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Editor's Preface to the Spring Edition

Here at Elon University, we are extremely grateful to host *The Pi Sigma Alpha Undergraduate Journal of Politics*. We are proud to present the Spring 2022 issue and congratulate all authors published in this issue for their high achievement.

This publication seeks to highlight the intellectual curiosity that leads to innovative scholarship in all subfields of political science, scholarship that addresses timely questions, is carefully crafted, and utilizes diverse methodologies. We are committed to intellectual integrity, a fair and objective review process, and a high standard of scholarship as we showcase the work of undergraduate scholars, some of whom pursue questions that have been traditionally ignored in scholarship but that drive our discipline forward.

Following the lead of the American Political Science Review (APSR) Editorial Board, we are excited to publish research in the areas of “American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, public law and policy, racial and ethnic politics, the politics of gender and sexuality and qualitative and quantitative research methods.” This publication also values the relationships formed through student-faculty collaboration and aims to build a culture of scholarship that expands beyond the college campus. We hope to encourage and empower students to seek out knowledge and pursue their potential, contributing to scholarship in a variety of disciplines.

This year, we thank our advisors Dr. Baris Kesgin and Dr. Aaron Sparks for their support, without which the issue would not have been possible. We would also like to thank the entirety of the Political Science and Policy Studies Department at Elon University, especially Dr. Laura Roselle; our Faculty Advisory Board; and all the students who shared their exceptional work with us this semester.

We are excited to present the Spring 2022 edition of the *Journal*. Thank you for your continued support and readership of our publication; we hope you enjoy the edition.

Sincerely,

The Editorial Board at Elon University

Submission of Manuscripts

The *Journal* accepts manuscripts from undergraduates of any class and major. Members of Pi Sigma Alpha are especially encouraged to submit their work. We strive to publish papers of the highest quality in all areas of political science.

Generally, selected manuscripts have been well-written works with a fully developed thesis and strong argumentation stemming from original analysis. Authors may be asked to revise their work before being accepted for publication.

Submission deadlines are September 15th for the Fall edition and February 15th for the Spring edition. Manuscripts are accepted on a rolling basis; therefore, early submissions are strongly encouraged.

Students may submit their work through Elon University's submission portal, found here: <https://www.elon.edu/u/academics/arts-and-sciences/political-science/psa-journal/>

Alternatively, students may email psajournalelon@gmail.com with an attached Word document of the manuscript. In the body of the email, students are asked to include their name and university, the title of the manuscript, and the closest subfield of political science to which their manuscript pertains (American politics, comparative politics, international relations, political theory, or policy studies). Due to the time committed to the manuscript review process, we ask students to submit only one manuscript per submission cycle.

Submitted manuscripts must include a short abstract (approximately 150 words) and citations/references that follow the *APSA Style Manual for Political Science*. Please do not exceed the maximum page length of 35 double-spaced pages, which includes references, tables, figures, and appendices.

The *Journal* is a student-run enterprise with editors and an Editorial Board that are undergraduate students and Pi Sigma Alpha members at Elon University. The Editorial Board relies heavily on the help of our Faculty Advisory Board, which consists of political science faculty from across the nation, including members of the Pi Sigma Alpha Executive Council.

Please direct any questions about submissions or the Journal's upcoming editions to the editors at Elon University: psajournalelon@gmail.com.

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"What Would Gandhi Do?" Gandhian Influence on the Indian Farmers' Protests 2020-21

Nina Dang, St. Olaf College

Indian farmers protested for over a year against a set of laws instituted in September 2020 that they expected would destroy their livelihoods and leave agriculture workers—42.6% of the Indian workforce—economically ruined due to big corporate takeover. The protests threatened the long-held power of Narendra Modi's central government, gained worldwide recognition as the largest protests in history, and were ultimately successful in causing the repeal of the new laws. The success and gravity of the movement and its explicit references to the methods of civil disobedience pioneered by Mahatma Gandhi have inspired comparisons to India's 20th century movement against colonial British rule. Were the Farmer's Protests truly a "Gandhian" movement? Little scholarly work has attempted to answer this question. In this paper, I argue that while some of the methods employed in the Farmers' Protests seem to draw directly from Gandhi's repertoire, their deviation from the quintessential Gandhian ethos of moral development and quest for spiritual truth prevent their classification as "Gandhian." I analyze 17 news articles on the protests published by domestic and international outlets, from September 17th, 2020, to November 29th, 2021, and compare them to those that characterize the "Gandhian Approach," as defined in civil disobedience literature. This research has particular significance for understanding the endurance and applicability of Gandhi's almost century-old methods of resistance in contemporary Indian politics, and underlines the unique qualities of Gandhi's anti-colonial movement.

INTRODUCTION

Mahatma Gandhi's unconventional and successful methods of colonial resistance against the British occupation of India in the early 20th century, such as hunger strikes, have served as inspiration for civil resisters across regions and time periods (Cortright 1997; Danielson 2003; Salstrom 2014). The Indian Farmers' Protests of 2020-21 are a contemporary example of successful Indian civil disobedience that seem to embody a Gandhian approach. Indeed, protesting farmers themselves have explicitly cited Gandhi as their guiding force: in an example, one sitting protester in New Delhi had a written message duct-taped across his mouth that translates to, "*Walking in the footsteps of Gandhi, I am on a hunger strike*" (Saaliq 2021). Additionally, movement organizers held protest marches that they referred to as *satyagraha*, which is a term that was coined by Gandhi to describe his unique form of nonviolent protest. Due to these references, and perhaps the common geographic location of the two movements, journalists and commentators globally and within India began to draw connections between them. However, there have been few attempts to systematically study the Farmers' Protests on the basis of their alignment with the "Gandhian Approach" to civil disobedience

(Suhrawardy 2022; Tripathi 2022). In this paper, I attempt to address this gap by analyzing news coverage of the farmers' protests beginning from their commencement in September 2020 until their cessation in November 2021, in search of evidence of the methods of civil disobedience they employed, the organization of their coalition and public statements made by their spokespeople, and ultimately assessing the level of alignment with the Gandhian Approach as defined by scholarly categorizations.

Based on the analysis, while some of the methods employed in the Farmers' Protests seem to draw directly from Gandhi's repertoire, their deviation from the quintessential Gandhian ethos of moral development and quest for spiritual truth prevent their justified classification as "Gandhian." This research points to the endurance and applicability of select elements of Gandhian methods of civil disobedience, while at the same time highlighting qualities that were particular to Gandhi's 20th century anti-colonial movement. While the Farmers' Protests may not be considered "Gandhian" from a theoretical standpoint, their symbolic use of Gandhi and *satyagraha* suggests an alternative lens through which one might evaluate the endurance of Gandhian influence in contemporary civil disobedience movements.

BACKGROUND ON THE FARMERS' PROTESTS 2020-2021

In September 2020, the Indian central government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi instituted a set of three new agriculture laws, which removed existing laws that protected the agricultural sector from corporate takeover (Bensadoun 2020). While the Modi government upheld that the new laws would grant farmers the freedom to set their own prices and hence benefit them in the long run, most affected farmers themselves contended that the measures would leave them vulnerable to corporate exploitation and destroy their livelihoods. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (umbrella body for multiple farmers unions) conducted civil disobedience efforts soon after the laws were introduced and ceased on November 19, 2021, when the central government officially announced the repeal of the laws in response to the farmers' demands. In its course, it grew into the largest protest in history with over 250 million people participating in the general strike organized on 26th November, 2020 (Kim 2021). Some media outlets have called the protests a major threat to Prime Minister Modi's government (Saaliq 2021). In over a year, the protests against the new agricultural laws have taken on many forms and have employed several methods of civil disobedience, from protest marches to rail blockades to storming historic monuments. The Farmers' Protests were largely nonviolent, with some notable exceptions that will be discussed in the analysis.

The "Gandhian Approach" to Civil Disobedience

Gandhi's 20th century movement to rid India of the British raj is one of the most extensively studied instances of civil disobedience in modern history, likely due to its trailblazing success. Gandhi's unique methods and the tenets of his version of nonviolent resistance comprise what many scholars of the topic refer to as the "Gandhian Approach," and what Gandhi himself referred to as "*satyagraha*." Scholarly analyses of Gandhi's tactics and Gandhi's own political writings provide a framework for understanding the foundational elements that make up the Gandhian Approach. Given the breadth of literature on this subject, there exists some variety in the scholarly emphasis given to different elements of Gandhi's *satyagraha*. In order to arrive at a standard characterization for use in the analysis, I first ascertain the elements described by scholars of Gandhian resistance to be basic "pillars" of *satyagraha*. I then detail how each of these pillars played a central role in Gandhi's 20th century anti-colonial movement. This discussion provides criteria of "Gandhianism" against which the relevant components of the Farmers' Protests will be judged.

Scholarly Characterizations of Gandhian "Pillars"

Analyses of *satyagraha* tend to emphasize the salience of both practical and moral elements. Judith Brown notes about Gandhi's approach to civil disobedience that ideologies such as *ahimsa* (non-violence) and *satyagraha* (nonviolent resistance grounded in truth, that treats ends and means as

the same) characterize the moral dimension of the Gandhian movement, while the practical components include exploiting the opponents' vulnerabilities: grassroots mobilization and actions that garner widespread attention (Roberts 2009). Similarly, Ramin Jahanbegloo describes Gandhi's *satyagraha* and its global adaptations in terms of a commitment to bringing both parties to realize greater reciprocity and interdependence, rather than the elimination of the opponent altogether (Jahanbegloo 2016). Nonviolence on an individual and social level is an implied part of the practice of *satyagraha*. Jahanbegloo emphasizes the practical importance of the universal appeal of Gandhi's *satyagraha*, which bridged religious and social divisions for the purpose of achieving a common goal: destabilizing British control. Gandhi's personal *satyagraha* involved self-suffering and service to mankind, but the most fundamental element of his conception of *satyagraha*, for Jahanbegloo, is the struggle against all forms of injustice, regardless of who the victims are. Relatedly, in her analysis of the protestant adoption of Gandhian *satyagraha* in interwar America, Leilah Danielson describes *satyagraha*, as understood by select American pacifists in the 1930s, as a perfect marriage between nonviolence and effectiveness (Danielson 2003). The movement appealed to these pacifists as a viable method of action because it was at the same time morally defensible and effective. Danielson's conception brings together the individual elements of Gandhian politics described by other scholars, such as those mentioned above, by defining Gandhi's *satyagraha* as a strategy of "nonviolent coercion" (Danielson 2003, 372). The "coercive" element initially made it difficult for *satyagraha* to gain widespread acceptance in the pacifist community, which had previously believed that education, moral persuasion, and conversion to Christianity were the only appropriate tactics for creating social change. Gandhi's *satyagraha* was thus distinct from pacifism in that the practical dimension (relating to effectiveness) was at least as integral as the moral dimension. Considering these scholarly categorizations of the Gandhian Approach together, the commonly emphasized elements can be categorized into four "pillars": nonviolence (*ahimsa*), moral/spiritual development, strategic planning and coercion, and the unification of social groups. This basic theoretical framework provides a means for examining Gandhi's approach to resistance and creating specific "criteria" for the comparative analysis of the Farmers' Protests.

Gandhi's Conception and Practice of *Satyagraha*

Pillar 1: Nonviolence (ahimsa)

Essential to Gandhi's conception of *satyagraha* is the belief that means and ends are inextricably intertwined. Since the aim of the movement was freedom from evil and the pursuit of moral truth, it could not deploy methods that were immoral or evil. Although Gandhi avoided expressing

religious affiliation in his politics, he is far better characterized as a pluralist than a secularist (Grier 2014). He believed that the moral truth at the heart of all organized religions was a belief in *ahimsa*, or nonviolence towards others, and wanted this to serve as a unifying force. Gandhi explains that *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* are necessarily interdependent: "When I look for Ahimsa, Truth says, 'Find it through me.' When I look for Truth, Ahimsa says 'Find it through me.'" (Sheshagiri 1978, 64). This relationship is central to the Gandhian Approach; it is the reason that the movement took the shape that it did. In the absence of violence as an option, the quintessential "Gandhian" methods of resistance, such as fasts and Salt Marches, were born. It was these creative tactics of nonviolent resistance that were replicated by other freedom fighters across the world, such as Martin Luther King Jr, Nelson Mandela, Lech Walesa and Vaclav Havel (Jahanbegloo 2016). Gandhi's belief in the pursuit of non-violence is succinctly summarized in one of his most famous quotes, "An eye for eye leaves the whole world blind."

While Gandhi touted *ahimsa* as a moral imperative, his political pragmatism complicated his view of violence. He personally upheld nonviolence as a *satyagrahi* but was aware of the "peripheral" violence that occurs in movements of that scale. He tried to implement campaigns that entailed a low chance of violent outbreak, but he did not let the remote potential for violence deter a campaign. He was, after all, a political realist (Mantena 2012). In order for any resistance movement or tactic to be considered Gandhian, it needs to include a clear renunciation of physical violence by key spokespeople; however, the protest does not need to be completely devoid of any kind of physical violence, as the Indian anti-colonial movement was not (Roberts 2009, 52).

Pillar 2: Strategic Planning and Coercion

Although *satyagraha* is centered around nonviolence, it should not be construed as mere pacifism. A defining element of Gandhi's freedom movement, and arguably a key to its success, is its incorporation of pragmatic tactics that sometimes entailed coercion. Gandhi was a strategic thinker as much, if not more, than he was a spiritual leader. He once defined himself as "an essentially practical man dealing with practical political questions," (Veeravalli 2014, 14). The collective effectiveness of Gandhi's various resistance tactics can be attributed to the fact that Gandhi launched them based on a continued analysis of the vulnerabilities of the British imperial regime. For Gandhi, "satyagraha was a science and he was an experimental scientist, trying out different strategies of resistance and using particular symbolic issues in different contexts," (Roberts 2009, 53). This pragmatic approach materialized in many of the influential campaigns of his *satyagraha*, such as the Swadeshi campaign which urged the boycott of British goods, the Non-Cooperation Movement, and the Salt March of 1930. The Swadeshi movement served to threaten the economic power Britain gained from exporting

goods in the Indian market, the Non-Cooperation Movement sought to induce self-governance by the withdrawal of Indian support in the imperial regime, and the Salt March unified masses of Indian people over their common resentment of the salt tax and occurred in plain sight of the international press. Anti-imperialism was not yet a strong theme in British national political discourse, so the British public was not a key target audience for Gandhi. Instead, he made a concerted effort to broadcast and spread his word in the anti-imperialist United States, who was also Britain's main Western ally (Roberts 2009). Hence, in order for a movement to be rightly considered Gandhian, it should involve strategic analysis of the opponent's vulnerabilities and the use of coercive tactics that probe these.

Pillar 3: Moral/Spiritual Development

While its implementation is in large part pragmatic, *satyagraha* was a moral philosophy for Gandhi. This manifests as not only the renunciation of violent tactics, but as a holistic personal commitment to self-sacrifice, courageousness, service to others, riddance of evil, and reciprocal benefit. For Gandhi, these values were the path to realizing moral truth, which was the ultimate goal of the movement (Mehta 2010). He modeled these values himself as a *satyagrahi*, renouncing material living and devoting his life to the service of humanity through his politics. The ideal political system—and the one he strived to help India realize—was an 'enlightened democracy,' which would facilitate the expression of these values on a societal level. He believed that in order for a state to have moral authority, it could not be based on violence: "Democracy and nonviolence can ill go together...it is a blasphemy to say that non-violence can only be practiced by individuals and never by nations which are composed of individuals," (Gandhi 1960).

The commitment to moral development is also salient in Gandhi's dealings with his opponents, the British imperialists. Rather than treating them as enemies, Gandhi believed that the liberating effects of *satyagraha* should extend to them as well. *Satyagraha* was a means by which to achieve a "heightened reciprocity or moral interdependence" that allowed both parties to emancipate from truth-denying beliefs and actions (Jahanbegloo 2016, 193). He engaged in extensive negotiation and arbitration with British officials in order to live out that mission. This universal approach to morality explains Gandhi's commitment to non-violence even towards a violent opponent. In a Gandhian movement, the opponent is not an enemy but a fellow stakeholder in the institution of moral society, and political action stems from the need to live out moral truths. As such, the goal of the movement is the betterment of humanity rather than the elimination of the opponent. In a Gandhian movement, the public expression of and commitment to these moral goals is an integral component.

Pillar 4: Unification of Social Groups

By highlighting what he believed to be the common foundation of all religious traditions (*ahimsa*), Gandhi framed *satyagraha* as an extension of all spiritual thought, “What may appear as truth to one person will often appear as untruth to another person. But that need not worry the seeker. What appears to be different truths are like apparently different leaves of the same tree,” (Gandhi 2005, 47). The Gandhian independence movement was almost unprecedented in its level of widespread support, which spanned ethnic and religious groups. Gandhi appealed to the Indian peoples’ closely held spiritual beliefs without alienating any single tradition. He believed that every religion needed epistemic humility because of the diversity of belief systems among the Indian populace. He believed that a secular state was necessary in order to allow multiple characterizations of the same essential truth to peacefully coexist and guide their respective followers toward moral living.

Gandhi selected symbols of protest that he thought would have widespread appeal. The Salt Satyagraha, or Salt March, of 1930 is a good example of such a selection. Salt was a necessity for almost all Indians, and most resented the British monopoly on salt and the subsequent high tax rate. He used this equalizing factor as leverage to amass more support for the resistance movement and encourage peripheral action, which was ultimately effective. The march began with around 80 people and grew to a force of over 50,000 of varying religious traditions, and encouraged further protest, such as illegal salt trade (Weber 2002).

In order for a movement to be Gandhian, it needs to have an ethos and effect of social unification. A Gandhian protest will act as a bridge between social groups that may not have historically converged. Using the “pillar” framework described in this section, the Farmers’ Protests will be systematically evaluated on their fulfillment of the criteria for Gandhianism.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In collecting data on the methods, organization, and ethos of the Indian Farmers’ Protest for my analysis, I retrieved news coverage of the protests from both Indian and international sources, using the Access World News Research Collection database. I used the keywords “farmer* protest*” and the date range 09/24/2020 - 11/19/2021, which mark the respective beginning and end of the protest movement. I performed two rounds of searches, filtering once for articles only published by Indian sources, and once for articles published by North American sources (with the additional keyword “India”). In each search, I analyzed every 5th article that emerged, analyzing a total of 17 articles (12 from Indian sources and 5 from North American sources). I chose to vary the source location in order to obtain both detailed and “big picture” coverage, which I expected that national and international sources would respectively provide.

In analyzing the articles, I looked for mentions of specific strategies of disobedience (e.g. road blockades, hunger strikes) and rationales for their use, direct quotations about the reasons for protest (e.g. “the greater good,” pragmatic considerations), direct quotations about inspirations, principles or symbols that shape their protest (e.g. benevolence, service, opposing injustice, figureheads) and indicators of their attitude towards the opposition (e.g. cooperative, adversarial). This information provides the raw data for my pillar-by-pillar analysis of the movement.

News articles are appropriate primary sources for this research for a few reasons. For one, scholarship on newspaper data in the study of collective action shows that large protests, especially ones that disrupt public life, are more likely to be covered (Earl et al 2004). Since the Farmers’ Protests were country-wide and included events like road blockades, they are likely to have had broad coverage. Since violence is also more likely to be covered, I can be confident that instances of protests turning violent will be addressed in the news, which is important for my analysis of the “non-violence” pillar. A potential weakness of relying on news articles is that they are unlikely to illuminate the internal philosophical motivations of the organizers, which might limit the understanding of the moral character of the movement and its approach to the opposition. However, a key feature of Gandhi’s moral dimension is not only the personal, but the public projections of these motivations. Since journalists value statements from key persons when covering an event, evidence of the movement’s moral character will emerge through quotations and references to public statements. My reliance on news coverage poses a potential limitation given the increasing censorship of news media in India; it is likely that some facts and perspectives were omitted from my analysis as a result. However, the available coverage provides a sufficient basis for an overall analysis of the movement.

Contemporary India is an interesting case for the study of Gandhian legacies because of the Gandhian influence presumably woven into the general consciousness. This research might suggest whether contextual factors, such as regime type, that have changed since Gandhi’s time have an effect on the applicability of the original version of *satyagraha*. Additionally, findings from this research may be generalizable to collective action movements in other states experiencing democratic erosion, as India’s score on the EIU democracy index took a fall in 2020 (Biswas 2021).

ANALYSIS

Pillar 1: Nonviolence (ahimsa)

News coverage of the protests repeatedly pointed out that they mostly engaged nonviolent tactics. Their methods of protest included mass blockades of major roads and railroads (“Rail Roko Highlights” 2021), shadowing members of Modi’s

government (Schmall, 2021), and camping out for months at city borders (“India protest: Farmers breach Delhi’s Red Fort in huge tractor rally” 2021). Some protests did result in the injury or death of farmers and members of the opposition alike. In one example, a nonviolent demonstration turned into a violent clash in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh, in October 2021. Four protesting farmers were killed after a car belonging to Junior Home Minister Ajay Mishra ran them over (“A farmer protest in India turns deadly, leaving 9 dead and a town on edge” 2021).

