intention of criminalizing drag performances and nonconforming gender expressions in public. However, some of these legal initiatives are currently on hold.[39] The website *Trans Legislation Tracker* shows that thirty-seven bills with anti-trans content were introduced on the federal level in 2023, across categories like healthcare, student athletics, the military,

35 Ibid., 572.

36 Julie Moreau, "Trump in Transnational Perspective: Insights from Global LGBT Politics," *Politics & Gender* 14, no. 4 (2018): 619–648, 620.

37 ACLU, "Trump on LGBTQ Rights: Rolling Back Protections and Criminalizing Gender Nonconformity," June 13, 2024, https://www.aclu.org/news/lgbtq-rights/trump-on-lgbtq-rights-rolling-back-protections-and-criminalizing-gender-nonconformity; James Pollard, "GOP candidates elevate anti-transgender messaging as a rallying call to Christian conservatives," The Associated Press, February 18, 2024, https://apnews.com/article/lgbtq-transgender-republicans-trump-christian-conservatives-election-83becc009d8123d96a75c2e4940ab339.

38 Squirrell, and Davey, "A Year of Hate."

39 Center for Education, Research, and Advocacy, "Understanding Drag Bans: The Latest Legislative Attacks on Queer Communities," Howardbrown, March 21, 2023, https://howardbrown.org/understanding-drag-bans-the-latest-legislative-attacks-on-queer-communities/.

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incarceration, and education. In 2024, forty-four anti-trans bills had been passed at the point of writing, in July 2024.[40]

The International Implications of Assaults on Drag Story Hours

Consequently, it is important to consider the international implications of the recent assaults on drag story times in Germany and Austria and how they are linked to anti-gender and far-right politics in the U.S., particularly with regard to Donald Trump. Prominent politicians from the Alternative for Germany Party (AfD) and the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) travelled to the United States shortly before they launched their own anti-drag campaigns. In the U.S., these politicians attended various meetings with political supporters of Donald Trump and his right-wing agenda.

Just one month before the aforementioned FPÖ politician Dominik Nepp started to agitate against drag story hours in Vienna, he engaged in discussions with members of the right-wing faction of the Republican Party and attended a speech delivered by Donald Trump.[41] While publicly demonizing drag story hours for children in Vienna, Nepp also made explicit reference to 'positive' developments in the U.S. He lauded the Republican Party's anti-drag and anti-trans policies, and referred in particular to political and legal initiatives in Tennessee that are aimed at banning drag story hours for children.[42] In March 2023, Dominik Nepp also succeeded in convening a special session of the Vienna city council on the potential dangers of drag story times for children. In his address to the city council, he once again linked drag story hours to questions of trans rights and also praised the growing opposition to drag storytelling events in the United States.[43] He argued that in the U.S. "there is already massive opposition from people in the mainstream, from normal families, who

40 Trans Legislation Tracker, "2024 anti-trans bills tracker," 2024, https://translegislation.com/.

41 Wien heute, "Nepp und Vilimsky besuchen in USA Trump-Auftritt," heute.at, February 21, 2024, https://www.heute.at/s/nepp-und-vilimsky-besuchen-in-usa-trump-auftritt-120021112.

42 ORF Wien, "FPÖ: Drag-Queen-Shows für Kinder verbieten," ORF Wien, March 9, 2023, https://wien.orf.at/stories/3197965/.

43 Wiener Landtag, "Wörtliches Protokoll der 21. Sitzung vom 24. März 2023, 21. Wahlperiode," Wiener Landtag, March 24, 2023, https://www.wien.gv.at/mdb/ltg/2023/ltg-021-w-2023-03-24-001.htm.

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say 'We don't want our children to be indoctrinated in schools, in private institutions or by the state.'" [44] According to Nepp, the U.S. can serve as a role model for how for how to effectively halt "this transgender agenda [of holding drag story times] in Vienna." [45]

In December 2022, another European delegation, comprised of members of the AfD and the FPÖ, attended a meeting of the New York Young Republican Club (NYYRC).[46] The objective of this meeting was, among other things, to enhance transnational and transatlantic collaborations among right-wing and far-right political groups and parties. Two Freedom Party of Austria politicians, Maximilian Krauss and Gerald Grosz, numbered among the delegates. Prior to their visit to the United States, Krauss and Grosz had already engaged in anti-gender and anti-LGBTQ+ discourse. Yet their rhetoric against drag story times and trans rights intensified following their visit to the United States. In April 2023, Gerald Grosz posted a social media video directed against the "gender madness of drag queens at school," in which he argues that drag storytelling events are a form of "thought terrorism" (*Gesinnungsterror*) that needs to be "cleaned up."[47] Maximilian Krauss declared in a press release that the new "gender madness in Viennese schools must be stopped immediately," demanding that trans girls, who are, in his view, "young, highly pubescent men" should be banned from female restrooms.[48] Further, Maximilian Krah attended the previously mentioned meeting of far-right and right wing delegates in New York. Krah is a former member of the European Parliament who represented the German Alternative for Germany before the AfD was kicked out of the far-right coalition in the European Parliament because of Krah's

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Sandra Schieder and Fabian Schmid, "Freedom Party im Trump-Land: Die USA-Reisen der FPÖ," Der Standard, January 6, 2023, https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000142294314/freedom-party-im-trump-land-die-usa-reisen-der-fpoe; De:hate, "AfD und FPÖ-Abgeordnete zu Besuch bei US-Rechtsextremen," Belltower News, December 15, 2022, https://www.belltower.news/netzwerke-afd-und-fpoe-abgeordnete-zu-besuch-bei-us-rechtsextremen-144367/.

47 Gerald Grosz, "Gender-Irrsinn: Drag-Queens im Unterricht?!" Facebook, April 25, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/DK.Nachrichten/videos/gender-irrsinn-drag-queens-im-unterricht-ein-kommentar-von-gerald-grosz/1022855125763609/.

48 FPÖ Wien Rathausklub, "FPÖ – Krauss: Genderirrsinn in Wiener Mittelschule muss umgehend gestoppt werden," OTS, November 16, 2023, https://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20231116_OTS0152/fpoe-krauss-genderirrsinn-in-wiener-mittelschule-muss-umgehend-gestoppt-werden.

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affirmative statements about the SS (the paramilitary elite corps of the Nazi Party, responsible for the institutional murder and democide of more than twenty million people during the Holocaust).

The German Domestic Intelligence Services (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) has categorized Maximilian Krah's political ideology as "völkisch nationalist," "Islamophobic" and "anti-democratic;" it has stated that Krah advocates for ethno-pluralistic positions and socializes in New Right circles.[49] Krah also actively promotes misogynistic, anti-LGBTIQ+ and anti-gender ideologies, and, for instance, argues that "real men vote right-wing," that Pride Month is "disgusting," and that "Gender theory is nonsense and feminism is cancer."[50]

In December 2022, a delegation of members of the AfD and the FPÖ met with Donald Trump Jr. and with the far-right, ultra-conservative politician and congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene. Greene is also known for her vocal support of Donald Trump and his right-wing radicalization of the Republican Party. She is perceived as a staunch opponent of trans rights, particularly with regard to gender-affirming care for trans youth. Greene's anti-Semitic, conspiracist, and trans-hostile statements have attracted attention on a number of occasions.[51] The delegation also convened with Steve Bannon, a former advisor to President Trump and one of the far-right media strategists behind the Make America Great Again campaign. Bannon recently asserted in German media that he intends to actively endorse and support the Alternative for Germany.[52] In 2017, the AfD had already sought support from Republican media strategists. The AfD Party employed the U.S. graphic design company Harris

49 Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz, "Verfassungsschutz-Gutachten zur Alternative für Deutschland," tp-presseagentur, January, 2019, https://tp-presseagentur.de/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Verfassungsschutz-Gutachten-AfD.pdf.

50 Henrik Düker, "AfD-Politiker zu LGBTQ: 'Echte Männer sind rechts,'" Campact Blog, May 8, 2024, https://blog.campact.de/2024/05/afd-zu-lgbtq-echte-maenner-sind-rechts-homonational/.