Other protesters reportedly beat and killed some of the occupants and the driver of the car, all of whom were members of the ruling BJP party. The protestors allege that the son of Junior Home Minister Ajay Mishra was also in the car, but Mishra denies this. A journalist was also later found dead at the site, but no further information about his death has been published. Speaking about this event, national spokesperson for the Farmers’ protests Rakesh Tikait called the protesters’ violence only a “reaction to the action” (Bhardwaj 2021). Protesters subsequently drew media attention to the violence they faced in the incident by posting images and stories about their deceased loved ones on social media (Schmall, Kumar, and Mashal 2021). In addition, the storming of the historic Red Fort in Delhi in January 2021 was described as one of the only other instances of violence associated with the yearlong peaceful protest (“Red Fort violence: Delhi police detain 200 after farmer protests” 2021). What was intended to be a peaceful breach of the Fort on foot and by tractor developed into a violent outbreak when some protestors diverged from the agreed routes, wielding swords against the police and breaking barricades. The event left one protester dead and 200-300 police officers injured. After the incident, the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM), the umbrella group of protesting farmers, claimed in a statement released later that they “condemn and regret the undesirable and unacceptable events and dissociate ourselves from those indulging in such acts” (“Red Fort violence: Delhi police detain 200 after farmer protests” 2021).

Although the protests were nonviolent for the most part, these instances of violence and their treatment by movement leaders warrants attention in the present discussion. The SKM made clear in their statement regarding the Red Fort protest that they condemn the violence that transpired. This, and the nonviolent nature of the vast majority of the other campaigns, suggests that the ethos of *ahimsa* influences the movement in a significant way. However, Rakesh Tikbair’s comment that the killing of the car occupants in the Lucknow clash was a justified “reaction” suggests an obvious diversion from Gandhian philosophy. Although Gandhi wasn’t blind to the potential for violent outburst, integral to his conception of *ahimsa* was the belief that violence could never justify violence.

Pillar 2: Strategic Planning and Coercion

An analysis of the reported methods of the Farmers’ Protests suggests that they consistently engaged tactics that

were strategically planned and coercive. Although the Modi government has a stronghold of support throughout the nation and has increasingly cracked down on dissent, the farmers identified vulnerabilities and used tactics that would probe these. A key example of this planning manifested in the protesters’ decision to stage demonstrations in Uttar Pradesh prior to an important election in the state—a state that also happens to be considered the bellwether for the national vote. Poll results for the election that was to happen early in 2022 showed that the BJP’s lead in Uttar Pradesh had actually weakened, and analysts have speculated that the Farmers’ Protests were instrumental in causing this (Schmall, Singh, and Yasir 2021). This comes after the BJP had months earlier suffered an electoral loss in West Bengal, which it had considered winnable, most likely due to the Modi government’s poor response to the second wave of COVID-19 and a struggling economy. Due to the increased unpopularity of the BJP government after years of landslide victories, Modi and his party were left vulnerable to a well-organized protest, which commentators have claimed is what ultimately prompted their concession to the farmers, well in time for the 2022 election in Uttar Pradesh.

In addition to the location and timing of their protests, their campaigns themselves involved the strategic use of symbolism and framing. For example, in October 2021, the farmers embarked upon an 18-day march from Champaran to Varanasi in a reenactment of Gandhi’s Champaran Satyagraha march of 1917, in which he led farmers in protest against the British imperial government’s exploitation of Indian Farmers (Jafri 2021). The Champaran March of 1917 was Gandhi’s first Satyagraha movement in India and is hence considered an important historical event in Indian independence. The farmers likened their treatment under Modi to British colonial exploitation, and hence chose to align their movement with Gandhian *satyagraha*. When asked about the decision, foot march leader Akshay Kumar stated:

Gandhiji came to Motihari when he got to know that Indian farmers were being exploited by the British government. The Britishers also gave a free hand to a British company to misappropriate the farmers’ hard-earned money. This is what is happening under the current regime to give benefits to big corporate companies. Therefore, we chose Chandrabhiya to begin our protest. (Jafri 2021)

In addition to the March in Champaran, there were other examples of the farmers aligning with Gandhian ethos in the framing of their movement. Social activist Medhna Patkar, who played an active role in the protests, gave a speech on the 73rd anniversary of Gandhi’s death in which she stated that the farmers have chosen to embody *satyagraha* and nonviolence out of a keen awareness that using violence would only result in their annihilation by the opponent. She stated, “The protesters are not foolish that if they pick up stones, they (security forces) will bring out the guns,” (“Adopting

Satyagraha, farmers' protest should go on: Patkar" 2021). Their largely nonviolent ethos seems to at least in part arise from the legacy of awareness that masses of people peacefully protesting can be effective in dealing with a powerful enemy. In their nods to Gandhi, the protesters are strategically drawing upon one of the few instances in recent Indian history when its people came together behind a common cause. Like Gandhi did, the protesters sought not only domestic but also international media attention, which allowed them to organize the biggest protest in history, with over 250 million participants. In garnering widespread support, farmers made sure to highlight the violence of the opposition and the exploitation of the ordinary but integral Indian farmer (Schmall, Kumar, and Mashal 2021).

In choosing to focus demonstrations in Uttar Pradesh, frame their movement in terms of Gandhian *satyagraha*, disrupt public daily life transportation blockades, draw widespread attention to the violence and injustice they faced, the farmers displayed strategic planning and coercive strategies reminiscent of Gandhi.

Pillar 3: Moral/Spiritual Development

Coverage of the statements of key spokespeople for the movement about their goals did not reveal a significant focus on the moral development of either party. While the protesters highlighted the injustice and exploitation that they were being subjected to, their arguments and goals were framed in pragmatic terms. For example, one of the slogans protesting farmers most often used was "*No Farmer, No Food*." Additionally, official statements by spokespeople addressing their opponent do not seem to reflect an ethos of reciprocal benefit or mutual betterment. For instance, national spokesperson for the movement Rakesh Tikait was once quoted saying, "Everyone should join us. The next target will be media houses, if you want to be saved then join us, else you'll also suffer" (ANI 2021). Rather than framing reform as a gateway to the universal betterment, Tikait uses threat in order to garner support for their cause.

The lack of a rhetoric of moral development or the emphasis on Gandhian values such as reciprocity marks a stark deviation from *satyagraha* as practiced by Gandhi. For Gandhi, political actions of *satyagraha* were means by which to achieve *satyagraha* on a spiritual dimension for all people. Perhaps due to the lack of a salient leader or *satyagrahi* who models and speaks to the values of the movement, the protests do not seem to embody any specific moral or spiritual goals.

Pillar 4: Unification of Social Groups

That the Farmers' Protests were able to garner over 250 million domestic participants and attention from international media and figures (such as Greta Thunberg and American pop star Rihanna) is a testament to their concerted effort to create a widespread movement with universal appeal. Left-leaning unions, religious organizations and caste-based social

groups called *khaps* are some examples of the variety of social and political groups that were on the frontlines of sit-ins and marches (Moudgil 2021). In speaking on the need for mass organization, protest leader Akshay Kumar stated, "The purpose of this march is to identify issues of peasants of every district. We seek to understand the plight of farmers and organise them under one banner," (Jafri 2021). This logic also prompted the creation of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (SKM) in November 2020, the umbrella body of farmers unions protesting the new laws. In addressing negative perceptions about the extent of religious inclusivity within the protests, Rajinder Singh Deepsinghwal, vice-president of one of the farmers unions, stated, "This is a farmers' movement and some people have been trying to make it a religious movement," (Anshuman 2021).

While the majority of protesters were North Indian Sikh farmers, movement leaders positioned the movement to represent the interests of all Indian farmers. They highlighted commonality by focusing on what they all stood to gain or lose depending on the development of the movement. In this way, the Farmers' Protests reflected the same effort that did the Indian independence movement to unify highly divided social groups before a common cause.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

A pillar-by-pillar analysis of the alignment of the Indian Farmers' Protests with the Gandhian Approach reveals that there are significant parallels between the two movements. Beyond their alignment with the pillars of non-violence, strategic planning and coercion, and the unification of social groups, the Farmers' Protests made deliberate nods to the Gandhian independence movement, such as by replicating Satyagraha Marches, commemorating the anniversary of Gandhi's death, and emphasizing the relevance of his resistance movement to their cause. However, the lack of evidence of a moral/spiritual dimension in their ethos prevents a justified classification of the movement as "Gandhian." The analysis seems to suggest that their references to Gandhi and Gandhian symbolism were strategic means to meet their practical goals, rather than an attempt to embody *satyagraha* in the original sense. It is possible that the contextual changes in India since the time of Gandhi have made it more difficult to find and use a common framework of morality. Without the existence of a shared "opponent," such as the colonial British government, there may not have been broad enough agreement about moral "good" and "bad." It seems that in the place of a shared understanding of morality, movement leaders used a shared appreciation of Gandhi and his legacy in Indian politics as a unifying force for mobilization.

This research points to the endurance and applicability of the more pragmatic elements of Gandhian methods of civil disobedience, while also highlighting the moral and spiritual quality that was particular to Gandhi's anti-colonial movement.

While the Farmers' Protests may not be considered "Gandhian" from a theoretical standpoint, their symbolic use of Gandhi and *satyagraha* suggests an alternative lens through which one might evaluate the endurance of Gandhian influence in contemporary civil disobedience movements. ■

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Redpilling Normies: Alt-Right Identity on “Chan” Imageboards

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Online forums such as 4chan, 8chan, and 8kun are infamous for a self-consciously offense culture characterized by racist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, and misogynist posts, couch the spread of this extremist messaging in “satirical” language and media. But to what extent are these “chan” imageboards similar in the construction and signaling of radicalized identity in the alt-right movement? This paper employs discursive analysis to underline the metapolitical mechanisms turning beneath digital identities across the imageboards 4chan/pol/, 8kun/pnd/, and an artifact of 8chan, “The Great Manifesto.” On “chan” imageboards, memes function as a collective project against a common opponent, and work to reinforce the bond of the community and to mark in-group members. Discursive analysis unveils floating signifiers littered around the memetic styles of the alt-right; these signals functioning as a force of collectivization through the delineation of an “other.” Within these spaces is an interplay between personal creative freedom and a larger, subcultural practice that positions “anons” as co-producers of burgeoning extremist ideology at the fringes of the internet.

INTRODUCTION

Redpilling Normies: The Alt-Right in Digital Spaces

On March 15, 2019, Brenton Tarrant shot dead 42 people in Christchurch, New Zealand. Before the attack, a targeted assault on Muslims, Tarrant posted a 16,000-word manifesto, formatted in a Q&A style, onto the anonymous messaging board 8chan. In the document, entitled “The Great Replacement,” the self-described ethno-nationalist and eco-fascist, fighting to preserve white Western culture against “degenerate” immigrants, reveals the source of his beliefs: “the internet, of course. You will not find the truth anywhere else” (Anonymous 2019, 23). Tarrant is not a lone-wolf. In 2020 the Anti-Defamation League recorded 16 right-wing extremist-related plots/attacks in 2020, an increase from the 13 documented incidents in 2019, and marked more than 4,500 incidents of white supremacist propaganda distribution compared to only 2,724 in the previous year (*Murder and Extremism in the United States in 2020* 2021). Online forums such as 4chan, 8chan, and 8kun are infamous for a self-consciously offense culture characterized by racist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, and misogynist posts, couch the spread of this extremist messaging in “satirical” language and media. But to what extent are these “chan” imageboards similar in the construction and signaling of radicalized identity in the alt-right movement? This paper employs discursive analysis to underline the metapolitical mechanisms turning beneath digital identities across the imageboards 4chan/pol/, 8kun/pnd/, and an artifact of 8chan, “The Great Manifesto.”

After a brief content advisory detailing the use of hate speech, the first section begins with an exploration of three schools of thought: Identity as Discursive Capital, Identity as Cultural Borders, and Identity as Frequency. Through quantitative or qualitative analyses, each school, despite differing methods and explanatory frameworks, tracks the construction of an alt-right identity in digital spaces. My research then constructs a theoretical framework that situates alt-right identity within the concept of metapolitics devised in Critical Theory. For users of the “chan” imageboards, the task of metapolitics is to weaken the culture that sustains the liberal democratic socio-economic and political order, on both the domestic and international stage. It is an active form of political thinking that reconfigures the boundaries, relationships, and identities that constitute established public culture. My research concludes with three cases, connected by a shared link to “The Great Replacement,” across 4chan/pol/, 8kun/pnd/, and 8chan. An examination of the most widely used and accessible “chan” imageboards stresses how the alt-right signal in-group identity.

On the Use of Hate Speech: A Content Warning

Much of the content this paper reproduces from 4chan, 8kun, and 8chan is extremely offensive. Language and visuals across the two sites often invoke dehumanizing stereotypes, employ hateful symbols, or promote violence towards specific groups of persons. This paper considers it necessary to present the actual language as used by members of these forums. It is done for three reasons. First, an examination of the discursive tactics wielded by the alt-right concerns the analysis of

language as used, with the purpose of providing nuance to case study analyses. Second, language, as used, is an inextricable component of the metapolitical theoretical framework used by both the alt-right and this paper, illustrating the normalization of hate speech and the distortion of political subjectivity. Finally, it is as 8kun boasts, “Speak freely – legally” (8kun.top). This motto encapsulates 4chan and 8kun’s fundamentalist belief in the freedom of speech. Without analyzing the language used, my research would produce only an obscured understanding of what “free expression” means to these communities.

Constructing an Alt-Right Identity: Three Approaches

Three schools of thought present different conceptualizations of radicalized right-wing identity in digital spaces: Identity as Discursive Capital, Identity as Cultural Borders, and Identity as Frequency. From the 1960s and 70s, the birthplace of the alternative-right (alt-right), emerges the conceptual foundation of the Discursive Capital School. Discursive capital, as an explanatory model, situates Michel Foucault’s “community of discourse” as the mechanism of identity formation. Memes and humorous or ironic speech become a form of cultural capital, discursive weapons: a form of speech that organizes, redirects, and checks group members through the imagined figures of “Social Justice Warrior” or “Cultural Marxist” (Finlayson 2021; Ganesh 2020; Greene 2019; Nissenbaum and Shifman 2017; Salazar 2018). The Cultural Borders School challenges the digital and physical divide by understanding alt-right language and imagery as claim-making exercises over virtual spaces—a demarcation of an imagined community, complete with its own culturally intelligible lexicon of objects, norms, and beliefs (Davey and Ebner 2019; Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir 2019; Valentini et al. 2020). Identity as Frequency largely abandons qualitative discourse analysis for elaborate statistical modeling. Identity formation, for this school, relies on repetition and overlap—the frequency of hate speech across several websites illustrates the fragmentation of distinct yet overlapping far-right sub-cultures (Baele et al. 2021; Hine et al. 2017; Papasavva et al. 2020).

At the heart of the Discursive Capital School (DCS) is the Foucauldian notion that external procedures of prohibition, will to truth, and power mark the alt-right as a community of discourse. Phillipe-Joseph Salazar’s study, “The Alt-Right as a Community of Discourse,” is the most ideologically pure of the DCS, urging researchers “to go back to the basics of the philosophical comprehension of ‘discourse,’ that is to Michel Foucault,” and extract these procedures to understand the alt-right (Salazar 2017, 3). Salazar draws on these three mechanisms to explain the alt-right’s prominence in the public sphere: the movement’s tactical agility to maintain ambiguous, coded styles alongside grass-roots activism dances around any attempts by the media to understand the phenomenon (Salazar 2018). First is prohibition. Communities of discourse, in this sense, are the actualizations of procedures made to control,

redirect, check, and organize speech. Finlayson, drawing on digital media studies and rhetoric, explores how “online radical conservatives” form “ideological families” around concepts of natural inequality, and express hostility to those who deny them (Finlayson 2021, 167). Prohibition becomes the means to create a “new class”—an Other that works in the shadows, exercising cultural power to undermine the “natural order” of gender and race, imagined through the figures of the “Social Justice Warrior” and the “Cultural Marxist” (Finlayson 2021).

These imagined boogymen require the second procedure, will to truth, to exist. Green pinpoints the weaponization of satiric irony as the means to create a “counterpublic” that generates its own truths. Alt-right trolling, or the act of antagonizing someone online, functions as a “hyper-humorous, hyper-ironic, hyper-distanced mode of discourse” that renders intent difficult to assess and meaning indiscernible (Green 2019, 53). Only the “redpilled” members of the community can make truth claims. By taking “redpill,” these members liberate their minds, professing an awareness of the alleged false consciousness of liberal brainwashing, and acquire the third procedure: power. Analyzing memes as cultural capital, Nissenbaum and Shifman argue that visual and linguistic content function as signifiers of superior status and reminders of shared identity. On 4chan, memes are performative. Each image is a projection of membership used to judge, condemn, and exclude other users, and signal in-group identity under conditions of anonymity (Nissenbaum and Shifman 2017). From prohibition, will to truth, and power emerges the rhetorical construction of the alt-right. Yet this school does not suggest how to distinguish between satirical and authentic messages embedded in the language and imagery of the “chan” imageboards.

Next is the Cultural Borders School. Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir position the clearest theoretical basis for this school of thought by characterizing debates within the alt-right as claims-making exercises that mirror bordering processes. Cultural borders, argue Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir, transcend traditional geopolitical jurisdiction to exist in virtual spaces where cultural objects, such as memes, function as signifiers of “which side of the border one occupies” (Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir 2019, 3). Language defines the contours of a community and the virtual geographies across which alt-right networks form—trolling, memes, and satire is as much about spreading information as it is staking claim on virtual spaces (Hodge and Hallgrimsdottir 2019). To account for processes of radicalization, Valentini et al, analyzing the Islamic State, conceptualizes these cultural borders as a hybrid environment that incorporates elements of online and offline experiences (Valentini et al 2020). This hybrid environment reframes online radicalization as partially dependent upon everyday physical behaviors as feedback loops that form within cliques and groups act in unison with digital spaces. Moving the internet beyond the role of an echo chamber, Primavera Fisogni applies the General System Theory to explain the process of

self-radicalization. General System Theory accounts for “an ordered of interrelated parts whose characteristics depend both on the characteristics of the parts and on the web of their interconnections” (Fisogoni 2019, 22). Interactions between online and offline spaces provide materials that function as fertile grounds for decision-making, for moving someone to act. Alt-right identity, in this sense, forms as an infrastructure that enables and justifies action, recognizing the presence of coordinated activity.

Quantitative analysis defines the third school of thought: Identity as Frequency. Hine et al address the lack of scientific studies on 4chan by initiating the first measurement study of the forum (Hine et al 2017). Papasavva et al amassed a dataset with over 3.3 million /pol/ threads across 3.5 years, observing high degrees of toxic content in over 37% of the 134.5 million posts (Papasavva 2020, 7). Hine et al, using a dataset of over 8 million posts, found that 12% of posts contained hate speech, and more notably evidenced 4chan’s extensive influence on the wider Internet, particularly on YouTube (Hine et al 2017, 11). Hine et al also ran a term frequency-inverse document frequency analysis to identify topics per country. The paper concludes that the majority of posts from countries match geographically: posters from the United States, for example, discussed issues in American politics, whereas Greek users discussed the economic crisis. Zannettou et al confirm /pol/’s obsession with ethnicity, and Baele et al compare these observations with alt-right communities at the fringes of the Internet (Baele et al 2021; Aannettou et al 2020). Baele et al seek to establish the extent to which /pol/ boards across chan forums fragmented into distinct “sub-subcultures” along extremity lines. Through co-occurrence network analyses of 4chan, 8kun, 16chan, NeinChan, InfinityChan, and Endchan, Baele et al concluded that the alt-right is not fully coherent across each forum. As the largest of the forums, 4chan featured the least extreme content, whereas the boards with fewer users hosted more esoteric and fringe threads.

The research to date is only beginning to recognize how the alt-right derives its shared identity from a sense of superiority. This project relies on the procedures outlined by the Discursive Capital School to contextualize images and text posted by redpilled users, while also drawing from the Cultural Borders School to examine the relationship between online behavior and actions offline. By tracing the movement of alt-right rhetoric from digital forums to the physical world, a task performed by “influencers” like Brenton Tarrant, this study explores how “chan” imageboard users broach the prohibitions of contemporary political culture.

Metapolitical Mechanisms: A Breakdown of Political Structures

This paper understands the construction of the alt-right identity as a metapolitical practice. Through discursive tactics, predominantly exercised online, the alt-right seeks to subvert and deconstruct the boundaries, relationships, and identities

that constitute established public culture. Metapolitics emerged from the prison cell of Antonio Gramsci, took its shape under the neo-Marxist theorists of the Frankfurt School, and received a spirited renewal with the critical theorists Jacques Rancière and Alain Badiou in the 1970s. At its core, metapolitics is an ideological project that recognizes the primacy of culture over politics as the necessary mechanism of revolution, with cultural hegemony as its primary goal (Bar-On 2021). A key study by Zienkowski defines metapolitics as consisting “of practices that potentially reconfigure existing modes of politics, the associated logics, and rationalities, as well as the dominant power structures in a given public sphere,” (Zienkowski 2019, 2). Zienkowski further distinguishes the concept as a “programmatic attempt” to break down the egalitarian legacy of the Enlightenment and replace it with a fascist model of society (Zienkowski 2019). Despite its origins and continued prominence in leftist theory, metapolitics is at the heart of the alt-right.

The way politics is usually understood and practiced – politicking within polities, within and outside of democratic systems – relies on sediment but contingent decisions on what counts as a legitimate mode of politicization within a public realm. The establishment of a society’s constitutive and antagonistic outside operates through a rationality that seeks hegemonic status. Metapolitical projects clash over the socio-political imaginaries that define the boundaries of what is to count as legitimate and/or illegitimate political language, practice, subjectivity, or modes of organization (Zienkowski 2019). Far-right forms of populism are metapolitical projects in that they are antagonistic to post-Enlightenment political configurations and ideologies, such as liberalism, socialism, and representative democracy. Victor Orban’s “illiberal democracy” in Hungary, for example, is an anti-democratic metapolitical project that attacks civil society and the separation of powers.