51 Brooke Migdon, "Marjorie Taylor Greene takes aim at gender-affirming care for trans youth,'" The Hill, March 3, 2023, https://thehill.com/homenews/house/3882637-marjorie-taylor-greene-takes-aim-at-gender-affirming-care-for-trans-youth/; GLAAD, "Marjorie Taylor Greene," October 25, 2023, https://glaad.org/gap/marjorie-taylor-greene/.

52 Kleiser Anna, "Warum Steve Bannon der AfD helfen will," ZDF, April 9, 2024, https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/politik/bannon-trump-afd-deutschland-war-room-podcast-100.html.

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Media, which has a reputation for having radicalized the electoral campaigns of Republican candidates in the U.S. as well as of other conservative and far-right political parties internationally.[53]

The Implications of Drag Panics

What are the implications of these developments in terms of the 2024 U.S. elections? Firstly, drag story time events serve as a significant *transnational mobilization point*, which provides a meta-language for a diverse array of political parties and groups, ranging from the alt right to right-wing branch(es) of the Republican Party, to the Christian right, and the New Right in Germany and Austria. On the one hand, attacks on drag storytelling events occur in reaction to local circumstances. Yet, on the other hand, anti-gender concepts such as so-called early sexualization, gender indoctrination, and the trope of drag performers as 'groomers' facilitate transnational connections between various right-wing actors and groups. These concepts and tropes enable far-right European groups such as the AfD and the FPÖ to connect with and be supported by right-wing, alt-right, and Christian conservative branches of the Republican Party, despite their differences.

Secondly, it is crucial to consider conservative, right-wing, and Evangelical U.S. organizations' significant financial investments in anti-gender campaigns in Europe, for instance, in the support of organizations such as the *Demo für alle,* which also has strong ties to the Alternative for Germany. In 2020, the independent international media platform *openDemocracy* created the largest database to document how right-wing U.S. Christian groups that oppose LGBTIQ+, sexual and reproductive rights spend their money in Europe.[54] Research from *OpenDemocracy* reveals that respective organizations may have already spent up to ninety million U.S. dollars. For example,

53 Nicole Doerr, "The Visual Politics of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): Anti-Islam, Ethno-Nationalism, and Gendered Images," *Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (2021): 1–15; Melanie Amann, "U.S. Ad Agency Boosts Right-Wing Populist AfD," Der Spiegel, August 30, 2017, http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/u-s-ad-agency-boosts-right-wing-populist-afd-a-1164956.html.

54 Nandini Naira Archer, "US Christian anti-LGBT 'hate group' spent more than $20m in Europe," openDemocracy, October 27, 2020, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/us-christian-anti-lgbt-20m-europe/.

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the American Center for Law and Justice financed the organization's European branch, the ECLJ, which defended Poland's restrictive abortion laws in the European Court of Human Rights. This organization is led by Donald Trump's former lawyer, who is also a financial supporter of his current election campaign, Jay Sekulow.[55]

It is important to shed light on international and translocal dimension of right-wing and far-right anti-gender politics and to take account of what Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash have described as a new form of transnational "heteroactivism."[56] In their view, "heteroactivism" involves more than organized mobilization against LGBTIQ+-rights and the promotion of a particular type of conservative anti-gender discourse. Rather, Browne and Nash demonstrate how contemporary 'anti-gender' and 'anti-LGBTIQ+' campaigns produce new, highly specific political narratives that aim to recuperate and reaffirm the place of the heteronormative couple and family as that which is best for society and best for children. However, these narratives always manifest themselves in manners that are particular to their specific local contexts. Hence, in examining the transnational entanglements of the AfD, and the FPÖ, and Trump's far-right Republican Party, it is essential to account for the central role that (white) heteronormativity plays in these parties' anti-drag and anti-gender politics and mobilizations. Anti-drag politics represent more than a backlash against LGBTIQ+ rights. These politics also constitute more than a political movement designed to oppose and delegitimize LGBTIQ+ rights. Rather, anti-drag mobilizations aim to re-establish (white) cis-heteronormative gender structures in alignment with the existing neoliberal and post-/neocolonial world order. They aim to erase – literally and symbolically – everything else.

Thirdly, the potential victory of Donald Trump in the 2024 presidential election will result in the strengthening of anti-gender, heteroactivist, and right-wing mobilizations on discursive and symbolic levels, as well as on material ones. It can be anticipated that far-right Austrian and German parties will view Donald Trump's presidency and a Republican Party that has demonstrated a

55 Tatev Hovhannisyan, "The U.S. Funding behind the Anti-Gender Movements in Europe," IWM, n.d., https://www.iwm.at/publication/iwmpost-article/the-us-funding-behind-the-anti-gender-movements-in-europe, post 131.

56 Kath Browne and Catherine Nash, "Heteroactivism," *Lambda Nordica* 25, no. 1 (2020): 72–80.

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strong commitment to anti-trans and anti-drag policies as a model for politics in Germany and Austria. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, images of Trump were utilized in political protests against pandemic health regulations that were organized by far-right and conspiracist groups.[57]

In this context, Trump was regarded as a "hero who stands up to the elite and endeavors to save the people."[58] In 2016, the Alternative for Germany was among the first political organizations in Germany to congratulate Donald Trump on his election victory, stating that the party would be a "natural ally at his side."[59] Trump has thus already "become the new symbol of the German far-right," [60] and this symbolism is likely to become all the more powerful if he wins the 2024 elections. This is especially the case due to the increased role of anti-gender rhetoric by far-right parties in Germany and Austria as well as by Trump's Republican Party during the last few years. Should Trump be elected for a second term, the normalization of anti-democratic, anti-LGBTI+, anti-gender, and far-right positions in Germany and Austria will be advanced further.

Attacks on Drag Performances as Global Assaults on Democracy

It is imperative to recognize that anti-drag politics and related mobilizations extend beyond the scope of single gender or sexual minority-related issues. Rather, attacks on drag story times and performances relate to broader efforts to de-democratize society and render it more authoritarian. Attacks on drag performances and opposition to sexual and gender diversity constitute global assaults on democracy. They are part of the weakening of democratic citizenship, democratic deliberation, and democratic norms and institutions. Thus, drag storytelling events are fundamentally about democracy itself. Drag story times concern the practice and possibility of imagining and creating more di-

57 Clara Meyer, "Why has Donald Trump become the new symbol of the German far-right?" Euronews, September 22, 2020, https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2020/09/22/why-has-donald-trump-become-the-new-symbol-of-the-german-far-right.

58 Ibid.

59 Kay-Alexander Scholz, "AfD and Trump," DW, February 1, 2017, https://www.dw.com/en/germanys-right-wing-afd-and-donald-trump/a-37373538.

60 Meyer, "Why has Donald Trump become the new symbol of the German far-right?"

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verse and inclusive political communities with (our) children and future generations.[61]

61 This article is based on discussions in the COST Action "LGBTI+ Social and Economic (In)Equalities" (CA19103).

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U.S. Presidential Elections and their Impact on LGBTIQ+ Communities and Activism across the African Continent

Mariel Reiss (University of Marburg, Germany) with contributions by Kevin Besong, Adrian Jjuuko, Āryā Jeipea Karijo, Belinda Qaqamba Makinana, Nozizwe Ntesang, Khanyisile Phillips, Omar van Reenen, Ayodele Sogunro, and Monica Tabengwa

> Changes in American leadership can influence funding for LGBTI initiatives, transnational solidarity efforts, norms surrounding gender and sexuality, human rights discourses, and the dynamics of anti-gender movements.
> – Nozizwe Ntesang[1]

Introduction

The effects of presidential elections in the U.S. have historically been wide-reaching. This is even more so the case during times of globalized human rights contestations – specifically for already marginalized communities, such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, and queer (LGBTIQ+) communities. The outcomes will be felt on different levels in the lived realities of LGBTIQ+ persons in many countries across the world. They will impact norms discourses, development cooperation, policies, and new legislation. This chapter sheds light on the impact of the elections on LGBTIQ+ communities across the African continent. To this end, the text brings together

1 Nozizwe Ntesang, Interview with Nozizwe Ntesang, written questionnaire, May 23, 2024.

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the voices of (organized) civil society activists from Botswana, Cameroon, Kenya, Namibia, Nigeria, Uganda, and South Africa. The contributors Kevin Besong, Adrian Jjuuko, Āryā Jeipea Karijo, Belinda Qaqamba Makinana, Nozizwe Ntesang, Khanyisile Phillips, Omar van Reenen, Ayodele Sogunro, and Monica Tabengwa share their perceptions about the impact the 2024 U.S. presidential elections will have on norms and rights discourses, legislation, and development cooperation in their respective national and regional contexts.

In order to capture perspectives from activists situated within different national and regional African contexts, a questionnaire was sent out. I approached fifteen activists working towards advancing the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons on national, regional, and international governance levels. The questions revolved around the general impact of U.S. American discourses about the human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons, the impact of previous U.S. presidential elections as well as the expected impact of the upcoming election on various African contexts. Out of the nine responses, I conducted two interviews online,[2] and the other persons replied in writing.

This chapter is clustered around the topics raised by the experts including as much of the content of the interviews as space allows. The interviewed experts have backgrounds in the social sciences, legal studies, development cooperation, and social work. They bring various situated perspectives to this chapter. They speak from the perspective of activists and/or members of LGBTIQ+ communities and are engaged in organized civil society networks or organizations. They are experts on their lived realities and have many years of work experience in activism, advocacy, and litigation. They are best placed to speak to the topic of this chapter. Thus I am including as much content from the written statements and the interviews as possible, acting only to weave them together and contextualize them.

The denomination of sexual orientation and gender identity under the umbrella acronym LGBTIQ+ is a largely Western conceptualization, one that is heavily influenced by debates in the U.S.A. The term and acronym render invisible non-Western descriptions and designations. The continuation and reproduction of (post)colonial structures need to be reflected on, as does the use of the 'common' abbreviation, which makes other terms, identifications, bodies, and lived realities invisible. This is in itself highly problematic and a continuation of hierarchical power dynamics. Furthermore, it is important to note that

2 One interview was with Monica Tabengwa, the other was with Belinda Qaqamba Makinana and Khanyisile Phillips.

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the acronym is an oversimplification of the different identities, lived realities and the intersections of identities of the people it tries to describe. At the same time, the umbrella acronym also serves as a unifier in transnational struggles and is used not only by the activists contributing to this piece but the wider international communities.

My own situatedness is that of a *white*, lesbian, cis-woman, a trained political scientist, and a postdoctoral researcher at a German University. I conduct research in eastern and southern African national and regional contexts on norms and rights discourses surrounding LGBTIQ+ persons and communities, the colonial legacies of anti-LGBTIQ+ laws and norms, such as those of 'UnAfricanness' as well as violence unfolding from colonialism (until) today. I have collaborated with most of the contributors to this chapter previously, and we will continue to work together in various projects.

The insights from the nine contributors are reflected on and discussed in three sections. First, the chapter describes the ways in which discourses in the U.S. impact on LGBTIQ+ related discussions in the national and regional contexts of the activists who have contributed their perspectives. Second, the chapter focuses on the impact that previous administrations in the U.S. have had with regard to the rights and norms discourses concerning LGBTIQ+ people and communities. Third, the text reflects on the activists' expectations regarding the upcoming U.S. presidential elections in November 2024, and details how they believe the election outcomes will make themselves felt national and regional discourses about LGBTIQ+ rights.

The Impact of U.S. American Discourses on the Human Rights of LGBTIQ+ persons and Norm Contestations

> When the U.S. sneezes, the world catches a cold.[3]

The following insights shed light on just how deeply debates in the U.S.A. are felt in the African countries included in this analysis when it comes to the human rights of LGBTIQ+ populations. When Khanyisile Phillips states that "when the U.S. sneezes, the world catches a cold," she is referring to is

3 Khanyisile Phillips, Interview with Khanyisile Phillips, transcribed audio recording, May 24, 2024.

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the right-wing movements that have gained ground during the past decade and the de jure and de facto developments concerning the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons that have accompanied these movements. These changes can be seen in the U.S., but they are also "spilling over to various parts of Africa," as Belinda Qaqamba Makinana adds in the interview I conducted with the two activists from South Africa. This notion was shared by many of the contributors to this text. In what follows, this insight is further unpacked with regard to two issues: one, the impact that norms and rights discourses have, specifically, the power of U.S. American anti-LGBTIQ+ movements; and North-South relations, particularly with a view to donor dependency but also in relation to transnational solidarity.

Belinda Qaqamba Makinana continues:

> Narratives on "let's protect the child" and these anxieties specifically around gender that are created, and this fear about how gender is made to be something to fear – as something that is there to influence children, something that exists to influence freedom and really trouble the notion of family – which is then turned into something that needs to be protected. Specifically, with the elections in America, we see, and I mean this particularly for the Trump era, this moving towards right-wing politics and restrictions of human rights. So, we see this move to the right, which we are also now starting to see playing out in Africa, which threatens human rights and LGBTIQA+ rights further.[4]

Namibian activist Omar van Reenen underscores this notion:

> Trump's rollback of protections for trans persons has also emboldened local anti-rights groups to create a hostile environment and policymakers to strengthen their regressive approach to laws. We saw this with the passage of anti-LGBTQ bills which mirror that of state legislatures long after Trump's presidency.[5]

Nozizwe Ntesang stresses this when she says:

4 Belinda Qaqamba Makinana, Interview with Belinda Makinana, transcribed audio recording, May 24, 2024.

5 Omar van Reenen, Interview with Omar van Reenen, written questionnaire, May 25, 2024.

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> [A]s a queer researcher from Botswana with extensive advocacy experience across East and Southern Africa, I have witnessed the significant impact of American discourses on lesbian, bisexual, and queer (LBQ) organizing and communities in our region. The globalized nature of the world and the disproportionate power wielded by nations like the U.S.A. inevitably shapes the landscape of LGBTQI rights and activism in Africa. The ripple effects of American discourses on LBQ communities are profound, touching upon various aspects of activism and social change.[6]

Ntesang unpacks this further with a view to southern African countries, such as Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa, when she states that they

> have made, and continue to make, strides towards decriminalization and legal recognition of LGBTQI rights. However, the anti-LGBTQI sentiments sweeping through East Africa, fueled by religious fundamentalists often supported by American actors, pose significant challenges. The existence of regressive legislation and rhetoric threatens to undermine the progress made in decriminalizing same-sex relationships, perpetuating discrimination and violence against LBQ individuals.[7]

As pointed out, not only the discourses in the U.S.A. are spilling over to African countries, but they are taking shape in policies and legislations. This has become especially evident in Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda in the past year.[8]

The discourse in Kenya around queer rights is very much impacted by the U.S., according to Āryā Jeipea Karijo. She explains this with regard to the recently proposed Family Protection Bill by Parliamentarian Peter Kaluma:[9]

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6 Ntesang, Interview with Nozizwe Ntesang.

7 Ibid.

8 CIVICUS, "Commonwealth Africa: LGBTQI+ Rights under Attack. Anti-Rights Reaction in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda Seeks to Erase LGBTQI+ People," CIVICUS LENS, April 19, 2023, https://lens.civicus.org/commonwealth-africa-lgbtqi-rights-under-attack/; Ottilia Anna Maunganidze and Chelsea Cohen, "Anti-Gay Laws: Africa's Human Rights Regression," ISS Today, September 27, 2023, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/anti-gay-laws-africas-human-rights-regression.

9 Ayenat Mersie and Mukelwa Hlatshwayo, "Insight: Kenya Could Follow Uganda as East African Nations Wage War on LGBT Rights," Reuters, June 27, 2023, https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/kenya-could-follow-uganda-east-african-nations-wage-war-lgbt-rights-2023-06-22/.