Metapolitics bridges social movement and political strategy by rendering cultural expressions as deliberate political acts. Discursive activities such as the creation and distribution of memes, tweeting, shit-posting, and trolling are explicitly categorized by self-described alt-right activist James Lawrence as a “form of dirty and lawless skirmisher warfare, carried out by non-centrally-organized partisans” in a “subjective metapolitical war” (Anonymous 2016). To use Lawrence’s description, it is also a heavily coded form of warfare. Part of the alt-right’s discursive tactic is to exacerbate the ideological drift encircling the First Amendment. Free speech is weaponized as a battle cry of the alt-right. Provocateurs and trolls frame hateful or offensive speech as an insurmountable commitment to the freedom to say anything (Stein 2018). By commandeering free speech, the alt-right obscures its dehumanizing and abusive rhetoric under a protective veil of universal rights.

Distinguishing between metapolitical *language use* and *discourse* highlights two essential fields of alt-right metapolitics: political subjectivity and politicization. The analytical concept of political subjectivity examines how people relate to governance and denotes how actors enter a

position to stake claims, to have a voice, and to be recognizable by authorities (Krause and Schramm 2011). It also stresses the power-ridden dimensions of politics of identity and belonging. The second concept, politicization, involves an “act of naming something as political, including the controversies surrounding the acceptance of this naming” (Palonen 2003, 182). Metapolitical language use refers specifically to linguistic discourse that seeks system-wide change through a reconfiguration of political subjectivity and modes of politicization. When non-linguistic symbols (e.g. auditory, visual), such as memes, accompany metapolitical language, and act, in practice, as patterns within and across specific messages, this is metapolitical *discourse*. Alt-right trolls rely on language as well as non-linguistic symbols in their metapolitical struggle (Nagle 2017).

Attempts to distinguish the genuine from the disingenuous, the ironic from the unironic, grow increasingly complicated and fuels extremism. J.M. Berger stresses the threat and vulnerability gap, by which in-groups cast themselves as increasingly vulnerable and out-groups as increasingly threatening, as an essential tactic of escalation (Berger 2017). Victimization through global conspiracy is a habitual form of alt-right discourse: Jews and other “social engineers” pursue white genocide by “collapsing white birthrates through sowing beliefs and attitudes that make family formation impossible, and by sanitizing and normalizing miscegenation” (Shaw 2018, 186). These strategic discursive tactics are never solely linguistic or visual acts. Memes function as a short-hand for unique forms of performative speech. A sense of performativity captures the social and cultural dimensions of these forms of speech as the alt-right articulates discourse in and as social norms (Butler 1997). Performativity adapts discourse to specific strands of the movement, to specific identities constructed in the respective communities of 4chan and 8kun. As “chan” imageboards promote alt-right identity through performative, memetic acts, it lowers the barrier for participating, opening the door for potential new members. This leads to my hypothesis: “chan” imageboards serve as recruiting spaces for extremist groups but are unable to concentrate a coherent in-group identity for the digital alt-right movement.

Designing the Red-Pill: What is the Alt-right?

Virtual communities dissimulate and consume variants of far-right ideologies, no one organizational form prevailing, no single platform spearheading the movement. It is leaderless, anonymous: an amalgamation of digital content connected by a shared belief in the eradication of “white identity” and “white civilization” by the forces of multiculturalism, “political correctness,” and “social justice,” with an appeal to youth counter-culture. But anonymity should not suggest a lack of strategy. Gatekeepers facilitate alt-right parlance online: “anons,” the title given to long-time users, abuse new members, known as “newfags,” when they fail to understand accepted vocabulary and symbols (Colley and Moore 2020). These

“anons,” alongside alt-right terrorists like Brenton Tarrant, occupy influencer roles as prominent figureheads of the in-group. By enforcing the community’s dynamic language and imagery, often through an obscure mix of humor and irony, in-group members enculturate passive lurkers of “chan” forums and mainstream social media sites into a reactionary worldview.

To those of the alt-right, swastikas alone are rather boring. Traditional far-right forums, such as *Stormfront*, are relics of the early internet, of an early approach to radicalization in digital spaces. Forums littered with brazen displays of Nazi iconography pale before post-ironic imagery: photoshop edits of mass shooters holding anime body pillows, videos of a crudely drawn bear listening to lo-fi beats as the Black Sun shines behind European monuments or memes of an anthropomorphic frog wearing the uniform of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS). To define the alt-right, and to further distinguish it from traditional far-right movements, I will locate its intellectual and communicational inspiration to the French Nouvelle Droite (“New Right”) of the 1960s and 70s.

Propelling the experimental processes behind an “alt-right identity” is the construction of disparate in-group signals that forge a new, modernized identity to inhabit the revived specter of traditional fascism. It is a project that seeks to re-imagine established modes of doing politics; a metapolitical strategy that shifts political identification towards a white supremacist identity base. Alt-right engagement in cultural struggles borrows from the *Nouvelle Droite* and its main ideologue, Alain de Benoist, and his adoption of “right-wing Gramscism,” (Zienkowski 2019). Although Benoist denounces Nazism and its biological racism, his political ideology rejects legal equality and “the religion of human rights,” and hopes “a metapolitical strategy...allows [the Nouvelle Droite] to gain cultural power before political power” (Bar-On 2012; de Benoist 1981). In online spaces, such as 4chan and 8kun, alt-right actors establish arenas in which cultural power foments as conflicting strands of the movement struggle for hegemonic control. The Breitbart Doctrine marks an evolution of the *Nouvelle Droite*, a continuation of the premise that “politics exists downstream from culture,” and that the source of a viable political revolution is cultural upheaval (Roberts 2018). From this analysis, the alt-right metapolitical strategy characterizes public culture and its established modes as corrupted by a conspiratorial left, a diabolical and often racialized “other,” that tricks white males into allowing the existence of concepts like the patriarchy or equal status between genders and races (Roberts 2018).

RESEARCH DESIGN

This paper applies qualitative analysis to research the extent to which “chan” imageboards are similar in the construction of an alt-right identity. Across the internet is a constellation of far-right imageboards: an ever-evolving network of nearly identical websites containing some variation of the term “chan” with similar internal architecture, visual design, and moderation

practices. From these forums disseminates a meme culture that creeps into mainstream social media as users, known as “anons,” generate and package anti-establishment humor that takes a variety of forms, including images, catchphrases, and GIFs (Conway, Scrivens, and Macnair 2019). An anonymous user, the “original poster” (OP), creates a thread by posting a message and attached image to a thematic board, with topics that range from television and anime to history and literature. This paper focuses on iterations of “/pol/,” boards dedicated to “politically incorrect” conversations. Rampant across these ‘/pol/’ boards is a festering commitment to racist and anti-Semitic language and alt-right activity impossible to maintain on more moderated and mainstream social media sites, such as Facebook or Reddit (Colley and Moore 2020). On the /pol/ board of the now-defunct 8chan, for example, Brenton Tarrant exclaimed that he “will carry out an attack against the invaders” and posted a manifesto and link to a livestream video of his attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, in 2019 (Baele, Brace, and Coan 2021). Two other /pol/ users, John Earnest and Patrick Crusius, followed Tarrant’s example, posting their manifestos before committing hate crimes and acts of terrorism.

My research examines three of these “/pol/” boards: the longstanding /pol/ of 4chan, the now-offline /pol/ of 8chan, and the /pnd/ (“Politics, News, and Debate”) of 8chan’s successor site, 8kun.top. I selected these three “/pol/” boards for reasons of influence and activity. 4chan boasts over 20 million monthly visitors and is the largest English-language imageboard (Conway, Scrivens, and Macnair 2019). 8kun’s /pnd/ comes second in traffic and posting activity and is thematic similarly to 4chan’s /pol/ (Baele, Brace, and Coan 2021). Unique to 8kun is the QAnon conspiracy that originated from 8chan’s /pol/ board. The board’s welcome page describes itself as “a war room” in which the ephemeral “Q Clearance Patriot,” or “Q,” leads the “autists of /qresearch/” against the “social chaos” and political corruption induced by Marxism (“Welcome to /QResearch/”). Since the inception of the QAnon conspiracy theory in 2016, numerous adherents committed murders, attacks, and kidnappings on behalf of

Q’s “Global War.” And on January 6, 2021, several QAnon supporters, either self-described on social media or wearing Q-affiliated clothing, stormed the United States Capitol Building. Inclusion of /qresearch/ captures the undercurrents of alt-right activity in digital spaces transforming into physical mobilization. After all, it’s vital to “remember that /pol/ was here before any of you, and Q came to /pol/, not the other way around” (“Welcome to /QResearch/”).

4chan, 8chan, and 8kun are central creative nodes of the alt-right movement. To capture the imaginative processes behind alt-right identity, case studies of selected threads are the center points of analysis. It is necessary to delve into threads and examine the discursive performativity of these three boards. Several limitations stunt this approach. With no account or login necessary to read or write posts, users are distinguishable only by poster IDs – a sequence of numbers attached to a poster upon the creation of a thread (and only that thread) – and country flags, based on IP geolocation, that appear along with their posts. The use of virtual protection networks, however, easily manipulate geolocation. Threads are temporary, often purged or cataloged, and permanently gone after seven days unless a board uses an archival system. To overstep these limitations, this paper will analyze Brenton Tarrant’s manifesto, “The Great Replacement,” as it existed on 8chan/pol/, and its continued representation on 4chan/pol/. Case studies provide evidence for claims – evidence that is, like multiple regression analysis, for example, observational rather than experimental. Selected threads will capture a specific point in time, functioning as representations of alt-right culture, and not a seeing-stone penetrating the unequivocal truths of the movement. But these threads contain rich, dense information that produces the means to discover the mechanisms through which the alt-right signals in-group identity.

Digital Fascism and Internet Memes on 4chan

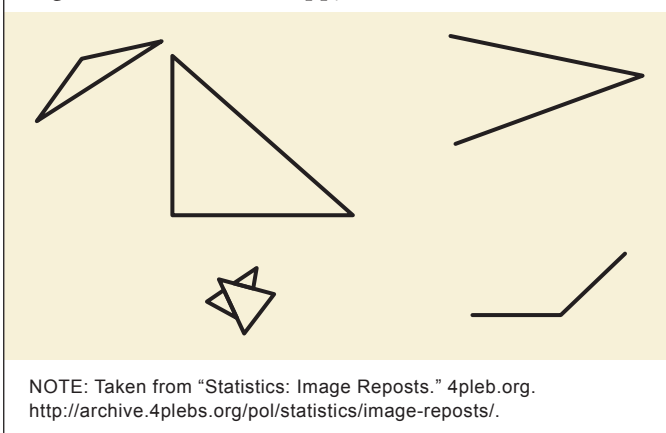
A creative engagement in the reconfiguration of the white supremacist ideology and promotion of an urgent need for action creates a cohesive ideological network across “chan” subcultures. By wrapping fascist aesthetics and white

Figure 1. The Happy Merchant



NOTE: Taken from Anonymous. (2021, September 5) *Which state next after Texas to ban abortion? will Texas be singled out?* [Online forum post]. 4chan.org. <http://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/337857993/#337865478>

Figure 2. Minimalist Happy Merchant Memes



supremacy beneath layers of irony, users experience a significant sense of agency and control through the creative production of transgressive content. Users adopt a sense of superiority as they move from "newfags" to "anons" through the redpilling process. But this is not an instant switch: alt-right rhetoric ranges from the obvious to the esoteric, demanding users to frequently engage with its evolutionary language and imagery. The transitory nature of memes allows alt-right users to affirm their redpilled status and to continuously check group membership.

On 4chan/pol/, memes express and reinforce myths of a threatening or illusive other as users transform, reimagine, and circulate images (Greene 2019). Memes on /pol/ feature an abundance of dehumanizing and racist caricatures. Jews are often the subject, with images framing them as the masterminds of the Great Replacement (Tuters and Hagen 2020). By far the most prevalent antisemitic meme is the *Happy Merchant*, a cartoon depicting a Jewish man with a hooked nose, crooked

teeth, and a hunched back rubbing his hands (Figure 2). The *Happy Merchant* often accompanies a message that implies a hidden conspiracy, orchestrated by the Jews, that facilitates the Great Replacement and white genocide.

For the "normies," a pejorative slang term for those considered mainstream, the innovative subcultural use of memes exceeds the boundaries of comprehension, functioning as an exercise of grammar. Figure 3 is another iteration of the *Happy Merchant* meme in a reduced and isolated form. It is an exercise in abstraction, a critical technique that renders alt-right memetic culture incomprehensible to outside viewers. A technical reimagining of memes allows for strangers, connected only through the shared use of 4chan, to negotiate in-group belonging. Extending the theoretical lens of discursive capital developed by Nissenbaum and Shifman, memes exist in a linguistic market (Nissenbaum and Shifman 2017). Like material capital, the market is unevenly distributed, as those attuned to the grammar of in-group slang wield a sort of wealth and authority over the uninitiated. Engagement with memetic grammar amplifies the voices of some users while silencing others, creating a ritual of communication that stimulates in- and out-group distinctions (Tuters and Hagen 2020). These distinctions are not drawn through political opposition or dissenting voices but the formation, through visual representation, an "us" and a "them" composed of those aware of a meme's underlying or intertextual meaning.

On 4chan, /pol/ especially, the frequent use of memes follows an illusive and ironic subcultural form. Only those on the "inside" understand the current course of meaning. Collective identification in an anonymous space relies on this memetic abstraction. Pepe the Frog, by far the most popular image reposted on 4chan/pol/, captures the metapolitical desire to monopolize what constitutes authentic instances

Figure 3. The Many Faces of Pepe the Frog on 4chan/pol/ and 8kun/pnd/



of political meaning. An illustration of a humanoid frog, Pepe takes myriad forms across its expansive history. For much of the meme’s early usage, Pepe accompanied textual posts as a “reaction face” on 4chan and Tumblr before the Anti-Defamation League, in 2016, labeled it a hate symbol (Tuters and Hagen 2020). But the meme has other uses. Anti-extradition protesters in Hong Kong utilized Pepe in the 2019 demonstration, but even so, the trend to combine the frog with Nazi imagery renders it a precarious image. To explain Pepe’s amorphous adaptability, Ernesto Laclau’s concept of a floating signifier, used in his analysis of populism, provides a critical lens (Laclau 2005). The value of a floating signifier is its emptiness. Disparate political groups can approach these symbols and give them meaning, forming a “chain of equivalence” across these varying constituencies. “Chan” imageboards mobilize Pepe the Frog as a floating signifier in attempts to string together a loose network of alt-right communities.

Brenton Tarrant on 8chan: A Template for Chaos

Brenton Tarrant’s “The Great Replacement” is a complete manifestation of the alt-right project, mobilizing memetic rhetoric into physical action. “The radicalization of young Western men is not just unavoidable,” Tarrant writes, “but inevitable...to combat the social and moral decay of their nations and the continued ethnic replacement of their people” (Tarrant 2019, 44). The source of this decay is a “suicidal nihilism” spawned by “mainstream, ‘multicultural’, egalitarian, individualistic insanity” that threatens “a future for white children” and “the natural order” (Tarrant 2019, 46, 25). An analysis of Tarrant reveals a link between memetic language and terrorist action that distorts the line between earnestness and irony. By trolling mainstream media sources, and placing white supremacy in the guise of “shitposts,” Tarrant creates a template for the spread of his propaganda and future violent attacks.

To rationalize his violent methods and conspiratorial thinking, Tarrant merges a perverse misconstruction of history with a shadow of a reference to cultural hegemony. History is written by the victors, he claims, so, regardless of tactics, “win first, write the narrative later” (Tarrant 2019, 72). Tarrant places himself in a long historical tradition constructed on ideas of power. He claims that “violence is power and violence is the reality of history” (Tarrant 2019, 28). He stresses the Battle of Vienna – the defeat of the Ottoman Empire by a coalition of Christian states in 1683 – and calls for a similar attack against the far more dangerous unarmed invader (Tarrant 2019). If the Christian West is to survive its current state of disintegration, it will need the agency of white men prepared to combat the encroaching Muslim and non-European immigrants. An agency like that of Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian mass murder, and Tarrant’s greatest inspiration (Tarrant 2019). Breivik, on 22 July 2011, murdered 77 adults and children in Norway, espousing similar rejections of Islam, political correctness, feminism, and the “radical cultural Marxist agenda”

in his manifesto (Tarrant 2019). In an eclectic mix of ideologies from different periods, Tarrant forges a new cultural script. It is a metapolitical tactic to provide a base for violent action that raises awareness of the white race’s current state of crisis. Figure 4 is indicative of the sporadic collection of cultural artifacts used to comprise the alt-right. Heavily gendered scenes of white men, women, and children in varying rural scenes underline the fantastical element behind Tarrant’s conspiratorial mode of thinking. It is a collage of thematic pictures curated to fit into the pre-constructed worldview.

Figure 4 suggests that the alt-right is not simply a form of politics but a unique form of interfacing with the external world that renders every external stimulus a floating signifier. The absence of counter-voices gives users of “chan” imageboards, like Brenton Tarrant, a sense of agency through the complete creative

Figure 4. Tarrant’s Fantasized “White Civilization”



NOTE: From Tarrant, B. (2019). *The great replacement*. https://img-prod.ifoglio.it/userUpload/The_Great_Replacementconvertito.pdf

control on the meaning invested into the floating signifiers. Digital subcultures thus become grounds for radicalization as users incorporate racist and gendered tropes into their schema.

Within the currents of history, according to the alt-right, is a constant encroachment on Christian nations by the aggressive process of Islamization, a “Great Replacement” committed by armed and unarmed invaders. This creeping endangerment of Western culture pushes Tarrant and Breivik to reject basic political action. Democratic elections are useless to soldiers who must only expect “a true war and to die the death of a true soldier” (Tarrant 2019, 52). Societal collapse is the true aim of the red-pilled white man – an apocalyptic restoration and rebirth of civilization through race wars. A reconfiguration of the past through conspiratorial thinking attacks the political structures protected by the prevailing liberal democratic cultural hegemony. Tarrant’s conspiratorial fascist propaganda replaces political organization with chaos: an organic and spontaneous mass movement to secure a future for the white race at all costs.

While acting alone, Tarrant’s call-to-arms forges an imagined network of combatants against the Great Replacement. Through frequent references to inside jokes, combined with targeted *shitposting*, the act of posting provocative content to derail a conversation, Tarrant’s transgressive comments bridge “chan” and gaming subcultures. He live-streamed the massacre, for example, from a helmet camera, an imitation of first-person shooter video games, and commented on his high score. Tarrant structured the livestream as a targeted message to a specific audience. By incorporating references to gaming YouTuber PewDiePie, and the Conservative pundit Candace Owens, Tarrant tried to troll the media and entertain “chan” and gaming insiders. Tarrant narrated his actions as if he was in a video game or on a “chan” thread, each an attempt to prolong his relevancy by encouraging viewers of his livestream to: “Do your part in spreading my message, making memes and shitposting as you usually do” (Thorleifsson 2021).

Reproduction of Nazi iconography in “The Great Replacement” characterizes subcultural memetic irony as the central form of communication in the metapolitics of the alt-

Figure 5. The Black Sun



right. In the manifesto, Tarrant poses himself a question: “Were/are you a nazi?” (Tarrant 2019, 20). To which he responds with an emphatic “no,” because since the fall of Nazi Germany in 1945, “actual nazis do not exist...anywhere in the world” (Tarrant 2019, 20). Tarrant also rejects neo-Nazis, which “is a very broad category of people” with a “fuzzy” definition (Tarrant

Figure 6. Democracy as a Jewish Ploy



2019, 20). Figure 5 displays the full-page spread of the "Black Sun," an esoteric symbol in Nazi occultism once displayed in the headquarters of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), located at the start of the manifesto ("Sonnenrad") and in Figure 4. Between the rays of the Black Sun are several images and slogans indicative of Tarrant's desire for "a new society." The fusion of unassuming tenets like environmentalism, anti-imperialism, and worker's rights renders the alt-right as an autonomous conceptual category outside the classic Right/Left dichotomy.

Through an almost absurd employment of symbols, like George Washington tucked in between the rays of the Black Sun, layers of irony develop. A paradoxical frame in which insiders treat visuals and language as both true and not true. For outsiders, it's impossible to pinpoint earnest belief. The production of a fascist internet culture and aesthetic through serious and non-serious fantasies of racial purity confuses the established differences underlying political representation. It allows the alt-right to create a transgressive and innovative political experience that reinforces the bonds of the community by distancing in-group members from the *normies*.

Brenton Tarrant on 4chan: Escalation and Memorialization

The rapid and anonymous production of memes creates a style of communication that is a core feature of the fascist phenomena: the perception of an endangered community that needs to be reborn through violent action. On 4chan, the glorification of Tarrant through memetic language contextualized his atrocities as the start of a glorious and divine revolution. In September 2019, one user posted:

Saint Brenton Tarrant of Grafton (pbuh) was a normal white man from upside down land until he saw the travesty that is the (((refugee))) crisis in Evropa. The slaughter of innocent Ebba Akerlund pushed him over the edge. On March 15, 2019, he entered history as the Firebrand Gallant after successfully raiding and physically removing 51 invaders from the al Noor and Linwood terrorist training camps (Anonymous 2019).