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> The parts in this bill that target transgender people is a direct copy from the anti-transgender bills that are being proposed or passed in the U.S. (520 house bills and counting in 2024). It is clear that the originators of this bill are not local actors. Concerns addressed in the anti-transgender section of the bill are not contextual to Kenya. For example, "the bathroom issue." Kenya as a country is working on WASH projects (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) which includes providing toilets to schools, clean water to communities. Without discounting the needs of transgender people in accessing bathrooms, this has never been a local point of activism. The second non-contextual issue that has been an obsession in the U.S. is the transitioning of minors. Again, without discounting the needs of young below minority age queer folx, in Kenya the issue has been access to healthcare for all. Even adult transgender people are not getting transitioning support let alone young people.[10]

Karijo points to the diffusion of certain rights and norms discourses in a similar way to how Makinana frames the "spill over" in the above. The diffusion is targeted, and as Karijo explains, it is further traceable to the U.S.:

> A side by side reading of U.S. anti-transgender legislation with sections of the laws that have been passed in Ghana, Uganda and are proposed for Kenya shows the authors are the same, they are global and they are definitely not from the continent. Key people leading the charge for these bills in Ghana, Kenya and Uganda have been in meetings with Sharon Slater of Family Watch International and on one occasion even had an audience with President Yoweri Museveni of Uganda.[11]

Omar van Reenen sees a similar development in Namibia:

> I realized anti-rights groups in the U.S. share resources, strategies and rhetoric internationally, the transnational exchange of anti-rights ideologies (pro-life and anti-LGBTQI+) imported from American Evangelical groups and NGO's like Family Watch international are alive and well.[12]

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10 Āryā Jeipea Karijo, Interview with Āryā Jeipea Karijo, written questionnaire, May 10, 2024.

11 Ibid.

12 van Reenen, Interview with Omar van Reenen.

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Khanyisile Phillips explains the impact of these movements for South Africa and the continent:

> Family Watch International is one of the biggest anti-gender movement organizations in the world and they are impacting South African politics. They even funded the African Christian Democratic Party, which held a protest a few years ago where they provided placards all over the country, stating: "Teach our kids maths, not masturbation." Speaking to comprehensive sexuality education that was introduced in the South African curriculum and pushing back regarding the guidelines for the inclusion of diverse sexual orientations, gender identity and expression, and sex characteristics. As much as there are also positive influences, depending on who is in power in the U.S., you also get these very negative regressions that we experience worldwide. Those that they experience in the U.S. and then we experience them in Africa. It is even more difficult for our siblings in other parts of Africa compared to us here in South Africa.
>
> Yes, South Africa, of course, has legal protections for LGBTIQA+ persons based on our constitution. And we know that there are issues with regards to the enactment of the constitution, for example, when people need that protection and reach out for essential services, lifesaving services. We know these are the limitations in the South African context. But I think it is important to note that there are other African countries where the positionality of the U.S. can be life threatening. And that must not be overlooked. Because if we are looking at and talking about discourses, we are speaking about how people are just talking about it. But it is not just that; people act on these discourses. People react to them and people lose their families and their lives. It is a dangerous thing that is happening when we see the U.S. moving in a certain direction and other countries literally following suit.[13]

Disguising anti-homosexuality, anti-transgender, and anti-LGBTIQ+ rhetoric under the framework of so-called family values is a move that scholars and journalists have started to analyze critically. Many of the responses from the

13 Phillips, Interview with Khanyisile Phillips.

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contributors here point to a misuse and misappropriation of the concept of family values, in general, but in particular with regard to African contexts.[14]

North-South Collaborations and Donor Cooperation

Widespread talk about so-called family values impacts not only norms and rights in African contexts, but the influence of this discourse is also felt in relation to donor funded programs. Ntesang points to the highly complex issues that activists in African and other Global Southern contexts have to navigate:

> Power dynamics in donor relations and donor funding, while crucial for LBQ activism in Africa, often perpetuates neocolonial power dynamics. African activists must navigate the complexities of donor relations, balancing the need for financial support with the imperative to maintain autonomy and integrity. The influence of American donors, driven by their own agendas and biases, can shape the priorities and strategies of African LBQ movements.[15]

Historical and political entanglements are pervasive and wide-reaching. They can be felt up until today when power dynamics are reproduced through donor-recipient collaborations.

Human rights activist and lawyer Ayodele Sogunro explains the multi-layered and complex relationships between the providers and receivers of development cooperation funding:

> U.S. LGBTIQ+ discourse tends to set the pace for both activism and anti-rights issues in the Nigerian and wider African contexts. On the one hand, activists and organizations in Nigeria have to work with their global partners and donors. These relationships are important for solidifying transnational solidarity, ensuring a flow of resources, a meaningful exchange of ideas. However, they also have the tendency to set priorities that may be a-contextual without necessarily meaning to do this. On the other hand,

14 van Reenen, Interview with Omar van Reenen; Makinana, Interview with Belinda Makinana; Monica Tabengwa, Interview with Monica Tabengwa, transcribed audio recording, May 28, 2024.

15 Ntesang, Interview with Nozizwe Ntesang.

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> anti-rights actors from the U.S. tend to see African contexts, including Nigeria, as fertile ground for spreading disinformation and sowing moral panics.[16]

A major shift in funding during the Trump administration was significantly felt in different contexts on the African continent and has had a lasting impact. Monica Tabengwa, a human rights advocate, explains this change:

> There is a lot of money coming out of the U.S. and that money might be attached to certain politics. Take for instance the issue around *Roe vs. Wade*, which concerns a very serious reproductive health issue: abortion rights. When Trump came into power, the gag rule happened. That meant a lot of money that was meant to be supporting family planning, abortion rights, safer abortion was cut off. And that was in direct connection to who was sitting in the White House.[17]

Omar van Reenen takes this one step further when stating:

> I believe when the U.S. was under the Trump administration many minority groups then had to turn their resources inwards as the country was under crisis, impacting our movement building efforts. We learn many innovative strategies from our U.S. partners, but their capacity to share those became less available when discourses shifted, and when gag-orders were put into place limiting our ability to interact and partner. … Funding is always reliable under progressive administrations who increase their support for advocacy, education and awareness. Conservative ones limit it and make it more challenging to sustain and grow our efforts.

This has led to a change in fundraising, as it

> helped us realize that we need to start relying on domestic and regional sources of support. Average Namibians have started to support our queer movement and showing up for us. U.S. funding has also always been very restrictive towards supporting core funding of LGBTQI+ NGO's and in many ways dictate what sort of projects can and cannot be funded, leaving our

16 Ayodele Sogunro, Interview with Ayodele Sogunro, written questionnaire, May 25, 2024.

17 Tabengwa, Interview with Monica Tabengwa.

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> local contexts and needs. Making us realize that we need to source financial support on our own terms that pays attention to our local needs.[18]

Adding another layer of complexity to the issue of external interference, human rights advocate Kevin Besong explains the Cameroonian context:

> Presently, in Cameroon, there is an increasing wave of anti-LGBT and anti-gender movements, which are being sponsored for political reasons to gain favor in the eyes of the public,[19] like telling Cameroonians that the U.S.A. and France are trying to impose sin. Lesbians have been thrown out of their homes by owners because of their supposed or perceived sin. Attacks on transgender women are also frequent.[20] Consequently, said movements increase when North American or European governments call for African governments to respect the fundamental rights of LGBT+ persons.[21]

In many regards South Africa is an exception on the continent and worldwide, as was already alluded to by Khanyisile Phillips in the above. The de jure rights of LGBTIQ+ persons are safeguarded widely through the constitution, while the de facto violence LGBTIQ+ persons experience is high. Deconstructing the umbrella term "LGBTIQ+" shows that violence against members of the community manifests itself differently along the lines of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and gender identity and expression, and other aspects as well as intersectionally – as pointed out in the introduction. As Makinana explains:

> I think that the funding pool has always been competitive and quite small especially for South Africa, because there is this particular notion that South Africa does not have a huge need because there is a constitution that recognizes LGBTIQA+ persons, which is erroneous in its own right, because it forgets that there can be laws. But they need to be protected and they need to be advanced. And there is also the social work that needs to be done domestically for those particular rights to be enacted.[22]

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18 van Reenen, Interview with Omar van Reenen.

19 Rita Schäfer and Eva Range, "The Political Use of Homophobia Human Rights and Persecution of LGBTI Activists in Africa," chap. 2.4 "Cameroon" (Bonn: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, March 2014), https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/iez/10610.pdf.

20 Referenced here is the case of Franky and Jonas, two Cameroonian transgender women, defended in court by Alice Nkom in 2013 and 2014.

21 Kevin D. Besong, Interview with Kevin D. Besong, written questionnaire, May 27, 2024.

22 Makinana, Interview with Belinda Makinana.

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The Impact of Previous U.S. American Administrations on the Rights of LGBTIQ+ Persons and Communities in African Countries

> Can we afford another four years of Trump? No. We cannot.[23]

The following statements refer to previous U.S. American presidents and, in particular, to the transition from Barack Obama to Donald Trump; they provide a multifaceted picture. As mentioned above, the Global Gag Rule implemented by the Trump administration had wide reaching implications for the work of activists and those working with LGBTIQ+ communities. This rule prevents organizations that receive U.S. global health assistance from providing information and services on legal abortion or advocating for access to abortion services in their country. This even applies to programs run with their own money. When Monica Tabengwa asks: "Can we afford another four years of Trump?" and then answers: "No. We cannot," she basically summarizes the responses from all of the contributors to this text. Going beyond the Trump presidency, even the Obama administration's policies led to mixed consequences for activists and communities on the African continent, although the administration also provided funding and support for U.S. American and global LGBTIQ+ communities.

Kevin Besong sheds light on this from the perspective of Cameroon:

> In my community, I vividly remember the days of Obama's presidential campaign and election as the first African American president with Kenyan heritage, who also championed LGBT+ rights. Then, it was seen as a wave or strategy to convince African leaders to buy into an idea of promoting and adopting this "way of life." As a result, in Cameroon in particular and Africa in general, the championing of LGBT+ rights increased homophobia and attacks upon gays and lesbians. Also, there were sarcastic statements being made (e.g. gay people wearing diapers, homosexuality being unAfrican, gay people being failures) as well as degrading words spoken to gay people. This tense atmosphere contributed to the LGBTQ+ struggle in Cameroon, which became even more difficult.[24]

Āryā Jeipea Karijo, from Kenya, underlines this ambivalence:

23 Tabengwa, Interview with Monica Tabengwa.

24 Besong, Interview with Kevin D. Besong.

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> During President Obama's tenure, Africa experienced the largest push to uphold queer rights. The fact that he was a Black President with African/Kenyan roots and he was advocating for queer rights was very important. On the downside it also cemented the thought in people's minds that "LGBTIQ was an American and Western agenda" and failed to humanize LGBTIQ+ people as people, even African people.[25]

The complexity of the involvement of the U.S. in the Ugandan LGBTIQ+ context is mapped out by Adrian Jjuuko, a human rights lawyer, scholar, and activist:

> The U.S.A. is a major player in Uganda as regards LGBTI rights – for both the anti-gay and the pro-gay movements. Republicans tend to be anti-gay while democrats tend to be pro-gay – and then there is Donald Trump, who even goes beyond mainstream republican ideas. So, under Obama or Biden there is a lot of (political) support coming from the U.S. government for the LGBTI rights movement – while during the Bush and Trump eras there was almost no political support. This also increases conversations about LGBTI rights and protections, and activists are given more prominent visibility and feel more protected. There is also more international solidarity during these periods. At the same time, we also see anti-LGBTI legislation flaring during the presidencies of democrats – which sounds ironic – but which can be explained by the fact that it works as some sort of push back against the liberal agendas of the reigning presidents. For example, the Ugandan Anti-Homosexuality Act was first debated when Obama was president. There was no such law during Trump's presidency, yet, it came back in 2023 during Biden's term. This does not imply that having anti-gay presidents in the U.S. is good for LGBTI rights in Uganda, the opposite is rather the case: pro-LGBTI presidents send a clear message to the Ugandan politicians which in turn makes them hide behind anti-gay laws. We also see a rise in anti-gay support from the U.S. during times when democrats are in power. It seems to reflect that when they lose on their home turf, homophobes focus on Africa. This also explains the anti-gay laws.[26]

According to Nozizwe Ntesang:

> [P]ast American presidential elections have had significant implications for LBQTI rights and activism in Botswana. The relationship between the two

25 Karijo, Interview with Āryā Jeipea Karijo.

26 Adrian Jjuuko, Interview with Adrian Jjuuko, written questionnaire, June 18, 2024.

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> countries, primarily centered around HIV funding, intersects with broader human rights discourse and advocacy efforts. Changes in American leadership can result in shifts in foreign policy priorities, funding allocations, and international pressure on Botswana to address human rights concerns, including those related to LBQTI rights. As a result, the political dynamics between Botswana and the U.S.A. play a crucial role in shaping the landscape of LBQTI activism and rights advocacy in Botswana.[27]

She unpacks this statement further, thereby providing valuable insights into the dynamics that have unfolded in the past and are indicative of the results of the upcoming presidential elections in the U.S.A. and their impact on Botswana and, possibly, also other African countries.

> Botswana and the U.S.A. have historically maintained a significant relationship, primarily centered around HIV funding. The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has been a crucial source of funding for Botswana's HIV/AIDS response, providing financial support for prevention, treatment, and care programs. … The allocation of funding through programs like PEPFAR can also be influenced by changes in American leadership. While PEPFAR funding is primarily targeted at HIV/AIDS programs, shifts in priorities or budget allocations may indirectly impact other health and human rights initiatives, including those related to LGBTQI rights and activism.

She explains the influence of the U.S.A. within the international system further:

> The U.S.A.'s position on LGBTQI rights can also exert international pressure on Botswana and other partner countries to address human rights concerns. Diplomatic engagement, conditionality of aid, and public statements from American officials can all contribute to shaping the human rights landscape in Botswana and influencing government policies and actions regarding LBQTI rights.[28]

In a similar vein, Belinda Qaqamba Makinana maps out how the U.S.A.'s role in international organizations, like the United Nations (UN) under former president Trump, influences the foreign policy of South Africa:

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27 Ntesang, Interview with Nozizwe Ntesang.

28 Ibid.

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In particular with the Trump administration, we saw how the U.S. withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council, which the U.S.A. has been part of for many, many years, really bringing in that point I made around modelling democracy, upholding human rights. And when the U.S. withdrew from the Human Rights Council in 2018 it really left countries like South Africa wanting to step in, because here is this country that really modelled human rights and protected human rights, saying, in fact: this UN Human Rights Council does not serve its purpose anymore. And this also then affects funding.

If you look right now in particular at the U.S., they fund a lot of HIV work and not specifically work on the advancement of and protection of human rights. And not that HIV work is not important; it is! But most of the funds, specifically coming from the U.S., are going to HIV work and not much is going towards Trans or LGBT work in general. We also clearly see a decrease on funding specifically tailored for black and brown persons. That is another dynamic we witness. Really, the type of funding they give or they are disseminating to the world, the type of aid they are disseminating, is very much reflective of their current state and where they are moving. And how they withdraw in particular from UNESCO and other UN mechanisms. That withdrawal shows in particular what is happening in South Africa. South Africa currently released a White Paper to withdraw from the Refugee Convention among others.[29]

So, they are following suit of a precedent that was set by the U.S., further impacting human rights. Because these conventions and these commitments and the signature to these conventions become advocacy tools to us as human rights workers. They become human rights mechanisms with which we hold our government to account. Because if you have signed to protect children, you must also protect LGBTIQA+ children. So, we use these conventions and treaties strategically in our advocacy work. When the U.S. moves away and they withdraw from UNESCO, from the UN Human Rights Council, we also see our countries following suit. Because these conventions become less binding and they become voluntary. And that is a danger for human rights.[30]

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29 South African Government, "Minister Aaron Motsoaledi: Release of Final White Paper on Citizenship, Immigration and Refugee Protection," April 17, 2024, https://www.gov.za/news/media-statements/minister-aaron-motsoaledi-release-final-white-paper-citizenship-immigration.