Throughout this thread is an effort to connect Tarrant to a movement unrestrained by geopolitical borders. No

Figure 7. The Republican Club



NOTE: Taken from Anonymous. (2019, September 1). *Saint Tarrant* [Online forum post]. 4chan.org. <https://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/225098306/>

Figure 8. Saint Tarrant



NOTE: Taken from Anonymous. (2019, September 1). *Saint Tarrant* [Online forum post]. 4chan.org. <https://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/225098306/>

matter the location, no matter the forum, the goal is the same: the survival of “white civilization.” The user’s reference to “(((refugee)))”, for those on the inside, is an intelligible vehicle for othering. The triple parenthesis is a construction of a “them” through memetic abstraction, with clear ties to antisemitism (Figure 6). In practice, this paranoid conspiratorial communication is a reactionary combination of antagonistic and innuendo-laden political communication.

4chan/pol’s memes created a pantheon of canonized figures belonging to the whole of the “white race” (Figure 7). This manipulated image of the “The Republican Club,” a painting that depicts former President Donald Trump surrounded by previous Republican presidents, now includes the faces of white terrorists. Dylan Roof, Robert Bowers, Breivik, and Adolf Hitler join Tarrant, who’s flashing a “white power” sign as he did in court (Figure 7). Figure 8 depicts Tarrant as a saint, holding his manifesto as the Black Sun glows behind him—a scene of content contrasted against Figure 9, which stirs melancholic feelings.

Memes throughout the thread also encourage “anons” to “take the action pill,” to accelerate the collapse of civilization by committing violence in real life (Anonymous 2019). More than a thousand of the archived posts stored on 4plebs.org characterize Tarrant as a saint. The sanctification of Tarrant is a call for greater engagement in terrorist activities: clear beacons around which the multiple pockets of alt-right activity across “chan” imageboards can rally. On 8kun, Phillip Manshaus, inspired by Tarrant, made similar post before attacking a mosque in Oslo: “well cobblers it’s my time, I was elected by saint tarrant after all...we can’t let this go on, you gotta bump the race war thread irl and if you’re reading this you have been elected by me” (Manshaus 2019). Alt-right memetic language interconnects these violent members of the movement, no matter their geographical context or background, in a chain of resistance against the conspiratorial theories of white genocide.

RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS

On “chan” imageboards, memes function as a collective project against a common opponent and work to reinforce the bond of the community and to mark in-group members. This paper examined alt-right identity in the anonymous and largely unmoderated forums of 4chan/pol/, 8kun/pnd/, and 8chan. It concludes that the alt-right, born and structured out of an intellectual movement aimed at rethinking the far-right’s classical ideological building blocks, binds its digital members together by subcultural and vernacular posting behaviors. New and extreme modes of political speech, muddled beneath layers of supposedly humorous or ironic claims, resonate with a metapolitical break from Western concepts of progress and egalitarianism. Discursive analysis unveils floating signifiers littered around the memetic styles of the alt-right; these signals a force of collectivization through the delineation of an “other.” Pepe the Frog, the *Happy Merchant*, and the triple parenthesis evidenced this phenomenon, whereas the sanctification of Tarrant and the perversion of history espoused by his manifesto create a cultural template for future mobilization. These

Figure 9. Why Won’t Somebody Do Something?



NOTE: Taken from Anonymous. (2019, September 1). *Saint Tarrant* [Online forum post]. 4chan.org. <https://archive.4plebs.org/pol/thread/225098306/>

findings reject the hypothesis that “chan” imageboards function exclusively as recruitment spaces for extremist groups and are unable to facilitate an intelligible in-group identity. Within these spaces is an interplay between personal creative freedom and a larger, subcultural practice that positions “anons” as co-producers of burgeoning extremist ideology at the fringes of the internet. ■

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280 Characters of Unfreedom: A Tocquevillian Examination of the Power & Danger of Social Media

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This paper is an attempt to better understand the power, potential, and danger of social media—particularly its danger to freedom of expression—by looking to Alexis De Tocqueville’s famous concept of the tyranny of the majority. The first section of this paper will unwrap and contextualize Tocqueville’s concept of the tyranny of the majority. The second will investigate the way social media exercises power in society. The third section will examine the idea of rising intellectual unfreedom through quantitative and qualitative analysis. The fourth section will connect the rise of intellectual unfreedom to the power of social media. Finally, the conclusion will attempt to contextualize intellectual unfreedom while also noting the validity and complexity of the moral power of the majority. This final section will also offer a brief prescriptive argument for the creation and protection of spheres of free inquiry within academic institutions.

The freedom to speak one’s mind is a physical necessity, not a political and intellectual piece of good luck; to a thinking person, the need seems to be almost as natural as breathing.

David Bromwich (2016)

INTRODUCTION

On January 26th, 2021, Harvard canceled one of its courses. The class, an examination of the efficacy of a controversial style of policing, was removed from Harvard course offerings following the circulation of a petition condemning it. The petition eventually received 879 signatures from individuals affiliated with Harvard. Perhaps more interesting, however, was how much external support the petition received. In addition to the Harvard signatures, the petition received over 330 signatures from external supporters and received backing from 20 external organizations. The course was a study of a specific style of policing, called Counter-Criminal Continuum Policing (C3) that was being employed in Springfield, Massachusetts (Goode 2012). The style of policing was developed by two Green Berets, Michael Cutone and Thomas Sarrouf, who, upon returning to the states from Afghanistan, noticed worrying parallels between the New England city and the war-torn villages they had seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. This comparison was not hugely unfair; residents of the Brightwood neighborhood of Springfield, MA lived in fear. According to the *New York Times*, “Gang members and drug dealers cruised the streets on motor scooters carrying SKS semiautomatic rifles in broad daylight. Gunfire erupted almost daily,” (Goode 2012). Traditional police recourse, however, did not seem to be a viable solution.

Residents distrusted the police, and the police, in turn, had done little to change this sentiment, only coming into the community to make arrests.

Cutone and Sarrouf recognized that the situation in Springfield, particularly the drug and gang violence, was like the insurgencies they had seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. They developed a plan to “work by, with and through the local population” and “detect, degrade, disrupt and dismantle criminal activity” (Goode 2012). It was the efficacy of this tactic that Harvard professor Kevin Parker wanted to study. The petition against the course was rooted in multiple complaints: that such a study was unethical; that the course might “naturalize policies and practices that have disparate impacts on black and brown communities” (Joint Letter & Demands to Harvard SEAS regarding ENG-SCI 298r n.d.); and that students in the course were being taken advantage of for unpaid research. It is not apparent that any of these claims were substantiated. The official goal of the course was to contribute “to an understanding of an impoverished community” that had “made some very courageous decisions about taking the control of their fate from violent criminal gangs” (Reilly 2021). It seemed, by standard accounts, to be a legitimate academic subject. The course’s study also had an intended positive real-world impact. Many community leaders in areas that had adopted C3 were supportive and, additionally, many neighborhood residents reported that C3 had improved their neighborhoods (Goode 2012). Parker’s goal of giving students a chance to engage in knowledge-building and getting them “in the trenches on social reforms and...drag hard problems back to Harvard to work with students to solve them” (Reilly 2021), was seemingly made in good faith.

This was not the way his work was received. While there was student outrage at Harvard, the controversy extended onto social media. One tweet received almost 1,000 retweets and 1,700 likes—the tweet cited the petition and stated, “So apparently Harvard is offering a course on the merits of counterinsurgency tactics used to police black and brown neighborhoods???? Not surprised but still disgusted” (Avriel Epps-Darling 2021). The college responded within six days of the tweet, acquiescing to demands to pull the plug on the course. Parker’s hope that Harvard’s administration would “display the moral courage to support its faculty who endeavor to lead such projects...and their academic freedom” (Reilly 2021) was not realized.

This case is notable for a few reasons. The first is that the content of study, C3 Policing, was *newly* unacceptable as a topic of study. For example, it was noted that “neither the use of C3 techniques in Springfield nor Parker’s interest in the method are new” (Reilly 2021). The Harvard SEAS website includes multiple articles on the topic, including 2012 stories from the *New York Times*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Harvard Gazette*, and *Nature*. The cancellation of the class represented a previously acceptable topic being deemed unacceptable following public outcry. The scope of the response to the course was also interesting. The large number of signatories on the petition not affiliated with Harvard were most likely drawn from the ranks of social media. The specific engagement on social media was notable because while it happened outside both the general context of academia and the specific context of Harvard, it determined the perimeters of free thought within those contexts. Finally, the speed at which Harvard canceled the course pointed to the power social media has when it comes to influencing institutional policy regarding intellectual freedom.

The writings of Alexis De Tocqueville provide a compelling analytical framework for understanding this case and others. American media has long been a mold of public opinion and has had a, in Tocqueville’s view, singular capacity for creating social unanimity. It is this idea specifically that this paper will address. If the traditional American press was worrisome because it could drop “the same thought into a thousand minds” (Tocqueville 2009, 987) as Tocqueville seemed to think, then social media represents a new dimension of that power. If traditional media, like newspapers, can “set the public mind” and form “political questions” (Tocqueville and Beaumont 2010, pt. 2, 24; pt. I, s64) in a way that could, according to Boesche (1987), cause people to “embrace a subtle self-censorship...reflecting the dominant values and repeating them ceaselessly until no one dreamed of questioning them,” (250) it seems, at the very least, worth spending a few pages analyzing the danger of a new and very powerful kind of press, one capable of putting the same idea into the heads of a million or more people at the click of a button.

The example of Harvard canceling Parker’s course offers an instance of public outrage curtailing intellectual freedom.

But perhaps more interestingly, it offers a picture of social media as the amplifier and disseminator of that outrage, and finally, as the catalyst for the course’s cancellation. Digital communication, and particularly social media, seems to be particularly powerful in determining and enforcing limits on intellectual thought. This paper will take the advice of Boesche and analyze the “enormous new capacities of the electronic age” (250) as they relate to Tocqueville’s warnings; it will argue that his writings, at once brilliant and cautionary, offer a framework for analyzing the danger to intellectual unfreedom that social media presents. Probing into why social media as a primary arbiter in determining the sphere of acceptable discourse ought to be considered problematic will help cement this understanding. The first section of this paper will deal with understanding Tocqueville’s framework. The second section will shift to social media and will examine its distinction. The third section will identify and analyze trends in perceived intellectual unfreedom and will look at empirical research on trends in academic freedom. Moving from these trends, the fifth section will connect social media to intellectual unfreedom. The final concluding discussion will connect Tocqueville’s theory to an understanding of the power and danger of social media in our world.

Fundamentally, Tocqueville’s work will be used to analyze the power social media holds in society, the shrinking sphere of intellectual freedom in the academy and the way the two can be understood as intimately and importantly connected. This paper will argue that Alexis De Tocqueville’s tyranny of the majority offers a uniquely compelling framework for analyzing the danger social media poses to freedom of thought.

Tyranny of the Majority

Within the body of American political thought, Alexis De Tocqueville’s three volume *Democracy in America* stands as an enduring tract on the possibility and limitations of liberal democracy. In *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville describes a particular danger found in governments that seek rule by the people. This danger is what he calls the ‘tyranny of the majority.’ A two-pronged analysis of the danger of ‘popular will’ as translated into popular power, Tocqueville’s tyranny of the majority identified both the obvious danger of a “direct majoritarian dominance of government” (Maletz 2002, 741), as well as a novel and more innovative argument that democracies are at risk of imposing a softer majoritarian tyranny on the minds and thoughts of their citizens.

The first type of tyranny is a straightforward account of power; all it highlights is the danger of abuse of power by those in power. Tocqueville argues that “one social power must always predominate over the others” (Tocqueville 2009, 482) and that this sort of predomination, though inevitable in kind, might be mitigated in degree by institutional checks. While, for Tocqueville, political liberty is compatible with a majoritarian society, it is endangered so long as majoritarian power is “checked by no obstacles which may retard its course and force

it to moderate its own vehemence" (Tocqueville 2009, 482). Furthermore, he notes that the rights of the minority will be in doubt so long as redress is arbitrated by the majority. Let one be wronged by the majority, and they will find no help from a legislature, executive branch, military, jury of peers or even elected judges insofar as the majority occupies those posts (Tocqueville 2009, 483). Injustice perpetuated by the majority will be judged not by an impartial third party, but by the majority itself.

Tocqueville's account of the political danger of the majority, however, is largely theoretical. Maletz (2002) notes that Tocqueville provides only "two real examples of majority tyranny...one involving mob violence in Baltimore, the other a discouragement of the political activity of racial minorities in Pennsylvania" (754). Though Maletz concedes that more examples could have potentially been found, he is suspicious of the universal claim Tocqueville makes, citing its thin empirical support (Maletz 2002, 754).

However, this first 'tyranny of the majority' is not the primary concern of this paper. The theoretical banality and potential inaccuracy of a *political* tyranny of the majority stands in contrast to Tocqueville's more interesting and innovative theory regarding the power of the majority over *public opinion*. Where political tyranny of the majority involves the capture and corruption of political institutions in service of the democratic majority, a tyranny of public opinion involves policing social norms. This second tyranny is the softer, but highly invasive, tyranny that the majority might hold over the minds and thoughts of citizens. This is the 'moral power of the majority.'

This second form of tyranny, for Tocqueville, highlights both the raw power and the radical uniqueness of democracy. While "the authority of the king is purely physical," a democratic majority, for Tocqueville, possesses "a power that is physical and moral at the same time" (Tocqueville 2009, 487). The sphere of acceptable thought and ideas is dictated by a sole power, the power of the majority. Tocqueville theorizes that a true majority's monopoly over public opinion allows it to demand fealty to its own conclusions. The result is a social sphere of inquiry open only so long as "the majority is still undecided...as soon as its decision is irrevocably pronounced, a submissive silence is observed" (Tocqueville 2009, 486). This silence constitutes obedience to the majority, paid by all factions in society. In Tocqueville's Europe, power factionalism provided shelter for dissenters: a European dissenter of the monarchy was sheltered by the common people (who were opposed to the monarch), or a monarchist that offended the common people was to be protected by the aristocracy (who opposed the common people).

In Tocqueville's America, there was no such protection. In other places, the fractured nature of groups allowed individuals attacked by one group to find protection in others. However, in America there existed only the "one sole authority" (Tocqueville 2009, 487) of the majority. Tocqueville

argues that the majority had unlimited power over deciding which ideas were acceptable and which were not. An author could write what they pleased only so long as it was within the boundaries decided upon by the majority, but as soon as one transgressed the set boundaries they were subjected to a sort of social castigation. A dissenter might "retain [their] life, [their] property, and all that [they] possess" (Tocqueville 2009, 489) but the majority would ensure that they lost their social standing, "tormented by the slights and persecutions of daily obloquy" (Tocqueville 2009, 488). What Tocqueville describes was the hammer of public opinion. Those who inspired its ire would be subjected to loud censure by "overbearing opponents" (Tocqueville 2009, 488). Once on their heels, they would find themselves abandoned by any former allies who chose self-censorship over similar ridicule. While there may be vigorous and interesting discussion within the sphere of acceptable discourse, true freedom of opinion, in Tocqueville's estimation, was dearly limited.

Tocqueville's notion of tyranny of thought, or the moral power of the majority, was in some ways a responding salvo to a *Federalist* or Madisonian account of democratic power. According to the historian Rory Schacter, Tocqueville did share Madison's "concern that a *state* legislature [could] become hostile to local liberties" (Boettke and Martin 2020, 17-18, italics added). But the *Federalist's* bigger concern was that a "deep or permanent divide between minority and majority factions in the United States" (Boettke and Martin 2020, 20) would emerge, creating the conditions for institutionalized majoritarian oppression of the minority group. Their solution was to design institutions so as to "render government invulnerable to the onslaughts of the impassioned majority" (Horwitz 1966, 299). Tocqueville, in contrast, rejected the idea that factions and division were of chief concern, arguing instead that society, or the public, was itself the undivided majority that all parties paid fealty to. As such, democracy's institutional design could never be strong enough to account for societal problems (Horwitz 1966, 306). In this understanding, "institutional checks alone would not suffice" (Boettke and Martin 2020, 20). Horwitz (1966) described this as Tocqueville's innovative leap, arguing that "Madison's was a numerical or political" tyranny whereas Tocqueville's was a "more subtle and intangible tyranny of unanimity and uniformity; that is, tyranny of society itself" (302).

This is the most important turn Tocqueville made. According to Horwitz (1966), Tocqueville "shifted the entire object of thought about the majority problem *from government to society*" (305, italics added). Society constituted the informal social norms and practices of a community. Government, in contrast, was concerned with the more formal institutions of political power. The importance of this shift comes from its understanding that freedom was both a social and a political concept. Insofar as *society* was capable of tyranny over its inhabitant, it constituted a danger to freedom. Freedom, in other words, depends not only on the restraint and moderation

of government, but also on the restraint and moderation of society *writ large*. No longer was freedom “a matter of restraining governors or making government ultimately responsible for the people,” but thanks to Tocqueville’s analysis, it also “depended on the habits and traditions of the people” (Horwitz 1966, 305). This social tyranny can be understood as the moral power of the majority.

This description, Horwitz notes, was a challenge to the conventional narrative of freedom. Coercive government oppression was less of a threat to free intellectual thought than the moral power the majority exercised over the minds of citizens. This was “despotism at a new stage of perfection” (Horwitz 1966, 303), as it concerned the manipulation of individuals’ wills instead of bodies. Coercion needed to be reevaluated because the majority’s power was “physical and moral at the same time” and acted “upon the will as much as the actions” (Tocqueville 2009, 487). There was no terminology for this moral coercion in Tocqueville’s time because, in a classical liberal sense which saw coercion as physical force, it did not look like coercion at all. Horwitz (1966) notes that this sort of unfreedom furthermore did not look coercive because it “transformed the very nature of individuals so that, because the source of restraint appeared to be dictated by the individuals own desires” (303). It appeared to be voluntary. Yet the end result of *intellectual unfreedom* was real. To Tocqueville (2009), the full effect of this subversive moral coercion was he knew of “no country in which there is so little independence of mind and freedom of discussion as in America” (487).

While interesting and persuasive, Tocqueville’s theory may seem out of touch. For those who saw the democratic election of Donald Trump, for instance, as a threat to liberalism¹, the Madisonian concerns seem much more relevant. The Madisonian idea was that well-designed institutions could protect democracy from illiberal tendencies. Do or die partisan battles to control the court system (Hananel 2016) and infringements on voting rights and districting fairness (Associated Press 2021) seem like the tactics of a partisan faction in a Madisonian nightmare.

The idea of an impassioned faction threatening political institutions, however, is not enough to deny that Tocqueville’s work is still important for understanding the danger of the moral power of the majority. Indeed, his illuminating placement of the problems of democracy in society rather than institutions seems like a prescient warning of the same kind that intellectuals offered *ex post facto* (but certainly not prior to) the growing power of anti-liberal factions in the United States. Only after democratic institutions were strained by the 2020 election, for instance, was consensus reached on the Tocquevillian idea that even the best institutions are not enough to check a society bent on their subversion (Horwitz 1966, 296). For this and other reasons, Tocqueville’s concern about the moral power of the majority is highly relevant.

The Power of Social Media

Social media is, without doubt, enormously powerful and influential. In the last thirty years, since the beginning of the popular acceptance of the internet, billions of individuals across the globe have become digitally connected (Shirky 2011, 28). This digital connection has allowed for an explosion of new ideas, has given the politically disenfranchised a new shared voice, and has radically democratized information distribution and creation. Yet, even as “the Internet and social media are omnipresent,” their “political roles...are not yet fully understood” (Shirky 2011, 28). This analysis will focus on one of social media’s *potential* political roles: its ability to coordinate majority opinion sentiments with revolutionary speed and reach. This next section will be devoted to developing an understanding of the potential and danger of social media.

The jumping off point for an understanding of the role, practice, and power of social media is to situate it within the larger landscape of news media. At its broadest, news media might be understood as any sort of large distributor of information about current events or political happenings (Graber 2003, 140). Yet, while categorically accurate, this sort of definition does not capture the defining features of social media. Indeed, as “there are vast differences in content, framing, and mode of presentation among various types of news venues and within each venue” (Graber 2003, 140), it is important to highlight the unique form and function of social media. There are two distinctive characteristics of social media: its reliance on user-generated content and its low barriers to entry (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020, 416). These characteristics combined offer a platform that is less gate-kept, more organic, and more responsive to trends than traditional media. The analytical work of this paper, however, is to determine how social media is shaping discourse and action, and whether it is doing so in a way that would be red flagged by Tocqueville.

Social media is sometimes analogized as a modern printing-press—both were revolutionary forms of media that worked to circumvent political gatekeepers and democratize both information production and dissemination (Shirky 2011, 34). This sort of democratization, however, is not necessarily a good thing. For example, the low barriers to content creation followed by the widespread ability to share content may serve to undermine gatekeepers² working in the interest of vibrant public discourse. While removing gatekeeping can certainly have good consequences, like making it “difficult for political or business actors to hide potentially harmful information” (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020, 416), it is also the case that many traditional media gatekeepers are also responsible for the high quality and factual correctness of traditional news media. A prime example of this tradeoff can be observed in the low fact-checking standards of social media. User-based content and the viral capacity of social media are eminently compatible with the spread of misinformation or fake news, “ultimately increasing political misperceptions” (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020, 417). This process, furthermore, may be abetted by a psychological

inclination to share information that evokes a stronger immediate reaction—as fake news is more designed to trigger fear or anger—than real news. Because of this psychological tendency, fake news often spreads faster than real news on social media (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020, 417). In general, the design of social media rewards “shorter, simpler, and more emotionally charged messages” (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020, 417).