30 Makinana, Interview with Belinda Makinana.

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The Expected Impact of the 2024 U.S. Presidential Elections on the Rights of LGBTIQ+ People and Communities in African Countries

> Africans should not be expected to push back against the American export of homophobia.[31]

The responses to the question about the expected impact of the 2024 U.S. presidential elections alternated between a relative sense of comfort and a cautious hopefulness in the event of a continuation of the Biden administration.[32] Contributors expected a worsening of funding and other types of support for the work on LGBTIQ+ related topics in the event that Trump wins, and they reported on a deep lack of trust in the U.S.A. as an entity that upholds the human rights of marginalized groups of persons.

The latter sentiments are embedded in the more recent developments on the global level. Āryā Jeipea Karijo, for example, points out:

> I expect that outsider groups' human rights will be seen as non-rights similar to the U.S. demonstration of Palestinian rights; African governments will pick groups they deem unworthy of human rights.[33]

She further contextualizes this with the politically motivated changes that affect the rights of women (cis and trans), non-binary persons, and LGBTIQ+ persons.

> Increasingly *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* will be used in Supreme Court decisions. The discourse around human rights has fundamentally changed in the world after October 7th. The world will witness more dehumanization of groups that are considered less worthy of human rights. In Africa, LGBTIQ+ people will be on top of the list as targets for dehumanization and violation of rights.[34]

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31 van Reenen, Interview with Omar van Reenen.

32 The interviews were conducted before Biden ended his bid for re-election. In order to retain the original words and thoughts of the contributors to this chapter, we have decided to retain references to President Biden.

33 Karijo, Interview with Āryā Jeipea Karijo.

34 Ibid.

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Omar van Reenen makes this point even more explicit:

> To be honest the outcome of the 2024 election is inconsequential. The current unfolding of the genocide in Gaza and the U.S. support for Israel has led us in the global south to view the U.S. as losing its moral arc on upholding international human rights standards. While a victory for a progressive Biden administration will provide the consistency, we need to reinforce and expand support for LGBTQI+ rights globally, which may further anti-discriminatory policies in Namibia/global south, we are losing our faith in the U.S. as a nation that furthers equality.
>
> A win for a conservative Trump presidency actually will not change much besides bringing back gag orders and a limitation in funding. We have seen the true colors of the U.S. That both progressive and conservative administrations reinforce human rights abuses, even if it does not pertain to LGBTQI+ rights. Today its Palestinians who suffer for U.S. political interests, tomorrow it could be indigenous communities in climate affected countries to continue profits for multinational corporate interests. All minority and unliberated communities can become victims of U.S. political interests.[35]

This deep loss in trust in the U.S. as a defender of human rights has been met with various strategies by activists. Nozizwe Ntesang outlines this trend:

> As African activists increasingly embrace decolonial approaches in their activism, it becomes imperative to critically examine the relationship between the U.S.A. (and the West) and Africa. The prevailing power dynamics must be dismantled to pave the way for a reimagined LGBTI activism rooted in joy and anti-colonialism.[36]

This is particularly the case with regard to the increasing export of anti-LGBTIQ+ norms and legislation initiatives from the U.S.A. to African countries, as Omar van Reenen states. Even though

> progressive administrations will surely help us oppose and restrict and push back against these groups domestically. But what needs to happen is to ensure U.S. foreign policy weakens anti-rights groups networks and reduces their impact in Namibia. It is counterintuitive to fund Namibia LGBTQI+

35 van Reenen, Interview with Omar van Reenen.

36 Ntesang, Interview with Nozizwe Ntesang.

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> groups to push back against the import of American religious extremism if the standard is not held on U.S. soil. These groups need to be held accountable within the U.S., no tax incentive for groups who influence policy like in Uganda, because in the end it will be American taxpayer funds that are then sent to LGBTQI+ groups to do the work for them. Africans should not be expected to push back against American export of homophobia.[37]

Expectations of a Possible Biden Administration

The prospect of the continuation of a democratically led government under President Biden for another four years elicited a sense of cautious hopefulness in the activists who contributed to this chapter. Kevin Besong points to the importance of the appointment of Christopher Lamora, a gay man, as Ambassador of the U.S.A. to Cameroon.[38]

> The Biden presidency has already proved its worth in the fight for LGBT+ rights in Cameroon by sending us an openly gay diplomat. This is a very strong message from the Biden Administration, communicating that Cameroon's LGBT+ community is not alone and the U.S. is watching! Also, showing that being gay is okay and gay people are leaders.[39]

Concrete measures that are expected include that

> the U.S. calls on the Cameroon government's attention to fight anti-gender groups. I expect a Biden Administration to adopt measures for the protection LGBT+ movement at their place of work, more and outstanding security measures should be included in the U.S. agenda and action plan for the future. For instance, lobbying for laws to be enacted for the protection of LGBT+ human rights defenders especially female human rights defenders. Transgender rights should be made more visible and measures taken to protect them.[40]

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37 van Reenen, Interview with Omar van Reenen.

38 Keegan Williams, "New Ambassador of Cameroon, Where Homosexuality Is Illegal, Is Gay," Out Front Magazine, January 4, 2022, https://www.outfrontmagazine.com/new-ambassador-cameroon-is-gay/.

39 Besong, Interview with Kevin D. Besong.

40 Ibid.

https://doi.org/10.14361/9783839474730 https://www.inlibra.com/de/page/agb - Open Access - (cc) BY

In expectation that the U.S. will continue to support and enable work that advances the human rights of LGBTIQ+ persons and communities, Omar van Reenen points out that

> the Biden administration [has] helped us heal from the scarcity of funds we experienced from the Trump administration, as funds were specifically earmarked for LGBTQI+ advocacy efforts, bolstering support for advocacy, education and community support initiatives. In retrospect, conservative administrations such as Trump's went further than just limiting funds, but restricting funds for many causes, impacting our health and human rights initiatives.

They also point out that

> even under a progressive Biden administration we have seen the passage of stricter anti-LGBTQI+ bills in Namibia, while the Biden administration has said little to nothing on this issue. So, will anything change if the Biden administration has stayed silent and continued its investment in developmental projects in Namibia without holding our government accountable? [41]

Expectations of a Possible Trump Administration

"If Trump gets elected that would spell disaster for LGBT organizing in Uganda"[42] is the first response by Adrian Jjuuko to the question. As the statements below illustrate, this is true beyond the Ugandan context. Ayodele Sogunro sheds light on what another four years of Trump in the White House might mean for the Nigerian context:

> [A] Trump win will cement the *Dobbs v. Jackson* [*Women's Health Organization*] decision, thus lending legitimacy to anti-rights movements, who are now using the courts as their forum. Consequently, courts in Nigeria may follow the lead of the Ugandan Constitutional Court in citing it as an exemplary jurisprudence to roll back rights and refuse to acknowledge LGBTIQ+ rights. Likewise, executive policy is likely to take a cue from the anti-

41 van Reenen, Interview with Omar van Reenen.

42 Jjuuko, Interview with Adrian Jjuuko.

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> rights rhetoric of the far right republicans and use this as an excuse to violate LGBTIQ+ rights in Nigeria. Nevertheless, transnational solidarity and private donor funding is unlikely to be affected and may even increase with the corresponding increase in anti-rights sentiment. [43]

Concerning the eastern African context, Āryā Jeipea Karijo points out that

> Donald Trump's tenure has all rights spaces including SRHR [sexual and reproductive health and rights], sex worker rights, abortion and bodily autonomy rights, LGBTIQ+ rights and even the fight against stigma around HIV/Aids set back almost a decade. During Trump's tenure Kenya's Ministry of Health withdrew abortion guidelines extrajudicially and it took activism litigation to have them restored. The fact that the Uganda Supreme Court relied on *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* (a U.S. Supreme Court decision that overturned *Roe v. Wade*) to uphold the anti-homosexuality act 2023.[44]

She anticipates that a similarly devastating impact for norms and rights discourses concerning LGBTIQ+ persons and communities will be caused by an additional four years of a Trump administration. Speaking about Cameroon, Kevin Besong outlines the direct impact that the outcome of the U.S. elections will have:

> If the Trump administration wins, the struggle of LGBT+ persons in Cameroon will heighten. Arguably, Cameroon authorities will make the struggle for LGBT+ rights extremely difficult to advance; also, the hounding and harassment will become more severe. Ultimately, attacks on LGBT+ people in Cameroon will continue.[45]

Tabengwa reflects on lessons learnt from the first Trump term and the lasting impact of his presidency:

> [I]n the past when someone asked me "what do you think is going to happen in Africa because of the U.S. elections?" I would say: I don't think anything is going to happen. But then we saw things happen. We saw what I mentioned about sexual and reproductive health and rights. For instance, there

43 Sogunro, Interview with Ayodele Sogunro.

44 Karijo, Interview with Āryā Jeipea Karijo.

45 Besong, Interview with Kevin D. Besong.

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> is money coming out of the U.S. government to support CSOs [civil society organizations] in African countries and at the time they could not work on and their money could not be used on any of those SRHR issues.
>
> And that was and is an important thing in a lot of African countries; anywhere really. Providing family planning is very important. So, can we afford to have another four years of Trump? No, we cannot. Because we have already seen what that did in reversing such rights. I never believed that *Roe v. Wade* would be overturned. But it happened. And thus, anything we thought we could trust, we cannot trust. Even with the Democrats winning the last election, the damage was done; because there are now institutional changes and institutions in place that were set up. And dismantling those institutions takes time. …
>
> I believe that there is more at stake this time, especially because of what has happened. Especially because of what was set up during the Trump era. So, if the U.S.A. goes back to a Republican-led government, there is nothing that is going to stop these right-wing organizations and they will be even more empowered. They can go out and spread more hate. So, I think there is even more at stake this time than the last time.[46]

Drawing on his experiences of the previous Trump administration, Adrian Jjuuko foresees the following scenario:

> If Trump gets elected that would spell disaster for LGBT organizing in Uganda. He has been there before – so we know that. Such elections affect who is Ambassador and who is the political/human rights officer in Uganda and these have direct impact on engagements with activists and communities. Moving from a Biden presidency to a Trump Presidency is not something that we look forward to, especially at a time when Ugandan activists are grappling with the Anti-Homosexuality Act.[47]

46 Tabengwa, Interview with Monica Tabengwa.

47 Jjuuko, Interview with Adrian Jjuuko.

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Conclusion

In addition to the U.S., elections will be held in sixty-three countries in 2024, and will involve 49% of the world's population casting a vote.[48] In nineteen African countries, presidential and/or general elections are being carried out: in Algeria, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Chad, Comoros, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Senegal, Somaliland, South Africa, South Sudan, and Tunisia.[49] Regarding the entanglement of the upcoming presidential elections in Botswana and the U.S.A., Nozizwe Ntesang notes the following:

> [T]hey coincide with a pivotal moment for LGBTQI+ activism at both national and regional levels. In Botswana, where LGBTQI+ rights remain a contentious issue, the political landscape surrounding the elections and constitutional review will shape the future of advocacy efforts and legislative reforms. Regional dynamics, influenced by the outcome of the U.S. elections and regional cooperation among activists, will further shape the trajectory of LGBTQI+ activism in Southern Africa. As activists continue to push for equality and inclusion, the elections present both challenges and opportunities for advancing the rights and dignity of LGBTQI+ persons in Botswana and beyond.[50]

The multilayered effects of the elections in the U.S.A. and resultant challenges and opportunities are reflected on in the insights by the nine experts who articulate themselves in this chapter. For the majority of them, developments during the past few years have shown that the LGBTIQ+ communities in the African contexts that are discussed here cannot and should not continue to count on the U.S. government for support of their causes – regardless of whoever is sitting in the White House.

Another four years of a Trump led administration will have dire and wide reaching consequences for funding and, more widely, for the work of activists fighting for the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons in African contexts. Gag rule(s), the

48 Koh Ewe, "The Ultimate Election Year: All the Elections around the World in 2024," TIME, December 28, 2023, https://time.com/6550920/world-elections-2024/.

49 Joseph Siegle and Candace Cook, "Africa's 2024 Elections: Challenges and Opportunities to Regain Democratic Momentum," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, January 17, 2024, updated June 12, 2024, https://africacenter.org/spotlight/2024-elections/.

50 Ntesang, Interview with Nozizwe Ntesang.

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weakening of democratic institutions, and cuts/shifts in budget in the U.S. directly and indirectly effect the work and livelihoods of communities and activists across the African continent. Conditions are expected to get worse under a second Trump administration and will continue to make activism for the rights of LGBTIQ+ persons significantly more challenging.

Yet if the Democratic candidate is elected, there is a glimmer of hope. For certain countries, the respective activists assume that the impact of the elections will be very direct. Kevin Besong, for example, goes so far as to say that the "2024 elections will either make or mar advocacy and lobbying in Cameroon."[51] For others, as discussed above, the influence of the elections will be more indirect and depend on the national context.

Certain aspects of the influence of these elections are deeply entangled. This includes how anti-gender and anti-LGBTIQ+ movements in the U.S.A. spill over and diffuse around the globe. A deep loss of trust in the U.S. as an upholder of human rights, in general, but of the rights of marginalized groups of persons, in particular, results out of this spill over and has made itself felt in many contexts. This extends to the U.S. based and U.S. funded anti-LGBTIQ+ movements that currently manifest themselves in norm discourses, legislation initiatives, policies, and development cooperation in African national and regional contexts. The spill over is also felt on a global scale in growing fractions in the aftermath of the 7th of October 2023, as some of the contributors point out.

In order to counter these developments, some strategies are outlined for the future. They include the importance of creating stronger transnational alliances across the continent and, increasingly and where possible, looking to national and regional sources for funding and support rather than international ones. Furthermore, it is important to continue to point out and deconstruct post- and neo-colonial dynamics such as the spread of anti-LGBTIQ+ norms and legislation initiatives and the diffusion of hateful rhetoric and harmful policies. These strategies are part of an on-going conversation and struggle that is shared by activists across the continent and not only a response to the 2024 U.S. presidential elections. Yet, as the insights shared in this chapter show, the impact of these elections is wide-reaching and will possibly by felt even more strongly in the future than in the recent past.

51 Besong, Interview with Kevin D. Besong.

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About the Contributors

Georgiana Banita is Senior Lecturer in North American Literature and Culture at the University of Bamberg. She is the author of the literary study *Plotting Justice: Narrative Ethics and Literary Culture after 9/11* (2012) and of the nonfiction book *Phantombilder: Die Polizei und der verdächtige Fremde* (2023, forthcoming in English as *Bullets, Bombs, and Big Data: Racial Prejudice and the Evolution of Police Violence*). She co-edited *Electoral Cultures: American Democracy and Choice* (2015) and is also the editor of an upcoming special issue on race and predictive technologies from the *Journal of American Studies*, where she currently serves as a member of the Editorial Board. In addition to issues of intersectionality and justice, she has published widely in the fields of Energy and Environmental Humanities, energy transition, and U.S. visual media cultures.

Birte Christ is Assistant Professor of American Literature, Culture, and Media at Justus-Liebig-University Giessen. She has worked on gender and sexuality studies, law and literature, reading cultures and the canon, and contemporary American politics. She co-edited the volume *Obama and the Paradigm Shift* with Greta Olson in 2012 and has published work on Hillary Clinton, Michelle Obama, and George W. Bush. Her latest monograph, *Imagining the American Death Penalty*, which treats films and TV series that negotiate capital punishment, will appear with Oxford University Press in 2025.