Social media has also contributed to the rise of partisan echo-chambers, spheres of discourse that reinforce contestable political opinions by removing them from the broader arena of contestability. Its low barrier to entry has increased the number of media choices that individuals can consume, which in turn allows for users to preferentially follow news that confirms their own biases and predilections (Zhuravskaya et al. 2020, 417). The way in which social media influences opinions is one important reason why it holds so much power.

More so than traditional media, social media is uniquely designed to change and/or harden people’s opinions. As the sociologists Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (1955) demonstrated in 1948, mass media in isolation is not enough to change someone’s opinion; a second step, that of social conversation—which is often informed by mass media—is required to form new opinions. Social media is uniquely capable of filling these two roles as “it allows people to privately and publicly articulate and debate a welter of conflicting views” (Shirky 2011, 34). Social media, like traditional media, provides individuals with an opinion landscape. What it does uniquely, though, is *also* offer the second step: a forum for engaging with the opinions of friends and family members—the people you trust. It is this second role that makes social media uniquely able to both offer ideas and pull individuals into allegiance to those ideas. The danger is that while social media does seem to encourage social conversation, it does so in a fragmented way. One of the reasons why a huge amount of varied information—of the kind accessible on social media—is a problem is that “with audiences dividing their attention among more news venues, the bond of shared information that ties communities together may be vanishing” (Graber 2003, 153). Social media then seems paradoxical; it both creates a sphere for social conversation and undermines the broader sphere of public discourse. This paradox is only reconciled by the recognition that social media’s strength is in creating spheres of *like-minded* discourse at the expense of a broader cross-factional public discourse³.

A social media that excels at creating impassioned factions seems much more consistent with a Madisonian diagnosis. It does not seem to be the case that social media is capable of building one common majoritarian consensus like the one Tocqueville describes. In fact, it seems to be doing the opposite. According to the above sources, social media is best at doing the thing the *Federalists*, not Tocqueville, feared—that is, creating a “deep or permanent divide between minority and majority factions in the United States” (Boettke and Martin 2020, 20).

While this interpretation no doubt seems to support a Madisonian concept of tyranny of the majority, Tocqueville’s writing offers an important insight into the power of social media. Even if Tocqueville’s (2009) description of the predominance of the majority may be called into question, his fear that oppression in democratic republics will come as “entirely an affair of the mind...which it is intended to coerce” (487) seems strikingly relevant in a discussion on the power of social media. The vocal individuals on social media do not necessarily reflect a true majority’s thought; however, social media offers a tool of amplification that allows those thoughts to appear dominantly majoritarian. Tocqueville’s majoritarian tyranny does not need to be understood as one single strain of discourse blanketing society; instead, it need only occupy the majority of thought in any particular sphere of discourse. The unique reality of social media is that it can allow a relatively small contingent to present as the majority within some context. What’s important is not the actual number of people articulating any given view relative to the total number of people in society, but the perception that the articulated view is that of the dominant majority—particularly by those on the receiving end. Thus, a relatively small group can occupy an outsized space within a particular sphere of discourse (like the influence social media exerted on Harvard’s decision to cancel Parker’s course). This comes to bear in academic settings particularly. What is considered acceptable or unacceptable is not decided nationally by a national majority, but instead reflects the dominant view in a particular context.

Academic intellectual unfreedom may be thought of as one example of contextualized tyranny of the majority. It is exactly the sort of socially incentivized censorship that Tocqueville described. To recall, this censorship worked through threatening the loss of one’s social standing through “the slights and persecutions of daily obloquy” as a social punishment for opining outside of society’s “formidable barriers” (Tocqueville 2009, 488) of acceptable discourse. This definition is striking in that it is almost identical to the definition of “cancel culture” provided by Harvard political scientist Pippa Norris. Norris (2020) wrote that “cancel culture” can be defined broadly as attempts to ostracize someone for violating social norms” (2). Cancel culture, as a social punishment inflicted for violating social norms, is the most obvious realization of Tocqueville’s warnings about tyranny of thought. This next section will look closer into whether this phenomenon can be reasonably connected to Tocqueville’s fear of majoritarian domination and whether its ascendance is due to social media.

Intellectual Unfreedom in Practice

While pressure to be politically correct is certainly a form of the intellectual tyranny Tocqueville described, a more exact study of his theory is found in the perceived change in academic freedom. Evaluating anything empirically as ‘soft coercion’ is difficult. For instance, identifying and studying

intellectual unfreedom is empirically difficult because self-censorship is essentially a non-event. In other words, it is difficult to show that something may have happened but did not. That said, there are cases that point towards such a *disincentivization* as well as empirical evidence suggesting that academics, as one of the few studied demographics on free intellectual thought, are *perceiving* more intellectual boundaries in their own work.

Understanding the scope of intellectual freedom requires identifying limits of expression. That, in turn, requires looking to cases that generate “controversy, opposition and pressures on the institution to engage in censorship” (Redstone and Villasenor 2020, 52). Redstone and Villasenor (2020), in a book called *Unassailable Ideas*, have noted that research “on politically charged topics is subject to indiscriminate attack on social media” (52) and for that reason provides a perimeter for understanding what is acceptable discourse. The highly public nature of these controversies, due to the highly public and viral nature of social media, then places pressure on school administrators “to subvert established norms regarding the protection of free academic inquiry” (Redstone and Villasenor 2020, 53). Because of the unwillingness of the university to shield its idea forums from social media, “it’s unsurprising that most members of the campus community avoid testing boundaries, and instead engage in discourse, teaching, and research within a much narrower range than is theoretically permitted by a university’s official policies” (Redstone and Villasenor 2020, 54). This is strikingly close to the contraction of acceptable discourse theorized by Tocqueville. The empirical landscape on free intellectual thought largely bears out this theory.

A more systematic approach to understanding the sphere of acceptable discourse shows a modern tendency towards free-thought contraction. A recent survey, *The World of Political Science*, 2019, attempted to fill the gap between case studies and quantitative analysis of intellectual unfreedom in academia. Involving 2,446 political scientists in 102 countries and 1,245 from 23 affluent post-industrial societies (Norris 2020, 9), the survey provided a comprehensive study of *perceived* intellectual freedom among social scientists. The survey’s results showed “growing restrictions of academic freedom of speech, pressures for ideological conformity, and the enforcement of politically correct speech” (15) within academic institutions.

The actual social pressures to conform to the majority can be witnessed in both the survey’s results regarding “*Experience of pressure to be politically correct*” (14) and “*Experience of academic freedom*” (14). When asked specifically about political correctness, 39% of respondents reported experiencing no change over time regarding pressure to be politically correct, over one third of respondents (36%) experienced ‘somewhat/a lot’ of an increase in pressure to be politically correct. This second group was much larger than those who had felt the pressure to be politically correct had gotten ‘somewhat/a lot’ better (15%). Further illumination

was provided by an ideological breakdown of respondents; while 42% of professors on the left had ‘experienced no change in the pressure to conform,’ only 20% of professors on the right responded similarly (13). But most importantly, the largest plurality (47%) of respondents in the survey reported that academic freedom, in their experience, had deteriorated ‘somewhat/a lot.’ This conclusion is supported elsewhere as well. A recent report drawing on a YouGov survey of 820 academics in the UK, for example, found that 32% of those who identified as ‘fairly right’ or ‘right’ reported having self-censored and refrained from presenting their own ideas and views in both teaching and research (Adekoya et al. 2020, 8). Self-censorship, the report further noted, was not just because of a fear of being uncomfortable or out of step with the prevailing social views but was oftentimes a “rational response—particularly for younger academics—to a workplace in which expressing such views may have a negative impact on their careers” (Adekoya et al. 2020, 8). What these studies identify is an empirical trend towards intellectual unfreedom.

Disparity in perceived intellectual unfreedom can be explained by examining who is thinking at the perimeter of acceptable thought; those operating at the margin of acceptable social discourse experience the pressures exerted by the majority when the margin contracts. Right-wing professors, often a minority within their institutions⁴, may feel more pressure precisely because their views do not conform to the views of the majority. Within academic communities at least, the majoritarian pressure is coming from the left. This pressure makes sense, as Norris (2020) notes that “public opinion on a wide range of issues has gradually shifted in a more socially liberal and progressive direction to become the majority view in public opinion in many affluent post-industrial societies in western Europe and North America” (14). Thus, the increased pressure to be politically correct may be an effect of public opinion that has shifted the sphere of acceptable discourse away from the right. The result is that many rightwing professors are likely to feel “growing pressures to conform with evolving informal social values both in the academy and broadly in postindustrial societies” (Norris 2020, 17).

What these studies identify is an empirical trend towards intellectual unfreedom. This trend, though analyzed here only in academic environments due to empirical accessibility, is starkly in line with Tocqueville’s thought on majoritarian moral pressure.

Social Media & Intellectual Unfreedom

One explanation for the trend towards intellectual unfreedom is the intuitive idea that individuals will not explore controversial ideas when they have nothing to gain from doing so and everything to lose. The threat of cancel culture, particularly, seems to be a driving force in disincentivizing the exchange of ideas outside the sphere of acceptable discourse. Ilana Redstone and John Villasenor directed their attention to this phenomenon, what they call call-out culture. Call-out

culture, they argue, is “one of the most visible changes to public discourse in the social media age”; it essentially is “the use of social media to build a wave of public indignation regarding behavior deemed transgressive” (Redstone and Villasenor 2020, 36). This sort of process is often legitimately pointed at individuals who have acted in harmful or unpardonable ways, but it also has invaded the sphere of open inquiry within academia. The pursuit of intellectual knowledge has always been linked to “broader political, social and religious currents” (Redstone and Villasenor 2020, 43). However, it has also been historically insulated from those currents. Social media is important because it provides “a new feedback mechanism through which those currents can shape and be shaped by what happens on campus” (Redstone and Villasenor 2020, 43). Not only is social media a new tool, but it also seems to be an incredibly effective way to publicly shame people into behavior modification. In other words,

Individuals who have been targeted by call out campaigns highlighting real or perceived transgressions will be less likely to do anything in the future that might once again attract online wrath. Even people who have not been targets of call-out campaigns see what happens to those who have and will modify their behavior as well to avoid becoming targets themselves (Redstone and Villasenor 2020, 43).

This sort of targeting, especially when academic institutions fail to protect the academic sphere of free inquiry, leads to the sort of academic unfreedom that seems to be on the rise in universities around the world. Social media’s abilities to quickly notice transgression, make that notice visible to a much larger audience, and find and target the transgressor all are factors that have made the moral power of the majority uniquely able to determine and dictate acceptable discourse.

CONCLUSIONS TO DRAW

If intellectual freedom *has* diminished, is it not immediately apparent that we ought to consider that a bad thing. Norris notes that public shaming has often been dealt out for reasons that are not vindictive or done in poor faith. For example, public shaming has helped victims achieve social justice when they are unable to obtain legal restitution or public apology. Public shaming on social media was also integral to the #MeToo movement, which targeted powerful sexual predators, and the Black Lives Matter movement, which used social media to call out racist textbooks, instances of police abuse and violence in communities of color, and organizations lacking diversity (Norris 2020, 2). In other words, there are certainly *reasons*, and they can often be quite good, for why social media ought to be used as a mechanism to publicly shame or call-out. Having boundaries on what is considered socially acceptable to say and believe also makes sense in a more interpersonal way. Talking offensively or without regard

to others often is carelessly or intentionally hurtful. If social etiquette was completely ignored, it would be hard to imagine any conversation ending productively or positively; it is even harder to imagine a functioning democracy with such a toxic public forum. And finally, even if the forums of social media *do* produce unjustified or harmful mob mentalities, how ought one to limit them? It seems like the intellectual freedom proponent does not win by censoring social media, as that itself is a form of intellectual unfreedom.

These are the difficult realities of social media and its power. This nuanced reality is where a careful reading of Tocqueville’s warning of the power of the majority provides clarity. The power held by social media is the moral power of the majority. It is a mechanism that demonizes and socially ostracizes those individuals whose views transgress the boundaries of acceptable discourse. It is not physical coercion, but as Tocqueville rightly noted, the power of the moral majority is great enough to not need to stoop to physical violence. Moral coercion *is* coercive in the sense that it is a threat: that one might lose their job, friends, privacy, or social status. It is not necessarily the case that everyone who crosses those boundaries ought to be defended for doing so, but it *is* the case that channeling the social power of the majority ought to be treated with a suspicion proportional to its capacity to control and subtly coerce.

Academia, in particular, may be served by Tocqueville’s analysis. What academia aspires toward is the generation of knowledge and genius. Premised in this manner, Tocqueville offers insight into the way that social tyranny leads to intellectual failure. “There is no literary genius without freedom of opinion, and freedom of opinion does not exist in America” (Tocqueville 2009, 490). This is a broad thrust to be sure, and Tocqueville did come before the time of Dickinson, Kerouac, and Foster-Wallace, but pushing the frontier of knowledge requires a certain disregard of conformity—and institutions like universities, so long as their commitment is to knowledge, ought to create space for that nonconformity. Tocqueville attributes the power of social tyranny to the isolation it levels at the target, and this is perhaps where his warning can be prescriptive. For academia, in particular, free inquiry is institutional. It is when academics are placed outside of the sphere of free inquiry and into the public sphere that their work becomes subject to the power of the moral majority. Creating and protecting this sphere of open inquiry, then, may be the place to start.

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NOTES

- 1 Liberalism is defined here using Yascha Mounk's (2018) definition: Liberalism is an ideological commitment "to basic values like freedom of speech, the separation of powers, or the protection of individual rights" (26).
- 2 In this case, journalistic professionals who get to decide which stories get run and which don't.
- 3 That this *like-minded* discourse is emotionally charged is another important point.
- 4 Only 27% and 2% of global respondents in the *World of Political Science*, 2019, Survey self-identified as 'moderately-right' and 'far-right,' respectively (Norris 2020, 14)

The Implications of Gender and the Islamic State: The Evolution of Female Roles in Iraq and Syria and Gendered Counterterrorism in the West

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In 2014, the Islamic State gained global prominence after years of silently fighting in the Middle East. With images and reports of women being forced into marriage and motherhood, the Islamic State established itself as a global threat against Western security and democracy. A year later, female members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria were reportedly being used as active fighters on the front-line, straying from the group's long-held conservative beliefs that women are meant only to fulfill subservient, domestic roles in the home. This paper offers how the role of women in the Islamic State has evolved in recent years to allow women to deviate from more submissive, traditional roles, to more operational and active roles within the organization. In addition, it seeks to illuminate the change in roles of women in the Islamic State and how the gender biases of Western counterterrorism have failed to account for female violent actors. Historically, women have held the roles of bride and nurturer, responsibilities of which follow traditional values and hold women to serve the male militants and bring up the next generation of fighters. Allowing roles previously held exclusively for men to be opened up to selected women is enticing for the Islamic States terror strategies while also a proving to be a problem for Western security measures.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to the rise of the Islamic State and the evolution of women in Islamist terrorist organizations, these groups were just men. Islamist terrorist groups were founded by men, operated by men, and made up of men who were committing acts of terror on the basis of religious motivations. Since the turn of the twentieth century, women have been progressively expanding their roles in societies all over the world, gaining opportunities in the workforce and among other societal structures, including terrorist organizations. As one of the most known and prominent terrorist organizations of contemporary times, the Islamic State¹ is on the radar of every Western intelligence agency. Since its rise to global prominence nearly a decade ago, the group has allowed women to take on roles that differed from previous militant Islamic terrorist groups including al-Qaeda and the Taliban. On December 2, 2015, the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, California was the site of a terrorist attack consisting of a mass shooting carried out, in part, by a woman who had pledged her allegiance to the Islamic State². This group has separated itself from the traditional mold of previous and other Islamist terrorist groups by allowing and even targeting women to join their fight. Studying the roles women hold in

the structure of the Islamic State tells an important story of the group, its members, and how Western intelligence and security perceives or, more accurately, does not perceive these women as external security threats to their nation.

The Islamic State poses the greatest terrorist threats to the West today, so it is vital to understand all the innerworkings of the group. Within the Islamic State, it has become evident that women are members that make up an increasing demographic. The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation reported in 2018 that of the 41,000 international members affiliated with the Islamic State, 4,761 were women (International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation 2018). However, even with the rising number of female participants in the organization, Western counterterrorism and national security policies have yet to be rebranded and adjusted to account for female attackers. As long as women are seen through gendered lenses as having no part in operational roles, the Islamic State will continue to exploit and wreak havoc on the larger international community through the use of women as frontline fighters (Agara 2015). With governments not viewing women as potential threats in the same way as men, many nations, including Western nations, find themselves at a higher risk of facing attacks. This paper seeks to explore the question of how the roles of women in the Islamic State have changed and

evolved over time. Additionally, this paper looks to understand how the prevalence and rise of women in the Islamic State has had implications on counterterrorism policies in the West.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women in Terror

Since the mid-twentieth century, women have come to play a much more significant role in terrorism. Over the last few decades scholars have begun to more frequently address the presence of women in terrorist organizations, yet the literature regarding women and terrorism is still limited. The scholars of the existing literature offer two major insights into the dynamic of women and terrorism, with works that advance the roles that women have held in terrorist organizations and the reasons why women join. Tunde Agara has found that women have been involved in terrorist attacks carried out by a number of groups (Agara 2015). The identification of women as being active participants in violent uprisings, performing strategic, supportive, and combative roles, shows the versatility of the roles women have held in a number of organizations including the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Baader-Meinhof group (Agara 2015). Cindy Ness has noted that from modern terrorism's beginnings, women have been more likely to play active roles in ethno-separatist groups in comparison to religious ones. The secular group Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) of Sri Lanka actively used women as insurgents and suicide bombers in their campaigns during the 1980s and 90s, whereas the religious group of Hamas during this same time limited women to occupying supporting roles from a distance as a vocal supporter or family member of an active male participant (Ness 2008). Mia Bloom and Ayse Lokmanoglu have observed that the face of terrorism is changing, even in groups with the most patriarchal ideologies like al-Qaeda. Women in al-Qaeda held particularly traditional and non-violent roles of teacher, translator, fund-raisers, and organizers, yet a handful of women did actively engage in violence (Bloom and Lokmanoglu 2020).

Laura Sjoberg and Caron Gentry have noted in their work that women's involvement in terrorist organizations has grown rapidly in a number of positions including support personnel, logistics, and as attackers. The Shining Path, a Peruvian terrorist organization, was found to have a number of women as part of their central committee and to have played numerous roles as teachers disseminating the group's philosophies and as fighters (Sjoberg and Gentry 2011). Sue Mahan and Pamala Griset have observed that female terrorists have performed many different roles and activities in revolutionary and guerilla groups. Sympathizing roles (cooking, sewing, and other household chores) and "warrior" roles are activities on two ends of the spectrum that scholars have observed women participating in (Mahan and Griset 2008). Griset and Mahan, as part of this "warrior" role, have identified female suicide bombers as having been an important part of

the arsenal of the LTTE and the Black Widows of Chechnya, and even more recently al-Qaeda. Adding to the conversation, Jakana Thomas has found that female attackers and suicide bombers are more deadly in nations where women have limited roles in society (Thomas 2021). Their role in the organization contrasts greatly with the typical role of women in that society. Karla Cunningham has observed that despite the patriarchal roots of the many terrorist groups that originate in the Middle East, the Syrian Socialist National Party (SSNP) and the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) utilized women in a number of attacks including as suicide bombers (Cunningham 2007).

Feminism, Gender, and Terror

The intersection of gender and terrorism has become an area of growing interest in the last couple of decades. Women are thought to be innocent and passive beings, which makes it interesting when they act as active members of terrorist organizations, as it goes against everything being a "woman" is. Most of the literature regarding women and terrorism has been analyzed through a patriarchal lens, rather than through a feminist lens. Feminist theory in international relations highlights how gender effects the international community as women are important and visible agents in political, economic, and social processes (Smith 2018). Analyzing women and terrorism via a feminist lens challenges assumptions about feminine and masculine gender roles that determine what men and women should (socially) do. Laura Sjoberg argues that gender analysis is crucial in analyzing conflicts and that literature regarding conflict as "genderless" is not only inaccurate but cripples understandings of war and conflict (Sjoberg 2014). Sofia Patel and Jacqueline Westermann observe that countering violent extremism measures does not adequately integrate feminist or gender perspective into counterterrorism strategies when it comes to developing policies and procedures regarding female terrorists (Patel and Westermann 2018). Many counterterrorism measures fail to recognize women as players in international terrorism as they see women as nurturing wives and mothers, not violent terrorists. Placing a feminist theory lens on terrorism highlights that women have and will deviate from the gender roles that society subscribes to them as women. Laura Sjoberg, Grace Cooke, and Stacey Neal have argued that the standards of what it means to be "a woman" is still subordinate to what it means to be "a man," (Sjoberg, Cooke, and Neal 2011). When *not* placed in a feminist lens, most societal notions of what it means to be a woman places emphasis on peacefulness, rather than violence (Agara 2015). Sjoberg et al have observed that the nature for society to associate women with "traditional" roles has to do with the concept that women are *assumed* to belong in them rather than ones that defy typical notions of what it means to be "a woman," (Sjoberg, Cooke, and Neal 2011). The feminist theory violates conventional notions of gender while also acknowledging women to be independent, autonomous actors.

Motivations to Join the Islamic State

It is vital to understand and acknowledge the motivations for women to join terrorist organizations as a way to grasp how and why they have the roles that they do. Jammie Bigio and Rachel Vogelstein have found that while some women were forcibly enlisted into violent terrorist groups, many voluntarily joined for reasons including ideological commitment and social ties. In the case of women joining Boko Haram in Nigeria, they did so to receive a Koranic education, the only education offered where the group holds power, in a nation where girls rarely have the opportunity to finish their secondary school education (Bigio and Vogelstein 2019).

In regards to women in the Islamic State, a handful of scholars have analyzed the mobilization of women into the organization. There have been a number of reasons uncovered by scholars that answer why a woman would voluntarily join the Islamic State. Erin Saltman and Melanie Smith have identified a number of push and pull factors that lead women through radicalization into the Islamic State. Feeling isolated socially or culturally, including questioning one's identity and uncertainty of belonging within a Western culture may lead an individual to join ISIS. In many Western societies, blatant forms of discrimination unfortunately exist, and many individuals that identify as a member of an ethnic minority group are likely to have experienced some form of verbal, if not physical, abuse on the basis of their ethnic identity. The discrimination that many Muslim women face for donning a niqab or a hijab, fuels anger and even hatred for the West, resulting in women joining the caliphate as a way to wage revenge, but also to be around women that make them feel like they belong. Women are moved to join the Islamic State as a means of sisterhood and to contribute to a new society based on religious duty (Saltman and Smith 2015).

The romanticization of life and adventure in joining ISIS is a major recruitment factor to attract women to the organization. Many of the women mobilized into the organization are young and join as a way to seek adventure in leaving their homes to travel to new places (Saltman and Smith 2015). Women have also been known to join based on the promise of meaningful romance in the form of being a wife to one of the organization's fighters. Marina Shorer has found that women are mobilized into ISIS for a number of reasons including familial ties and the promise of sisterhood. This idea of sisterhood and family is especially effective in recruitment from women in the West. Many Western Muslim women question their own identity as teens and young adults. The propaganda disseminated by ISIS lures the young women in on the belief that they would be given a family by joining the organization (Shorer 2018). Having been socialized in Western societies, most of these women have lived in a constant battle of choosing between living the "modern" Western values they know and retaining traditional Islamic principles that their families' value. Debangana Chatterjee and Alice Martini have found that women join the caliphate to become brides of the

militants. Terrorism analysts at London's International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation estimated that in 2014 there were some 30 European women who had traveled to Iraq and Syria with the intention of marrying members of ISIS and other militant groups (Baker 2014). In 2013, a Scottish woman fled Glasgow to marry an ISIS fighter in Syria and just a year later in 2014, twins Zahra and Salma Halane left Manchester to join the Islamic State (Chatterjee 2016).

Lastly, scholars have identified survival as a motivation for why women join ISIS. When the Islamic State raids towns and villages, they leave them in complete ruins. Oftentimes, male family members are killed, leaving the surviving women to be targeted by ISIS. In order to stay alive, these women join the group for their own protection. In territories controlled by the Caliphate, resources and infrastructure are exploited by the group. The organization's power and control make joining a viable solution for those deprived of public facilities and services including banks and grocery stores. Many women, as a survival mechanism, turn to support the caliphate for access to basic necessities, such as food, water, and shelter (Spencer 2017). In war-torn areas, ISIS provides a safe haven for poor, widowed, and alone women. Joining is a matter of survival and a battle for basic necessities (Gan et al 2019). Yet over time, women who join based on survival become full members and take up active roles in the organization.

METHOD/ARGUMENT

The modern evolution of the female role in Islamist terrorist organizations and the failure of subsequent policy changes by the West is an example of the lack of urgency to solve the problem of gendered counterterrorism strategies. By utilizing a case study and focusing on the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, relevant conclusions can be drawn about the organization that currently poses the greatest national security threat to the West. In order to answer how the roles of women in the Islamic State in the regions of Iraq and Syria have changed, data collection via existing/archival data and published ISIS documents, videos, pictures and other propaganda will be used. The analysis of existing data will include journal articles and books by experts on the Islamic State, and interviews and news articles by journalists. Documents that will be analyzed are original materials released and published by the Islamic State. These include manifestos, photos, and videos. In analysis of this data, inductive analysis will be used to explore and draw theories and make generalized conclusions as why the role of women in ISIS has evolved. Using inductive analysis allows for the specifics of the data to discover patterns and themes, and eventually develop theories around why women have joined ISIS or, if it does not support the theory, why they have not. The Islamic State as a case study is unique when going up against a group like al-Qaeda, as scholars found surprisingly few points of comparison when it comes to the presence of women in the groups. The Islamic State plays an interesting

role in understanding how the roles of women have evolved in Islamist terrorism, specifically groups like ISIS that hold patriarchal values of the highest degree.

Scholars that do not study the Islamic State could be interested in this subject because the feminist and gendered perspective can be viewed as a case study for adjusting counterterrorism measures in response to more violent female operatives in a global climate where terrorism has become a frequent phenomenon. The PLO, terrorist organizations that find a way to operationalize women find a way to threaten and successfully carry out attacks against the West. Although terrorist organizations that do not mobilize women for attacks still carry out dangerous attacks, the organizations that mobilize women are harder to thwart because of the unassuming presence of a woman as an attacker. The recognition and understanding of the evolution of the roles of women in the Islamic State could be significant to scholars of post-9/11 terrorism or scholars of gender-based violence. The Islamic State's use of women in a number of different roles expands their threat of violence globally, while also facilitating the conditions for an increase in female participation and the greater selection of more dangerous roles than previously seen. This paper will analyze the changing role of women and the implications of these changes on Western counterterrorism policies in a case study of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The changing roles of women in the Islamic State are an important case study in the larger field of international terrorism as it tells a regional story of gendered evolution and the West's failure to respond to changing times.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

As of 2018, the United States Defense Department had estimated there were roughly 15,000 members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria ("FY2019_LIG_OIRREPORT.Pdf" 2021). The members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria are not all nationals of the two nations. Of the few thousand members of the organization, many come from abroad (Chechnya, Tunisia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, and Western nations including the U.S. and the European Union) to join the fight (Chaliand 2016). In understanding the role of women in ISIS and even the organization itself, it is necessary to think of it in two different contexts: pre-2014 and post-2014.

The Islamic State was birthed as an extension of the global jihadist movement in the late 90s and the turn of the century. At the same time, its social origins are rooted in a specific Iraqi context, and, to a lesser extent, in the Syrian War (Gerges 2014). Founded by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi³ in late 1999, the group originated as Jamaat al-Tawhid wa-I-Jihad (JTJWJ) (Zelin 2014). The group was created on a union between an Iraqi-based al-Qaeda offshoot and members of Saddam Hussein's Iraqi Baathist regime (Gerges 2014). Shortly after its creation, al-Zarqawi and the group pledged its allegiance to al-Qaeda and began participation in the Iraqi

insurgency following the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003. It then underwent a series of name changes from 2004 until its present use of ISIS beginning in 2013. After the initial invasion, the group became insignificant on the global scale, in part, due to the U.S. troop surge in 2007. When U.S. troops pulled out of Iraq in 2011, the Islamic State reemerged from the shadows and began to establish and set forth the foundations for the modern version of itself (Cameron et al 2019). This came at a time of increasing instability in Iraq and Syria as a result of the end of the Iraq War and the start of the Syrian War. In April of 2013, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi⁴, leader of the Islamic State, officially changed the group's name to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in the last event before the group was launched into global prevalence the following year (Cameron et al 2019). Historically, in context with Islamic culture and religion, "a woman's primary role has been as a mother, sister, daughter, and a wife of Muslim men at war," (Sjoberg, Cooke, and Neal 2011). Women, under ISIS, were initially required to play a more submissive role as dictated by ISIS and its publication of the *Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study* (Gan et al 2019). In the earliest years of the organization, women were actively discouraged from joining. Prior to 2014, women as part of the Islamic State was unheard of.

The year that most scholars acknowledge as the rise of the Islamic State in regards to international prominence was 2014 when the expansion of its power and ability became apparent on a global scale. This was also the year that women had begun to take active roles in the organization. Al-Baghdadi began an offensive that ended with ISIS taking the city of Mosul, Iraq's second most important city (second to the capital of Baghdad) (Chaliand 2016). By 2015, the Islamic State was increasingly carrying out attacks beyond the borders of Iraq and Syria. It was during this time that an uptick of attacks on the West occurred. Of these attacks was the notable 2015 Paris Attacks (Steafel 2015). By December 2017, ISIS had lost almost 95 percent of the territory it had occupied including its two biggest strongholds in Raqqa and Mosul (Cameron et al 2019). During these years (2014- present), the Islamic State was forced to change some of their practices regarding women in the organization. Because opposition forces were scaling up the number of attacks and the power of these attacks, size in regards to members and area conquered began to dwindle. This time period led to ISIS actively recruiting women for a variety of reasons including growing their population and membership (Spencer 2016). Due to changing counterterrorism measures and a lack of male fighters, ISIS was forced to let women become frontline fighters, which highlighted the evolution of women in ISIS from traditional roles to more operational roles.

Prior to 2014, women were not rendered operational by ISIS leaders. The Islamic State was purely focused on upholding Koranic teachings, winning the fight against Shia militants and establishing a Sunni majority region. However, by the time the group reached its peak in 2014, the U.S. and other

Western forces had begun launching small scale attacks and localized airstrikes to push back against the Islamic State under the campaign “Operation Inherent Resolve” (Cameron et al 2019). This forced the Islamic State to turn to women to begin carrying out daily tasks and functions to keep the organization running. The Islamic State thus began a campaign to recruit women as a means of survival for the group. The fight against the Islamic State by U.S. led forces, forced the hand of senior officials resulting in a change in tactics. This seemingly minor event created an avenue for women to gain positions in the Islamic State and is the reason there has been a shift in the roles of women, highlighting how they have changed from the beginning of the Islamic State to its most recent form.

ANALYSIS

Prior to 2014, women had not been mentioned in any material disseminated by the Islamic State. Based on material released by the group and existing research, classifications of the roles of women can be divided into two categories: domestic and operational. The domestic roles that women hold tend to be more traditional and in line with Koranic teachings. These responsibilities include mother, wife, and caretaker to name a few. Operational functions of women includes using women as active frontline fighters, of which had not been utilized by the Islamic State until 2014 and the groups rise to global notability.

Domestic Roles

Released in 2015 by the Islamic State, “Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study” clearly lays out the vision of the roles women are expected to hold in the group. This document outlines the fundamental roles of women and the exceptions to the rules. According to the manifesto, it is a fundamental function of a woman to serve her husband and children. Women are expected to perform traditional functions as wife, mother, and nurturer. According to the manifesto, “The greatness of her position, the purpose of her existence is the Divine duty of motherhood,” (Winter, trans. 2015). Women, according to the manifesto, are mothers first and foremost, as this position is essential to the growth of the Caliphate. Women are expected to raise the next generation of jihad fighters and teach those children about Allah’s ultimate destiny (Spencer 2016). These women are considered the spiritual protector of Islam, shielding their families and homes from the superficiality and falsehood that they believe the West is trying to push onto them (Gan et al 2019). In a data set in which 72 former female members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria had information collected, roughly 15 percent of the women had reported being a mother and another 48 percent disclosed that they were wives of fighters (Spencer 2016). The emphasis put on women as mothers is evident in the Islamic State’s *Dabiq*, a magazine and media outlet used to disseminate propaganda and messages from 2014 to 2017. In the 11th issue of *Dabiq*, released in

September of 2015, the group states that the women living under the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria should, “have loads of children,” (ISD 2016). This issue is more focused towards women than previous issues, with it urging women to care for their children, as these children are the future of the group.

Part of the decree to women from the Islamic State is that they are forbidden from leaving the home. Women are expected to remain indoors hidden and veiled, while they undertake chores such as providing meals, laundry, and cleaning the house (Spencer 2017). The Manifesto declares that for women, there is no responsibility greater for her than that of being a wife to her husband (Winter, trans. 2015). Women are expected to become wives as soon as possible when entering the group, with girls as young as nine being married to grown fighters (Davis 2017). In the later issues of the *Dabiq*, women are given examples of how to please their husbands. Issue 12 declares that wives should be positive of polygamy and respect the wishes of their husbands in doing so (ISD 2016). Women in this role are vital members of the community, as they are said to keep the spirits of the fighters high during times of conflict (Bloom 2015). Part of being a dedicated wife under the Islamic State means that women are often seen as sexualized objects and are used to satisfy the sexual needs of their husbands. Members of the Islamic State justify the use of women as “sexual slaves” as a way for men to be protected from sin (“ISIS in Their Own Words” 2014). Although these women are highly regarded as fundamental for the survival of the Islamic State, many of the roles they are expected to fill are more for the pleasure and nurturing of others rather than for themselves.

The roles of wife and mother are expected of most, if not all, of the women that join the Caliphate. The sheer number of women that hold these traditional domestic roles highlights the importance of women’s roles as traditional and ideological supporters of the Islamic State (Spencer 2016).

Operational Roles

Even though women are ushered into these domestic, more feminine roles, not all of the women are limited to these roles. In the more recent years of the Islamic State the group has upped their female-focused propaganda by showing women fighting on the frontlines (ISD 2016). Women have recently been allowed to hold positions in more operative and front-line roles. Some of these roles encompass offensive combat operations and defensive military activities. In the manifesto released by the Islamic State, there was a specification that allowed women to leave the house and participate in combative roles. The manifesto states that, “if it has been ruled by fatwa that she must fight, engage in jihad because the situation of the *ummah* has become desperate,” thus giving permission for women to partake in combative front-line roles (Winter, trans. 2015). In waging jihad, women may be appointed by leaders in the group to perform certain combative tasks including laying mines and monitoring the enemy (Bloom and Lokmanoglu 2020).

The Islamic State began to gradually allow women to hold these operative roles beginning in 2014 with the creation of the Al-Khansaa brigade, an all-female police unit that consists predominantly of Iraqi and Syrian women (Spencer 2017). The unit's main purpose is to enforce Sharia Law and to punish women for committing offenses that break the laws. The women in the Al-Khansaa brigade have several different functions along with enforcing Sharia Law in the territory held by ISIS. These functions include overseeing brothels of enslaved Yazidi women, administering punishments, and to search women at ISIS checkpoints (Vonderhaar 2021). The brigade is known for their brutal violence against women who have been identified as committing offenses against Sharia Law, including the case of a twenty-four-year-old woman who had a bear trap torture device placed on her chest after Al-Khansaa members found her to have violated modesty laws for breastfeeding in public (Counter Extremism Project 2021). Photos released by ISIS and obtained by Reuters and the Mirror in 2015 show women clad in burqa's wielding AK-47s in a training exercise held for members of the Al-Khansaa brigade (Leonard 2015). These photos are evidence that women under the Islamic State are beginning to hold more combative roles within the organization. The Islamic State has also been found to have trained some women to be violent killers. In 2016 it was reported that the Islamic State had created an all-female sniper squad affiliated with the Al-Khansaa brigade (Gan et al 2019). Iraqi News and The Sun reported that an Iraqi man had been killed by one of these female snipers in 2017 and the Iraqi Army took to twitter to confirm the use of the female snipers in the attack (Crouch 2017). These attacks were the beginning of the Islamic State gradually introducing the use of women in more violent attacks. Attacks of this kind peaked at the Battle of Mosul in the summer of 2017 when ISIS sent out dozens of female fighters to fight against U.S. forces (Gan et al 2019). Propaganda disseminated by the Islamic State has shown the use of women in combative action with images and videos of women firing weapons on the front-lines of the fighting. Released in February of 2018, a propaganda video shows clips of a woman firing a rifle over a bank of dirt and later in the video a truck of five women bearing rifles was shown to be flying an ISIS flag and driving into battle (Dearden 2018). These propaganda videos acknowledge the use of women outside of the home as combatants, something that the group had never publicly confirmed before. The evolution of women from strictly domestic household roles to being allowed to function as a combatant in recent years highlights a potential change in strategy from the individuals higher up in the group's hierarchical structure.

In addition to operating on the front-lines, operative roles include women disseminating propaganda and recruiting new members into the organization. The Islamic State has become heavily reliant on female members to lead social media recruitment campaigns. With women leading the recruitment mission, the Islamic State has been able to lure in and recruit

over 20,000 foreign militants into joining the organization. In a study of 72 female former members of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, 55 percent of them had held a role in recruiting (Spencer 2016).

The shift to allowing women to hold more operative recruiting roles is seen online and on social media. In 2015, at the height of its power, women in the Islamic State were posting 100,000 pro-ISIS tweets on social media daily (Gardner 2015). These tweets were mainly targeted towards girls and young women, attempting to persuade them to give up their current lives and join the Caliphate. "Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study" by the all-female Al-Khansaa brigade is a piece of propaganda that highlights the role women play in the recruitment of others into the Islamic State. Female members of the group have tweeted about practicing shooting guns and have even posted photos of their guns (Davis 2017). With women using these tweets to show themselves participating in action they are able to lure in young women who want to participate in combat.

In addition to showing women in combat, the women who have roles in recruiting and creating propaganda use various social media platforms to glorify their lives and create emotive messages to rally and convince other women to join ISIS (Gan et al 2019). Women who do hold roles as recruiters have created online support groups using social media messaging apps WhatsApp and Kik to aid women in coming to a decision to travel to Syria and Iraq to join the Caliphate (Counter Extremism Project 2021). The role of women in these recruiting roles has become indispensable to the Islamic State, as the recruitment of others is the lifeline for the organization in a time where their power and territory is being fought against by the US and its allies.

IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNTERTERRORISM

With the increasing use of female operatives as both suicide bombers and on the front-lines in combat by secular and religious groups, terrorists organizations have succeeded in using Western gender stereotypes to their advantage (Bloom and Lokmanoglu 2020). Counterterrorism efforts across the globe have failed to give sufficient thought to the idea that women can represent an untapped and unused resource in the spread of extremism and radicalization. Many Western nations, including Australia, have demonstrated that their current approaches to combating violent extremism do not adequately integrate gendered perspectives (Patel and Westermann 2018). Gender stereotypes suggesting that women are peaceful and nonviolent actors are still prevalent in many states today. These gender biases appear to influence the counterterrorism policies in a number of states, including states in the West. These biases deeply affect American security policies. The terrorist profile used by the US Department of Homeland Security has applied only to men, highlighting that even capable counterterrorism programs have blind spots relating

to the presence of women and violence (Thomas 2021). The Islamic State's increasing use of women as militants has created a problem for counterterrorism strategists and policies in the West. Women are not naturally associated with terrorism and violent attacks; therefore they have not been considered serious threats which has allowed them the space, power, and ability to move about facilitating attacks while avoiding detection by authorities. Women make for strategic and unassuming suicide bombers because they are unexpected perpetrators. Despite the potential threat from women participating in combat, they are often overlooked by security agencies as possible perpetrators because violent women interrupt the assuming gender stereotype that women are innocent bystanders (Sjoberg and Gentry 2008). Knowing that women are more frequently joining operational roles that include combative operations and recruitment can place intelligence and counterterrorism agencies ahead of attacks, as they will be more aware that women are potential threats and active militants and not innocent bystanders.

Beyond changing counterterrorism policies, nations need to look inward on their repatriation policies for women associated with ISIS. With the Islamic State on a decline, more women and children are looking return to their native countries, many of those being in Europe and even the U.S. It is imperative that governments implement a policy that investigates the women who are seeking to come back, as with women having a role as perpetrators it is possible, they are looking to attack on their home soil. France, Germany, and Britain have already announced they will deal with ISIS affiliated women coming from abroad on a case-by-case basis (Bryson 2018). If women have had a history of being a violent actor in the organization (i.e. combatants and front-line fighter) it needs to be considered before being allowed to return home. With all we know about women partaking in active combatant roles, it is plausible that they would be willing to carry out attacks once they got back to their native countries. Some western nations have already begun sorting out policies for returning women with ISIS affiliation. An atmosphere of counter-terrorism hypervigilance globally may discourage governments from showing flexibility in dealing with their own nationals (Crisis Group 2019). Nations aware of the threat that the women hold may be less likely to let them back in the country. It's imperative to look at the roles that women held and the circumstances that they came to be part of the organization. While some women choose to join willingly, other women are forced into it for a number of different reasons. For countries to gauge which women are true actors of violence and which ones were there for matters of survival, addressing this on a case-by-case issue is in the interest of both national security and the well-being of women who are innocent and want to come home and start anew. Women who willingly and actively participate in violence should be held accountable, and counterterrorism policies should account for that.

Understanding the multifaceted use of women in the Islamic State is vital in creating effective policies to guarantee the safety of citizens globally. With newfound information regarding these women and their functions, intelligence agencies and policy makers need to treat their active participation in combative and violent operations for what it is: a threat to national security and safety globally (Agara 2015). Until Western governments fully acknowledge the involvement of women in the Islamic State as active participants and actors and adjust their counterterrorism policies to account for women committing acts violence, the Islamic State will continue to use women to exploit the gender biases adopted by society by creating mass hysteria through violent acts of terrorism by using women in these combative violent roles.