Esther Edelmann is an Assistant Professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands. She currently teaches and conducts research in the field of "Literature and Law" and is preparing her new research project on the far-right perspective on climate change in Germany and the Netherlands. Her first book manuscript, "Inverted Worlds and Belated Baroques," is currently under review at Brill Publishing and deals with modern and contemporary literature

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from the German- and Spanish-speaking world on the topic of financial crises. The book highlights three (neo)-baroque literary and philosophical commonplaces: the inverted world, the world as a stage, and the figure of the rogue or picaro, and argues that these topoi should also be considered as politico-economic concepts of the present.

K. Allison Hammer is an Assistant Professor and coordinator in the Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies program at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale. Their monograph, *Masculinity in Transition,* was published in 2023 by the University of Minnesota Press. Their work on queer and trans subjectivity and American cultural production is also featured in *Queering Desire: Lesbians, Gender, and Subjectivity* (2024), *The Routledge Companion to Art and Disability* (2022), *Transgender Studies Quarterly, Women's Studies Quarterly, Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies, NORMA: International Journal for Masculinity Studies,* among others. Hammer received their PhD in English literature with a certificate in Women's and Gender Studies from the Graduate Center of the City University of New York in 2017. After receiving their PhD, Hammer was a Senior Lecturer at Vanderbilt University in the Department of Gender and Sexuality Studies. Through international collaborations, they seek to forge connections between literary study, history, and political theory.

Christine M. Klapeer is a Professor of Political Science and Gender Studies and a board member of the Center for Diversity, Media, and Law (DiML) at the Justus-Liebig University of Gießen. Before joining the University of Gießen, Christine held visiting professorships, teaching, and research positions at several universities, including the University of Vienna, the Central European University in Budapest, the York University in Toronto, the University of Göttingen and the University of Kassel. She is the co-founder of the LGBTIQ+ Studies Caucus in the German Political Science Association (DVPW) and a core group member of the COST Action "LGBTI+ Social and Economic (In)Equalities" (CA19103). Christine is committed to a 'queering' of Political Science and publishes in the areas of queer-feminist state theory, (transnational) LGBTIQ+ politics, sexual citizenship, institutionalized heteronormativity, and new forms of anti-gender mobilizations.

Frans-Willem Korsten is Professor of Literature, Culture, and Law at the Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society in the Netherlands. He participated in the NWO/FWO funded program: "Imagineering Techniques in the

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Early Modern Period" as well as in the NWO-funded program "Playing Politics: Media Platforms, Making Worlds." He published on sovereignty and the Republican baroque, in *Sovereignty as Inviolability* (Verloren, 2009); *A Dutch Republican Baroque* (AUP, 2017); and in *Marketing Violence: The Affective Economy of Violent Imageries in the Dutch Republic* (Cambridge UP, 2023). Another major focal point is the relation between literature, art, justice and law, in *Art as an Interface of Law and Justice: Affirmation, Disturbance, Disruption* (Hart, 2021); *Cultural Interactions: Conflict and Cooperation* (AUP, 2022). The theme of justice is developed recently in relation to urbanism and climate-justice in *Imagining Urban Complexity: A Humanities Approach in Tropes, Media, and Genres* (Routledge, 2024; together with Anthony T. Albright).

Melanie Kreitler is a postdoc at the University of Giessen, Germany, in the Department of Anglophone Literary, Cultural, and Media Studies. Her book *Mental Illness and Narrative Complexity: An Experiential Approach to Puzzle Films and Complex Television* will be published with Edinburgh UP in 2025. Her research addresses narrative complexity across media, with an emphasis on films and videogames, critical approaches to empathy, and the intersections of cultural and media discourses. She is co-editor of the special issues "Illness, Narrated" (2021), "Queer Politics in Media and Legal Cultures" (2024), and "Mental TV: Changing the Narratives of Mental Disorders on Television" (2025).

Sabine N. Meyer is Professor of American Studies and Co-Director of the North American Studies Program at the University of Bonn. Her recent research has focused on Native American writing and law/politics from the nineteenth century onward, and on representations of Native Americans/Indigenous people in North American popular culture. Meyer is the author of *We Are What We Drink: The Temperance Battle in Minnesota* (2015) and *Native Removal Writing: Narratives of Peoplehood, Politics, and Law* (2022). Her publications also include articles in scholarly journals such as *American Indian Quarterly*, *Law & Literature*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, and *The Journal of American History*. She is co-editor of the monograph series Routledge Research in Transnational Indigenous Perspectives.

Marzia Milazzo is an Associate Professor of English at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Her book, *Colorblind Tools: Global Technologies of Racial Power* (Northwestern UP, 2022), which shows how white people disavow racism across national boundaries to maintain power, and how anti-Black and colo-

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nial logics can be reproduced even in some decolonial literatures, won the 2023 Association for Ethnic Studies Outstanding Book Award. Her articles have appeared in *The Global South, Journal of International and Intercultural Communication, Journal of Applied Philosophy, Research in African Literatures, ARIEL, Cultural Studies*, and other venues.

Greta Olson is Professor of American and British Literature and Cultural Studies and Director of the Center for Diversity, Media, and Law (DiML) at the University of Giessen. She is Principal Investigator of a project on images of migration and human rights in the interdisciplinary research group Human Rights Discourse in Migration Societies (MeDiMi). Greta was Fellow at the Käte Hamburger Center for Advanced Study in the Humanities "Law as Culture" in Bonn (2014, 2016), is general editor of the *European Journal of English Studies* (EJES), and, with Jeanne Gaakeer, the co-founder of the European Network for Law and Literature. Greta authored *From Law and Literature to Legality and Affect* (Oxford UP, 2022) and is co-creator of the film *Beyond the Gaze: Media Awareness for Media Inclusivity* (2023). She works and wishes to facilitate projects on the nexus between artistic practice, political activism, and academic analysis.

Maik Paap is a research associate and PhD candidate in the subproject "Migration and the Humanization of 'Health': Paradigms, Practices, and Conflicts" in the DFG-research group "Human Rights Discourse in Migration Societies" (MeDiMi). His work centers on human rights, migration, and health discourses in international organizations, particularly UN agencies, and their inconsistencies with domestic discourses. Maik earned a bachelor's degree in political science and law from the Leuphana University Lüneburg and a master's degree in International Politics and International Law from the Christian-Albrecht University of Kiel. During his studies, he worked with organizations such as Viva con Agua de St. Pauli e.V. and Refugee Law Clinics Deutschland e.V., which fueled his interest in access to rights and the representation of marginalized groups on the international level.

Sara Polak is Lecturer in American Studies, chair of the MA North American Studies, and research fellow in the NWO project "Playing Politics: Media Platforms Making Worlds" at Leiden University Centre for the Arts in Society in the Netherlands. Sara was a Rubicon fellow at the International Graduate Centre for the Study of Culture at Giessen (2016–2017) and Fulbright scholar at Yale University (2014–2015). She has written *FDR in American Memory: Roosevelt and*

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the Making of an Icon (Johns Hopkins UP, 2021), and co-edited *Violence and Trolling on Social Media: On the History, Affect and Effects of Online Vitriol* (Amsterdam UP, 2020) and *Embodying Contagion: The Viropolitics of Horror and Desire in Contemporary Discourse* (University of Wales Press, 2021). She regularly contributes to public media (newspapers, radio, television) about U.S. American history, politics and culture in the Netherlands, the UK, Belgium and the U.S.

Mariel Reiss works at the Center for Conflict Studies at the University of Marburg in the interdisciplinary Research Center "Transformations of Political Violence." She conducts research on the complex relationships between changing patterns of interpretation and justifications of political violence against LGBTIQ+ persons with a focus on eastern and southern Africa. Reiss holds a PhD in political science from the University of Marburg, Germany. Her publications discuss the establishment and development of regional organizations and the role of state and non-state actors as well as the negotiation of human rights within multilevel governance systems. The geographical focus of her work is on Eastern African countries and the East African Community, Southern African countries and the Southern African Development Community, as well as the African Union and the European Union. Since January 2024, Reiss has been coordinating the scientific network "Re-centering African Subjects and Subjectivities," which is funded by the German Research Foundation.

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