CONCLUSION

In the last half decade, the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria has had a distinct shift in how women are utilized in the organization. From its creation in late 1999, women were expected to hold strictly conservative and traditional roles in the organization. Beginning in 2015, there was a shift in the dynamic in the Caliphate and women began to be seen and acknowledged holding roles in active operational positions including recruitment and combat. While women still hold subservient roles as mothers and wives, they have been allowed to actively participate in combat roles as dictated by the "Women in the Islamic State: Manifesto and Case Study" written by the Al-Khansaa brigade in 2015. In the manifesto women are permitted to leave the house to wage jihad if a fatwa is issued indicating that the Islamic State has had some evolution in how women are utilized and expected to function. Women are no longer just passive, supporting, background figures, but have become largely portrayed as heroic wives who fight alongside their husbands and as nurturing mothers who are raising the next generation of jihadi warriors (Gan et al 2019). The presence of more women in operational roles means that children born into the Islamic State could have two parents actively fighting on the front-lines, potentially influencing them to fully commit to jihad at younger ages. The use of women in the Islamic State has many implications from counterterrorism to boosting morale in younger generations. Women are crucial in growing the population of jihadi loyalists so that the Islamic State not only survives, but also expands beyond the current generation. Women in the Islamic State that hold roles in recruitment are key because these women not only disseminate propaganda to attract new members but they also have the fundamental task of maintaining the Islamic State's longevity and power. These women are responsible for bringing in thousands of members, local and foreign, to build the organization's ranks and population. The role of these women creates the foundation for the entire Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Recruitment of other women

by current members of ISIS, creates incentive for more male members to join under the promise that they would receive a wife and marriage. A direct byproduct of more women in the organization is more men, meaning that the Islamic State gains power both militarily and in numbers. The more members the Islamic State has, the more legitimacy it can lay claim to, and the more likely men and women will continue to be willing to join the ranks of the organization.

The evolution of women into operational roles is another vital piece of the Islamic State's growth and existence. The advantages for the Islamic State to use women as combatants is tremendous as it places strain on the counterterrorism policies of the West due to their lack in gendered perspectives and accounting for women as violent operatives. Donned in Burkas, which are required under Sharia Law enforced by the Islamic State, women have the ability to carry weapons and bombs undetected. Due to the gender biases that plague Western security and counterterrorism, women are more likely to not be suspected of being active members of terrorist organizations, catching the world and governments off guard when they commit acts of violence in the name of terrorism. The Islamic State allowing women to join the front-lines in Iraq and Syria has shown to have strengthened the battlefield when women were sent with men into battle. The combination of both male and female fighters puts the Islamic State at a numerical advantage when it comes to regionalized battles, allowing them to successfully keep their territory and acquire more.

The domestic roles that women in the Islamic State hold are equally as important for the survival of the organization as newly held operational roles. The fundamental role of women in the Islamic State is to be a mother. Women raising and nurturing the next generation of ISIS fighters and supporters is imperative for the survival of the group. In this role, mothers preach the Koran and teach jihad to the children as a way to prepare them to sacrifice their lives for the Islamic States purpose. In this domestic role, women are expected to keep their husbands and current fighters satisfied and happy as a way to boost morale and fighting spirits. By pleasuring their husbands, the Islamic State believes that the women are rewarding the male militants for their fight against the enemy. With their spirits high they are more likely to give everything to the organization including, the ultimate sacrifice of death which is considered the most heroic action of these militants.

Under the Islamic State women are used in several different roles, mainly in domestic occupations and a select few in operational roles on the front-line. By utilizing women in roles recognized as traditionally masculine, the Islamic State puts foreign governments and their counterterrorism policies to shame for not accounting for women as violent actors. These women have proven to be paramount for the survival of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Once a mere speck of importance to the Islamic State, women have proven

to be a key part and an imperative piece to keeping the Caliphate alive. Without them, ISIS would most certainly not exist, nevertheless be one of the most threatening terrorist organization the world faces today. ■

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NOTES

- 1 The Islamic State is also known as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and as the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). For purposes of consistency, this paper will use Islamic State and ISIS to refer to the organization.
- 2 The 2015 San Bernardino attack in California was carried out by a married couple Rizwan Farook and wife Tashfeen Malik, who opened fire at coworkers in a banquet room. In the end, 14 people were killed and 22 were injured. Malik had pledged her allegiance to ISIS the day of the attack.
- 3 Abu Musab al-Zarqawi was a Jordanian Jihadist credited with founding ISIS. He was killed in a targeted killing by a joint U.S. force in 2006
- 4 Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was an Iraqi terrorist and leader of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria from 2013 until his death in 2019. He notably put ISIS on the international map and is credited with its expansion as he was leader of the organization when it reached its peak from 2014–2016.

The Log Cabin Republicans and the Construction of Male Citizenship in the GOP

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This research paper observes the difference in rhetoric surrounding the construction of traditional male citizen pillars by the activist group known as the Log Cabin Republicans and the Republican Party. By observing the progression of LCR's mission statements from 1996 to the present, we can see that the Log Cabin Republicans were attempting to prove that sexuality did not affect the traditional male citizenship pillars. By comparing the LCR's Mission Statements to the developing party platforms of the GOP from 1996 to the present, it's seen that the GOP believed that sexuality directly affected someone's ability to take part in marriage and soldiering traditions and thus, was not a compatible pillar of traditional male citizenship.

INTRODUCTION

The Log Cabin Republicans [LCR]¹ is the nation's oldest and largest² Republican organization dedicated to LGBTQ+ issues. Operating since the 1970s, the LCR is a membership organization that attempts to work within the Republican party to shift party values to include homosexuality within other aspects of traditional male citizenship. Because of the zeitgeist of the late 20th and early 21st century, with the passage and repeal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" bill banning queer service members and the fight for equal marriage rights, they shifted to focus on these issues. This is observed through their "Issues" page from 1996 to the present day.

As a group that is mostly comprised of white, Christian men, LCR members are demographically aligned with the Republican party, but due to their homosexuality status are part of the group of "compromised citizens", a minority within the Republican party and within the nation³. They are therefore unique in terms of activist groups as they attempt to work within traditional conservative spaces to shift inclusion to include queer men within traditional male citizenship. But how do they go about accomplishing this? They do so by attempting to shift the traditional pillars of male citizenship.

Political scientist Rogers Smith stated that though the white, male, Christian, straight sect of the population is the minority in the world's population and often in the United States, they are constructed as the natural citizen in the American state. In his book, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy Since The 1960s*, Robert Self goes further than Smith to break up the idea of traditional male citizenship into distinct pillars: breadwinning, soldiering, and heterosexuality. Breadwinning is the ability a man must

provide for his wife and family, soldiering is the ability for a man to serve overseas, and heterosexuality is not engaging in any same sex relations (Self 2013). I argue that the Log Cabin Republicans are attempting to place themselves within this archetype of "traditional male citizenship" through attempting to establish homosexuality with the pillars of breadwinning and soldiering, thus making heterosexuality an interchangeable pillar. I also argue that as members of the Republican Party, they don't wish to argue that breadwinning and soldiering shouldn't be traditional male citizenship pillars, but simply that inclusion should shift to give gay men access to traditional citizenship.

For this paper I altered Self's pillars to replace the pillar of "breadwinning" with the pillar of "marriage." Though breadwinning is, as stated above, a man's ability to provide for his family, I believe this pillar is directly impacted by a man's ability to marry and thus have a family first and foremost. They cannot provide for a family if they are not included within a traditional heterosexual family. Therefore, studying access to marriage over a citizen's ability to provide for his family is the most opportune comparison. Thus, for this paper, I observe the three pillars of traditional male citizenship as: marriage, soldiering, and heterosexuality.

Through reviewing the Log Cabin Republicans' Mission Statements, it is observed that they believe sexuality is not impacted by the other pillars of male citizenship. Therefore, homosexuality is compatible with both traditional male citizenship pillars: marriage and soldiering. In comparison, the GOP believes that the pillars of male citizenship: soldiering, marriage, and heterosexuality, are co-dependent. To show this theory, this paper highlights the shifting views of both the Republican Party and the LCR through an analysis of their mission statements. The analysis of the Log Cabin Republicans'

mission statements from 1996 to 2021, and a comparison to the Republican Party's mission statements from 1996 to 2016, show how both the Log Cabin Republicans and the GOP were attempting to maintain most aspects of male citizenship. Where they differed is that the Log Cabin Republicans maintain their belief that the pillar of heterosexuality is interchangeable with homosexuality and the GOP believes that homosexuality is incompatible with soldiering and marriage, and thus homosexuality is an incompatible pillar of traditional male citizenship (Figure 1).

In historical and sociological literature, the study of queer citizenship has only looked at their relationship with the nation at large, and thus the total of American society. The literature has been focused on rediscovering queer history and aligning it with bureaucratic development in the nation. Unlike this paper, these sources observe how the state regulated queer citizenship by using homosexuality to define who could be naturalized and who could incur state benefits (Canaday 2009). Further, though the literature surrounding male citizenship does touch upon homosexuality as a pillar, it observes it through the larger scope

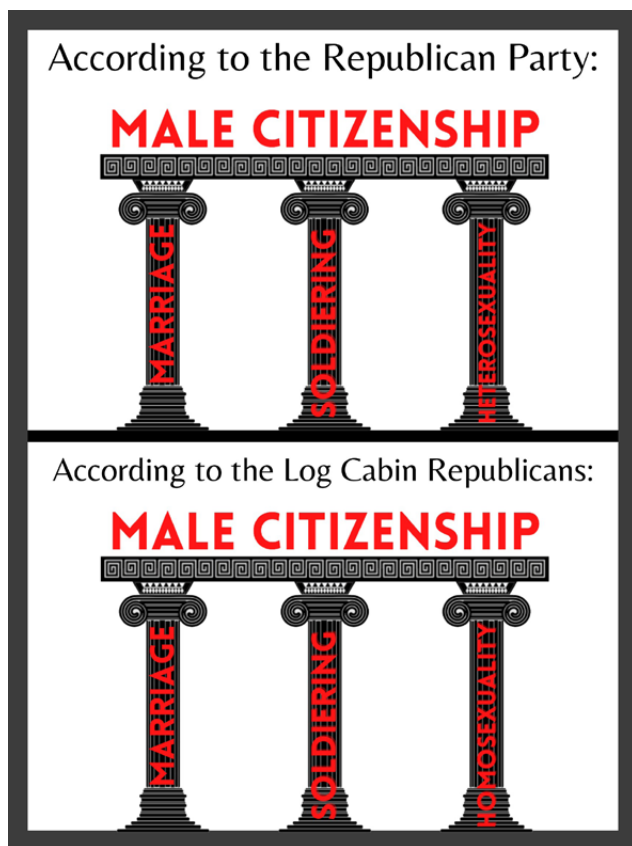
of American citizenship and thus includes observation of queer people who sought to shift all three pillars of male citizenship and not just the heterosexuality pillar (Self 2013). This paper seeks to fill a gap in studying the Conservative LGBTQ+ group through analysis of the largest organization dedicated to their values.

This paper expands the traditional definition of citizen towards ascriptive identities rather than shared beliefs. In previous literature, it is shown that American history is defined by the passing and repealing of naturalization, immigration, and voting laws that withhold citizenship from those who are not white, rich, and married men. Such laws would expand the word citizen into different categories, thus separating and limiting the rights each "citizen" would receive based on their background (Smith 1997). Aristotle famously stated that the designation of a citizen referred only to "men who had some share in the political life of their polis, not to all who lived there." Despite the fact that the Revolutionary War and the goal of removing the "fixed, ascriptive hierarchy" established under the British Monarchy was accomplished, the rich, white, land-owning men were surrounded by social hierarchies, and thus were impacted by the limited scope of "citizenship" within the United States. For over 80 percent of U.S. history, American laws have established barriers to citizenship by defining certain cohorts as "legally ineligible" for citizenship, based simply on race, nationality, or gender (Smith 1997). But, as stated above, this removal of rights is not simply connected to a citizen's civic rights, but which aspects of American society they can participate in, such as serving in the military and participating in marriage.

Further, and what is central for this study, is that all homosexual acts resulted in loss of citizenship privileges. This paper stands apart from previous research completed on citizenship, as it attempts to remove the problem of intersectionality within the study of citizenship and observe a group that is part of the "natural citizen" category, other than their sexuality status. By observing the Log Cabin Republicans efforts to shift away from the heterosexuality pillar to instead include a homosexuality pillar, this paper fills a gap in understanding how sexuality impacted citizenship in the late 20th, early 21st century, and how the GOP believes sexuality impacts citizenship.

Following a section on methodology and sources, the first section of this paper focuses on the Log Cabin Republicans language surrounding queer inclusion in the military and their effort to repeal the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. The second section shifts to look at the Republican Party's language surrounding queer military inclusion, their support of the DADT policy and a comparison to the LCR's statements. The third and fourth section shifts to look at same sex marriage policy and language through the LCR firstly, and then the Republican Party. These sections illustrate the overarching struggle between the two groups between the redefinition of male citizenship, whether homosexuality could

Figure 1. SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1: Diagram Showing the Male Citizenship Pillars According to the Republican Party and to the Log Cabin Republicans



Illustrated by Molly Lamendola using Canva.

be an interchangeable pillar of the traditional male citizenship structure, or if the heterosexuality pillar is co-dependent on the marriage and soldiering pillars, thus disallowing any structural changes within the Republican party. The conclusion summarizes the findings and discusses future scholarship possibilities surrounding the impact of the same sex marriage decision and the repeal of DADT on the Republican Party and the traditional male citizenship structure.

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

The central goal of this paper is to observe the discourse between the LCR and the GOP surrounding same-sex marriage and queer military service, thus attempting to outline the underlying question whether pillars of male citizenship are interdependent on each other. Therefore, my method of analysis is a close reading and content analysis of the LCR's mission statements from 1996 to 2021 and the GOP party platform from 1996 to 2016. The Log Cabin Republicans' mission statements were accessed using Archive.org's "Wayback Machine" to access the LCR's website through the past few years. The year 1996 was chosen as the start date as it is the year for which the earliest mission statement or "issue overview" is available utilizing this resource. The mission statement and "issue overviews" were chosen as a point of analysis as they remain a standard of belief across all chapters of the LCR and provide an adequate insight into the belief system of the organization at certain moments chronologically. Further, the website source was chosen as the LCR updated the website often to showcase their shifting belief system over time. Similarly, the Republican Party platform from 1996 to 2016 was chosen to coincide with the years of analysis for the LCR, and for documenting the belief system of the Republican party during certain points chronologically. Further, I utilized news articles to illustrate the context surrounding the decision making of these public facing beliefs and the era at which they were in.

I read through the Log Cabin Republican's websites and the GOP party platforms thoroughly to review their overarching goals but shifted to finding specific mentions of queer military service and same sex marriage. Since I'm working within a small window of time, I was able to utilize all the GOP party platforms from 1996 to 2016, and then select sections that related to same-sex marriage and queer military service. To find these sections I utilized the search terms of "homosexuality," "gay," and "same-sex" within paragraphs that had the search terms "marriage" or "military." For the Log Cabin Republicans, I looked through their mission statements from 1996 to 2021 for language relating to the GOP's party platform to find if there was overlapping language, and if so, which ideas and themes connected the two. I then used the "Issue" section of their website and completed a discourse analysis with their statements and the GOP's statements, looking for mentions of queer military service and same-sex marriage. I created a document adding statements from both the GOP and the Log

Cabin Republicans connected to either queer military service or same-sex marriage and compared rhetoric and verbiage between the two. Furthermore, I was interested in a quantitative analysis of the GOP's platforms and the LCR's mission statements, and thus compared the number of lines each group gave to these issues from 1996 to the present. I created a chart highlighting this comparison to better understand the possible connection between the number of lines given to the issues of queer military service and same-sex marriage, and how much importance each group placed on these issues. This paper hypothesizes if the issue was of a distinct importance to either the Log Cabin Republicans or the GOP, then they would give the issue more lines within their statements.

Log Cabin Republicans and Military Service

To the GOP and, in turn, to the Log Cabin Republicans, military service is a pinnacle aspect to male citizenship. Robert Self states that soldiering provides the opportunity for the nation to put their "best" citizen forward and a "mirror for the nation to gaze upon itself," (Self 2013). Going further with this, the act of disallowing queer service members from participating within military service highlights the GOP's belief that anyone who is not heterosexual should not be 'gazed upon', that they are not the nation's 'best.' Even more central to this study is that as the GOP believes homosexuality is incompatible with military service, they must also believe homosexuality is incompatible with the traditional male citizenship structure, as these pillars are co-dependent.

The "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy passed in 1994 codifying the GOP and the nation's position on queer service members. DADT allowed the military to discharge service members that "engaged in homosexual acts or who disclose they are gay", but supervisors were only allowed to ask about sexual orientation with "a good reason." With the military defending the policy as it "reduces sexual tension" (Cassens 1998). Many groups, like the Log Cabin Republicans, stepped forward to challenge this position legally, calling it unconstitutional, but every federal appeals court upheld the policy. The Log Cabin Republicans saw their best opportunity to challenge DADT after the Supreme Court ruled in *Lawrence v. Texas* that the Texas statute making sodomy a crime violated the Due Process Clause (Oyez 2003). In December 2004, after the *Lawrence v. Texas* ruling, twelve queer people expelled from the military filed a lawsuit in Boston to contest their release from service. C. Dixon Osburn, the Executive Director of the Servicemembers Legal Defense Network who advised the plaintiffs, stated that he believed the "gay ban can no longer survive constitutionally" and that it existed "just to accommodate prejudice." This group was following the model the Log Cabin Republicans had established when they filed a similar suit in October of that same year. In October, LCR supported a group of plaintiffs not yet discharged from service, but who wanted to file a suit out, "of fear of the military finding out their sexual orientation if they are gay and lesbian," (Associated Press International 2004).

Other than the legality of the situation, many found the LCR's approach at the time to be a direct reaction to the political climate surrounding the 2000 Presidential election and support of their cause in the Republican Party. The Log Cabin Republicans supported President George Bush in his 2000 election but would eventually pull support from in during the 2004 election due to his continued lack of support for the LGBTQ+ community. When President Clinton put the policy in place in 1994, the Pew Research Center reported that only 45% of survey participants agreed LGBTQ+ service members should be banned from service (Pew Research Center 2020). It's important to note that in 2004, 46% of "Conservatives" stated they would support gay military service members (Kiefer 2021). By 2010 when this policy was repealed, the 46% shifted down to 28% Conservatives and 40% Republican's generally (Pew Research Center 2020). Though it is not known if the LCR were aware of this percentage of support, it seems as if they at least understood that DADT was a largely supported policy in the Republican Party. Thus, they do not specifically mention their direct support of a total repeal of DADT in any of their statements of purpose from 1996 to the repeal in 2010. What they do say repeatedly is that they align with the Republican Party in that they support a strong national defence. They state this quite clearly in 2005 when they state, "We are loyal Republicans. We believe in low taxes, limited government, strong defense, free markets, personal responsibility, and individual liberty," (Log Cabin Republicans 2005). Even in 2021, their mission statement remains, "We are loyal Republicans. We believe in limited government, strong national defense, free markets, low taxes, personal responsibility, and individual liberty."

In 2004, under the "Issues" section of their website, they state that "The United States Military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy must be changed," but do not call for total repeal of the act. They do state that this is "blatant discrimination" that damages "military readiness and weakens national defense," (Log Cabin Republicans 2004). They continue by stating that the policy leaves the United States at risk of losing the "best and brightest" by excluding a group of people from defending the United States. They state a specific instance when seven Arabic linguists were removed from the military's Defense Language Institute for being gay despite complaints from the military that they were short Arabic linguists, asserting that the military is wrong in believing that allowing openly gay service members would hurt "unit cohesion" and evidencing 24 other countries that allowed openly gay service members (Log Cabin Republicans 2004). The LCR also point out that many use the policy to avoid military service as "a sizable percentage of those kicked out of the armed forces for being homosexual are actually heterosexual" and that millions of the military's budget is spent investigating violations of DADT.

The LCR highlight their inclusion within the conservative movement when they state that homophobia won't impact unit cohesiveness. Specifically, "...if some heterosexual

members of the United States military have moral objections to homosexuals, that won't impact unit effectiveness," as research has been done that effectiveness as nothing to do with the unit's respect of each other (Log Cabin Republicans 2004). This separates the LCR from other gay rights organizations. They're not saying the Department of Defence needs to make the military accepting of LGBTQ+ people or stop discrimination all together, but they do need to shift to accommodate queer individuals within the military and thus within the traditional aspect of male citizenship. I think this is a strategic position as to not alienate themselves from the more conservative members of the Republican party or even politicians trying to gain support from both the LCR and the more conservative members of the party (Log Cabin Republicans 2004). This "Gays in the Military" section remains the same until 2006.

In 2006 the issues page changes from nine points against DADT to 14 (Table 1). Further in 2006, though many of the general positions and reasoning stays the same, some of the language is changed and the reasons become significantly more quantifiable. They continue the same discussion surrounding the fact that 24 nations already have openly gay service members. But the language on points they discussed in early years has changed significantly. Instead of stating, "Even if some heterosexual members of the United States military have moral objections to homosexuals, that won't impact unit effectiveness", they state that the "...decrease in gay and lesbian discharges during wartime clearly shows that arguments about unit morale and cohesion have no basis," (Log Cabin Republicans 2006). They state that if the service of gay military members were "detrimental" to unit cohesion, then discharges would increase during times of war. They go further to state that the repealing of DADT might help unit cohesion as more trusting bonds would be formed when all service members could be honest. Also, instead of stating that DADT has allowed heterosexual service members the ability to lie about their sexuality to leave the service has been edited to instead place blame on the "witch hunts" by the Department of Defence. They state that these investigations are "improper" and "harassment" that is "potentially leading to the discharge of heterosexual service members." Their emphasis on a continued point that DADT is not just wrong, but it harms the military's readiness, recruiting strategy and budget is seen throughout their 2006 issue statement and highlights an increasing assertiveness that a limited, heterosexual military is harmful for national defence (Log Cabin Republicans 2006). This showcases their continued allegiance with the idea that they agree with the GOP that the national defense and soldiering is a pinnacle aspect of American society and should be given the right number of focus/finances. However, they simply believe queer service members should participate within this structure and disallowing their access is harming the overall structure of "soldiering."

The Log Cabin Republicans keep this page through 2006 and 2007 but add a section on the growing support of military officials and lawmakers in 2007. They mention the New York

Times Opinion piece written by General John Shalikashvili, who was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff when the policy was implemented, titled “Second Thoughts on Gays in the Military.” In the piece he states that the new wars in the Middle East require an increase in military members, and thus a re-evaluation of the policy is needed (Shalikashvili 2007). They also sight the recent support of Republican Senator John Warner (R-VA) who interjected when Joint Chiefs Chairman Peter Pace stated he opposed homosexuality. Warner stated, “I respectfully but strongly disagree with the chairman’s view that homosexuality is immoral.” The Log Cabin Republicans were clear in their previous reasonings that morality should not be a part of the decision, as what is best for the military and the service members should be held first. By mentioning the morality behind homosexuality, they are stating a new desire for homosexuality to be morally accepted within the Republican party and with it, support of the DADT repeal (Log Cabin Republicans 2007). But, with the addition of the new military and political supporters, this version of the LCR “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” page remains the same through 2007 to 2010 when Congress repeals the policy (Log Cabin Republicans 2008).

The GOP and “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

To better understand what the LCR were responding and reacting to, we must see what the rhetoric the GOP were using surrounding DADT. In the 1996 GOP Party Platform, the party uses six paragraphs to discuss “Rebuilding America’s Strength” and eight to discuss “The Men and Women of Defense” but use just two lines to discuss queer military inclusion. They state, like the LCR, that “Republicans are committed to ensuring the status of the United States as the world’s preeminent military power.” They also seem to agree that military readiness has been below par and there have been budget shortfalls, which are

all things the LCR would state would be helped by repealing DADT. But the GOP states quite clearly in 1996, “We affirm that homosexuality is incompatible with military service,” (The American Presidency Project 1996). In 1992, in their section “The Men and Women of Defense,” they state that “Unlike the Democrat Party and its candidate, we support the continued exclusion of homosexuals from the military as a matter of good order and discipline,” (The American Presidency Project 1992). However, they do not mention exclusionary military service in their 1988 party platform (The American Presidency Project 2020). By 2000, they include their stance on gay service in the “A Military for the Twenty-First Century” and state that the military is not a place for “social experiments” and state that they “affirm traditional military culture” and that “homosexuality is incompatible with military service,” (The American Presidency Project 2000). Though they do state in their “Upholding the Rights of All” section that they “...oppose discrimination based on sex, race, age, religion, creed, disability, or national origin and will vigorously enforce anti-discrimination statutes,” they leave out any mention of discrimination based on sexuality (The American Presidency Project 2000). This is the first time that the GOP mentions that queer military inclusion would be a stand against tradition, not that it is just incompatible. This is a clear shift within their language and belief that queer inclusion would go against traditional male citizenship. If, like Self states, the soldier is the opportunity for “the nation to gaze upon itself” with the soldier acting as the perfect male citizen, the GOP is not just stating that they do not believe queer citizens can adequately fulfil this role (Self 2013). They continue this in both 2004 and 2008, stating that “homosexuality is incompatible with military service” but state that this is due to their affirmation of traditional military culture (The American Presidency Project 2004). Another shift occurs in 2008, when they state that maintaining a heterosexual military is to “protect our servicemen and women” (The American Presidency Project 2008). This is the first and only time that the desire to “protect” service members is stated as a concern within the inclusion of gay service members, and as it is the platform written closest to the repeal of DADT, I believe it is directly related to that. After the 2012 platform, there is no mention of queer military service within the party’s platform. What the GOP begins to do instead is drop the idea of safety or that inclusion is bad for national defense and instead toward a rationale of protecting traditional military culture. They state that they “reject the use of the military as a platform for social experimentation and will not accept attempts to undermine military priorities and mission readiness,” (The American Presidency Project 2012). They increase this statement further in their 2016 platform by stating, “We reject the use of the military as a platform for social experimentation and will not accept or continue attempts to undermine military priorities and mission readiness. We believe that our nation is most secure when the president and the administration prioritize readiness, recruitment, and retention rather than using the military to advance a social or political

Table 1. Number of lines mentioning LGBTQIA+ Military Service Within the Party Platforms of the GOP and the Mission Statements/Issues of the Log Cabin Republicans

Years	Log Cabin Republicans	The Republican Party
1992	N/A	1
1996	0	2
2000	0	3
2004	59	1
2008	50	1
2012	0	1
2016	0	7

agenda. Military readiness should not be sacrificed on the altar of political correctness,” (The American Presidency Project 2016). The phrase “altar of political correctness” stands apart from the sentence as it points out that though the GOP lessened their hard rhetoric surrounding gay service members to not turn off this voting group but to please conservatives within their ranks by rallying against political correctness.

In 2016, gatekeeping military service from certain individuals was a renewed political discussion. In April 2019, President Donald Trump instituted a ban on trans individuals serving in the military. In a report from the Palm Center, a non-partisan group that studies LGBT military issues stated that the policy, “...is a perfect parallel to the failed ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’ policy, also sold as not being a ban although designed to systematically push gay people out of military service — or at least keep them silent and invisible,” (Jackson and Kube 2019). Two lower court injunctions blocked the policy until the Supreme Court voted 5-4 to reinstate it in early January and a U.S. appeals court reinstated it again in June despite the multiple suits (Chung and Stempel 2019; Lopez 2019). In the early days of his presidency, President Joe Biden reversed the ban with an executive order, but in a poll days after, many Republicans stated their opposition to transgender people serving in the military (Jarvis 2021). In January 2019, in reaction to the first Supreme Court decision, the Log Cabin Republicans released a press release that stated, “Transgender military personnel have served their country honorably and openly for the past two and a half years, and all indicators point to our national defense being stronger for their presence – the most salient indicator being that the disputed policy actually permits the continued service of transgender personnel who came out in light of the 2016 policy,” (Log Cabin Republicans 2019).

Log Cabin Republicans and Soldiering

One might ask why military inclusion seems to be so important to the Log Cabin Republicans and why they would fight so hard for their right to serve. Firstly, as they state that a strong military defense is part of their main platforms, that there is an aspect regarding the fact that they want to participate in what they trying to preserve and just garner true equality. But there could be a deeper implication to this, as within traditional male citizenship. There is a belief that “military manhood” and patriotism was the very foundation of the United States’ image. This is since the male citizen, as the “natural citizen” is supposed to be the best the nation can offer and an opportunity for “the nation to gaze upon itself,” (Self 2013). The Vietnam war played a significant role in pushing the importance of this “military manhood” concept and became a symbol both political parties utilized to “conceptualize freedom, equality, and the citizen’s relationship to the state,” (Self 2013). Though the LCR and the GOP would argue in favor of a strong military force after 9/11, the GOP’s position still doesn’t shift to include queer individuals in their idea of “military manhood.” This was seen within the Vietnam War as well, as the draft did not include heterosexual

individuals as “American officials and ordinary citizens alike imagined the armed services to represent a masculinity that gay men were believed not to embody.” This can be applied generally to military service and especially to the post-9/11 era. This can especially be seen if we compare the language used by the Department of Defense in 1966 and the Republican Party platform we already looked at. In 1966 the DoD stated, “The homosexual is considered unsuitable for military service and is not permitted to serve in the armed forces in any capacity” while the GOP states that “homosexuality is incompatible with military service,” (The American Presidency Project 2000; Self 2013).

The Log Cabin Republicans and Marriage

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 in the landmark *Obergefell v. Hodges* case that it was a violation of the 14th amendment for states to refuse to recognize same-sex marriages. Justice Anthony Kennedy delivered the opinion of the court, stating that liberty was guaranteed in the Constitution and since the petitioners wished to have liberty through the freedom to marry someone of the same sex and having their marriages deemed lawful, then not allowing them to do so was a violation of the Constitution. He also went on to discuss how changes within the marriage institution and the legal definition of marriage and who can marry has changed over the last few centuries, as the nation has grown and matured. Justice Kennedy stated that these “developments in the institution of marriage over the past centuries were not mere superficial changes. Rather, they worked deep transformations in its structure, affecting aspects of marriage long viewed by many as essential,” (Supreme Court 2015).

The language used in Justice Kennedy’s majority opinion mirrors the Log Cabin Republican’s early rhetoric surrounding gay marriage. On their website, they have a page under their “Issues” section titled “The Case for Civil Marriage,” which they adopt verbatim from 2004 to 2011. Here they discuss the point Justice Kennedy brought up, regarding how the institution of marriage has changed overtime as more people were included into the fold over time. They continue that many of those who oppose same-sex marriage state that they want to respect the “tradition” of marriage. “If this argument sounds familiar, it is,” the LCR write, adding, “[s]egregationists used to say the same thing during the Civil Rights struggle four decades ago,” (Log Cabin Republicans 2004). They go on to claim that same-sex marriage should be legalized using messaging strategies directed at those within the Republican party. They state that allowing same-sex marriage would lead to more stable relationships and any opposition is just prejudice that “gay men are more promiscuous than heterosexuals.” They add that marriage encourages monogamy and long term committed relationships, both things that the Republican Party wants, so allowing same-sex couples to participate in that would be something they should support, “How can the religious right disagree with this point?” they ask (Log Cabin Republicans 2004).

2004 was an important year for the Log Cabin Republicans and their campaign for Marriage Equality. The Log Cabin Republicans had endorsed President Bush in the 2000 election but withheld their support in the 2004 election. They had always had a tense relationship with President Bush and the Bush family as they had pulled support from George H.W. Bush after the 1992 Republican Convention where the GOP ran a staunch anti-gay campaign to try and stand apart from the Clinton campaign. Former White House Communications Director Pat Buchanan gave a speech that night where he stated that the GOP stands with President Bush “against the amoral idea that gay and lesbian couples should have the same standing in law as married men and women,” (Buchanan 1992). This speech was largely contrasted by Mary Fisher’s speech on the HIV/AIDS epidemic that had killed 100,777 people between 1981 and 1990. 59% of said death were gay men (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention 1998). Fisher worked within the Ford Administration and then became a political activist after contracting HIV from her husband. As it was believed that only gay men could contract the virus, Fisher worked to prove that anyone could contract it, stating that, “Though I am female and contracted this disease in marriage and enjoy the warm support of my family, I am one with the lonely gay man sheltering a flickering candle from the cold wind of his family’s rejection,” (Fisher 1992). She was later coined the “Republican princess” by The New Republic (Jackson and Kube 2019). Despite her speech, many believed the convention to be an “explicit attack on gay rights” and the Log Cabins pulled support from Bush in 1992, largely because of the convention’s rhetoric, and Bill Clinton won the election (Jordan 1992). Despite the LCR’s pulled support, during Clinton’s administration, the Defense Against Marriage Act was signed in 1996 and defined marriage as the union between a man and a woman, specifically “the word ‘spouse’ refers only to a person of the opposite sex who is a husband or a wife,” (Legal Information Institute 2020). By 2000, when George W. Bush was running for office, it seemed to just be a continuation of the anti-gay rhetoric, but he later changed his mind after meeting with the Log Cabin Republicans in April 2000. Leaving that meeting he stated, “I hope Republicans, conservative Republicans, understand that we judge people based upon their heart and soul,” (Miller and Barabak 2000). By February of 2004, however, Bush stated that he would support a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage and called it “the most fundamental institution of civilization.” He pushed Congress to work quickly as to protect the marriage institution from some “activist judges,” (Stout 2004a). By September of 2004, the Log Cabin Republicans had pulled their support from George W. Bush’s re-election campaign stating that the White House was “disloyal” to them and their interests (Stout 2004b). But Bush still won in a landslide, and despite the LCR’s efforts, the Republican party remained strongly committed to opposing same-sex marriage equality for years to come.

What is important about the Log Cabin Republican’s efforts within the fight for marriage equality is that they tried and failed to prove that heterosexuality was a movable pillar within traditional male citizenship. They did not dispute the importance of marriage within citizenship, nor the discourse regarding two-parent households or similar non-traditional family set-ups, they simply stated they wished for access to the marriage tradition. If shifting to observe the GOP’s rhetoric surrounding same-sex marriage, it can be observed that the LCR had no impact on the GOP’s same-sex marriage platform. The GOP continue to believe that heterosexuality is a pinnacle aspect of marriage and thus a homosexuality is incompatible with traditional male citizenship, as seen within their party platform, their convention speeches and Republican Presidents.

GOP and Gay Marriage

Unlike within the rhetoric surrounding DODT and queer military access, the GOP begins the debate by establishing marriage as a tradition. Unlike their rhetoric surrounding soldiering, they establish the belief in a one man, one women marriage within each platform from 1996 to 2016, but do so briefly, giving just a few lines to the topic (Table 2).

In 1992 the GOP stated that they would oppose any law that recognizes same-sex marriages and in 1996 the Defense of Marriage Act was signed to establish this officially (The American Presidency Project 1992). In 1996, they stated, “We reject the distortion of those laws to cover sexual preference, and we endorse the Defense of Marriage Act to prevent states from being forced to recognize same-sex unions,” (The American Presidency Project 1996). This was the same year of Patrick Buchanan’s speech where he stated that he stood with President George H.W. Bush, “against the amoral idea that gay and lesbian couples should have the same standing in law as married men and women” and the platform highlights this sentiment within the Republican Party. By 2000, the GOP expanded on its brief same-sex marriage opposition pledge,

Table 2. Number of lines mentioning Same Sex Marriage Within the Party Platforms of the GOP and the Mission Statements/Issues of the Log Cabin Republicans

Years	Log Cabin Republicans	The Republican Party
1996	0	5
2000	0	4
2004	46	14
2008	44	9
2012	0	8
2016	0	10

now devoting four sentences (compared to one previously) in its platform (Table 2). They state that they value the traditional definition of marriage and that states shouldn't be forced to recognize other "living arrangements as marriages," (The American Presidency Project 2000). What stands out in their 2000 statement is that they add, "We rely on the home, as did the founders of the American Republic, to instill the virtues that sustain democracy itself," (The American Presidency Project 2000). By establishing the connection to the founding fathers, and the "virtues that sustain democracy" they seem to be clearly stating that gay men and women should not just be barred from marriage and the social construct of citizenship, but they should be knowingly barred from citizenship and the opportunities of democracy. They continue that, "For the same reason, we do not believe sexual preference should be given special legal protection or standing in law." By 2004, the pledge to oppose same-sex marriage increases from four to twelve sentences, with an entire section devoted to "Protecting Marriage." They stated their support of President Bush's constitutional amendment to protect marriage. The GOP adds further that the welfare of children should be considered, and any benefits given to married couples should be restricted to just "one man and one woman" marriages (The American Presidency Project 2004). They call the Defense of Marriage Act a "common sense law" and state that any attempts to "redefine marriage in a single state or city could have serious consequences throughout the country," (The American Presidency Project 2004).

By 2008, Republicans focus their platform on the appointment of "Constitutionalist Judges" that will not attempt to undermine traditional marriage laws. They continue their 2004 rhetoric surrounding the impact on children and state that "Because our children's future is best preserved within the traditional understanding of marriage, we call for a constitutional amendment that fully protects marriage as a union of a man and a woman," (The American Presidency Project 2008). But other than that, they do not specifically say that they are against same-sex marriage, just that the Republican party has been at the forefront of protecting traditional marriage and that it should be up to the people to vote on any redefinition of marriage. By 2012, they returned to their more forceful language, saying,

We reaffirm our support for a Constitutional amendment defining marriage as the union of one man and one woman. We applaud the citizens of the majority of States which have enshrined in their constitutions the traditional concept of marriage, and we support the campaigns underway in several other States to do so, (The American Presidency Project 2012).

With the Supreme Court's decision to establish gay marriage, the language of the GOP's platform changes again in 2016. They now have a section on Religious Freedom's connection to gay marriage and state their support for the First Amendment Defense Act that "will bar government

discrimination against individuals and businesses for acting on the belief that marriage is the union of one man and one woman," (The American Presidency Project 2016). This stands out, as they are putting the access to liberty from gay men and women second to the liberty of those with specific values. They go further to state that the American family, and the traditional American family, one man and one woman, is the "foundation of civil society." They stated that the traditional family is fundamental to the "progress of our Republic" again establishing a clear overlap between access to citizenship and access to marriage. They go one step further in 2016 to state that strong families, and thus families created by one man and one woman "advance the cause of liberty by lessening the need for government in their daily lives," (The American Presidency Project 2016). They state clearly that they do not support the Supreme Court's redefinition of marriage and wish the decision to be left up to the states once more (The American Presidency Project 2016).

Log Cabin Republicans and Marriage Citizenship

"Gay men sought to step fully inside the circle of citizenship," Robert Self writes, continuing that "...in making their case to do so further destabilized inherited assumptions about American manhood and the heterosexual breadwinner ideal," (Self 2013). This is key to understanding why marriage is so important to both the LCR and the GOP despite what their differences might be in defining marriage. Marriage is an entrance to masculinity and breadwinning; it allowed gay men the opportunity to step away from their image of "sexual perversion" and into the white-picket American dream. In her book, *American Marriage: A Political Institution*, political scientist, Priscilla Yamin states that 2004 was a battle for the "soul of the nation" quoting the head of the Georgia Christian Coalition. She also calls upon George W. Bush's State of the Union address to highlight that 9/11 re-established this belief that despite everything shaken up in a post-9/11 world, there was an effort to keep traditions strong. Bush went on to state that there are "unseen pillars of civilization" and, likely, was referring directly to marriage and family. Yamin describes the idea that during this time, both sides, either pro-restricting marriage or pro-expanding, shifted their tone significantly as conservatives focused on government regulation and the liberals on morality. This is something we can see clearly in GOP party platforms, but not so clearly in the LCR's statements, as they seem to step more towards the left with their language (Yamin 2012).

Further, like the GOP's battle against queer soldiers, "traditional marriage" was a concept utilized often in marriage debate. The GOP used it and even some queer liberals utilized the "traditional marriage" concept to state that marriage was a tradition same-sex couples did not need to be involved in. Therefore, the language in the Defense of Marriage Act states that it is intended to "protect the institution of marriage" therefore, protect the traditional concept of marriage. The Log Cabin Republicans, who want to conform to conservative,

traditional beliefs, see marriage as another standard to “normative citizenship.” Since they wish to be a part of the traditional male citizenship group, they need access to marriage to fulfil this desire or the Republican Party will not see them as traditional male citizens.

CONCLUSION

This paper observed male citizenship through the lens of both the Log Cabin Republicans, a LGBTQ+ advocacy group within the Republican Party, and the Republican Party. Both groups believed that soldiering and marriage were fundamental pillars of male citizenship, but they differed on their belief whether homosexuality could be an interchangeable pillar to male citizenship. The Log Cabin Republicans believed homosexuality could be an interchangeable pillar, as they utilized rhetoric to attempt to prove tradition wouldn't be impacted by queer inclusion. The Republican Party does not believe the pillars of traditional male citizenship to be interchangeable and believes heterosexuality to be intertwined within the concepts of marriage and soldiering. This is highlighted in their party platform language from 1996 to 2016.

When looking at the pillar of soldiering, the Log Cabin Republicans stand against the Republican Party's belief that “homosexuality is incompatible” with military service (The American Presidency Project 1996). They attempted to prove this to the Republican Party by utilizing language that highlights their place within the party, and with shared values as the GOP, by stating that queer service members would not hurt national security nor hurt relationships within the unit. The LCR even goes as far as to say that the Department of Defence doesn't need to make the unit inclusive, just accessible to queer individuals (Log Cabin Republicans 2004). The Republican Party begins by stating that military service is simply “incompatible” with military service, but then shift to language that implies queer inclusion would stand against military tradition.

When observing the male citizenship pillar of marriage, the Log Cabin Republicans maintained their stance that marriage is a right they should be granted and that the definition of marriage is not traditional, but has been a constantly shifting entity throughout history. Unlike with soldiering, they attempt to argue this to the larger Republican Party by utilizing political means and pulling support from Presidential candidates who supported the Defence Against Marriage Act. The Republican Party maintained its belief that “traditional marriage” is between one man and one woman throughout 1996 to 2016. Once Obergefell v. Hodges was established, their language switches to focusing on the protection of religious freedoms but continues their belief that marriage is between one man and one woman.

Therefore, despite the effort of the Log Cabin Republicans to establish homosexuality as a pillar of male citizenship through the shifting of the marriage and soldiering pillars, the Republican Party continues to believe heterosexuality must remain a part of traditional male citizenship. Thus,

highlighting the GOP's belief that queer citizens have no place within traditional male citizenship at all.

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NOTES

- 1 The Log Cabin Republicans chose their name, "Log Cabin Republicans" derived from the wish to emulate the early Republican party under President Abraham Lincoln who sought "liberty and equality under the law" above all else (Log Cabin Republicans 2021).
- 2 Since 1977, the group has expanded to "thousands" of members across 26 states and has segmented its organization into 35 chapters (Log Cabin Republicans 2020).
- 3 In his book *All for the Family*, Robert Self points out that gay men and women in the 60s possessed a "compromised citizenship" status and that the activists understood that their compromised citizenship was simply due to fear of sexual deviancy and the belief that homosexuality was a mental disorder (Self 2013).