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The Threat of Trump: The Religious Rhetoric of the Trump Administration and the Threat it
Poses to LGBTQ+ People and their Existence.

Anne Marie Gildea

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Theology and Religious
Studies (Research)
School of Critical Studies
College of Arts
University of Glasgow
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Table of Contents

1. Abstract.....	4
2. Acknowledgments.....	6
3. List of Figures.....	7
4. Introduction.....	8
5. Defining Terms.....	8
6. The Notion of a Moral Paradigm Shift.....	10
6.1 The Overton Window.....	11
6.2 Kwame Anthony Appiah and Moral Revolutions.....	12
6.3 Cecilie Eriksen on Moral Revolutions.....	15
6.4 Pope Francis' Legacy within the LGBTQ+ Rights.....	16
6.5 The Vatican's stance on LGBTQ+ before Pope Francis.....	16
6.6 Francis' stance on LGBTQ+.....	17
7. The Role Religious Freedom Plays in the Debate about LGBTQ+ Rights.....	19
7.1 The Affordable Care Act and Religious Freedom.....	19
8. Political and Legal Action in the Past and Present for the LGBTQ+ Community.....	20
8.1 Douglas Victor Janoff's discussion of LGBTQ+ rights expansion.....	21
8.2 Previous administrations contributions to LGBTQ+ rights.....	22
9. Division of the Political Parties in the U.S.....	23
9.1 Republican vs. Democrat.....	23
9.2 Democrat's gradual acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.....	24
9.3 Data showing growth in acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community.....	24
9.4 The Trump administration's anti-transgender rhetoric and its effectiveness on the American people's perception.....	25
9.5 The Role of Religious Affiliation on Party Division.....	32
9.6 Political Tactics of the Republican Party.....	39
9.7 Enforcing the idea of a traditional American family.....	40
9.8 Voter mobilization.....	41
9.9 Trump planting seeds within the first presidential term.....	42
9.10 Conservative Christians.....	44

9.11 The dehumanization of transgender people.....46

10. Anti-LGBTQ+ Policy in the U.S. Government and Political Beliefs.....46

 10.1 Data showing rise in hate crimes against the LGBTQ+ community.....47

 10.2 The impact of overturning LGBTQ+ legal rights.....48

 10.3 Trump’s Executive Orders: A Commentary.....54

 10.4 Project 2025.....58

11. Conclusion.....62

1. Abstract

This dissertation researches the role of religious rhetoric of the Trump administration and the implications of this on the LGBTQ+ community in the United States. This discussion unveils the motives of the Republican party and how the political division in the U.S. has been driven deeper. As a result of this religious rhetoric, the LGBTQ+ community faces discrimination and the stripping of their legal protections.

The document's argument surrounds the current political and cultural paradigm shift happening in the United States. Donald Trump is using religion to gain popularity with Christian conservatives while giving a platform for extreme leftist political beliefs. Trump is shifting the political window to an unprecedented moment in American history that allows for discrimination of vulnerable people. Anthony Kwame Appiah's work on moral revolutions is considered in his book *The Honor Code*. Appiah argues that moral revolutions and cultural shifts come from the honor that is placed on individuals. In these circumstances, the moral shift is going back in time and changing American people's acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community negatively. Pope Francis's writing and statements on LGBTQ+ people are examples of how religion can be a more positive intervention. Religion does not have to be a threat to LGBTQ+ people's lives rather an inclusive community.

The dissertation includes government documents outlining laws surrounding LGBTQ+ legal protections and definitions of LGBTQ+ identities. Donald Trump's Executive Orders are used as data surrounding the discrimination of LGBTQ+ people. Data was collected from the Pew Research Center about U.S. electoral polls, U.S. religious affiliations, and opinions surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. Along with this, data was collected from studies that research the impact of Trump's legal actions on the LGBTQ+ community. The various sources are incorporated to discuss the religious rhetoric of conservative Christians and how they have strengthened their political base. I argue that this has been accomplished through using religion as a uniting force for conservative Christians for politicians to gain reelection and push their agendas.

This research points to the importance of separation of state and church in the U.S. government. As well as the need for diverse education, legislation and cultural norms that encourage inclusion. The research also points to the dangerous political divide in the United States that includes conservative Christians and their ideas surrounding a traditional America. Trump's anti-LGBTQ+ campaign paired with religious undertones is a political strategy to strengthen his political base to be reelected in 2024. The result is detrimental to America's democracy and vulnerable people's legal protections.

2. Acknowledgments

I would like to express gratitude to Professor Julie Clague for her supervision and guidance on this dissertation. Her endless office meetings, zoom calls, revisions, and reassurance made this process less stressful and manageable. She has shaped me into a stronger researcher and writer.

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Lastly, to my sister and the greatest role model, Kathleen. Your determination and hard work have never failed to amaze me. You constantly break the barrier of what can be achieved when you put your mind to it.

3. List of Figures

Figure 1: Majorities of LGBTQ adults see more acceptance for gay, lesbian, trans and nonbinary now versus a decade ago (Pew Research Center)

Figure 2: American's views of laws and policies related to transgender people have changed in recent years (Pew Research Center)

Figure 3: Ethnoreligious voting in presidential elections (in percentages) (Pickel 12)

Figure 4: A God Driving a Revolution from Conservative to the Far Right in the United States (Pickel 17)

Figure 5: Long-term decline of Christians, rise of religiously unaffiliated Americans (Pew "Religious Values and the 2024 Election")

Figure 6: Deep division between Biden and Trump supporters in views of whether the Bible should influence U.S. laws (Smith et al.)

Figure 7: Bias Motivation Categories for Victims of Single-bias Incidents in 2023 "FBI Releases 2023 Hate Crime Statistics")

Figure 8: Anti-LGBTQ+ incidents against select targets (Lotz)

4. Introduction

This dissertation examines the conservative political shift concerning LGBTQ+ rights in the United States under the Trump Administration and its right-wing supporters who have leveraged religious rhetoric to influence public policy based on their conservative beliefs. The document uses theories and research from various scholars such as the Overton Window, Kwame Anthony Appiah's ideas on moral revolutions, the Pew Research Center's data on U.S. political and religious beliefs towards the LGBTQ+ community, and the recent rescission of LGBTQ+ legal protections. The Overton Window helps us understand political shifts through history and our modern context. It helps us understand the political shift in 2025 of the Trump administration and the rescinding of LGBTQ+ rights, and how this was made possible. Kwame Anthony Appiah will contribute to the discussion on moral revolutions connecting to the shift in culture and politics in the United States. Appiah places emphasis on the idea that honor motivates progress in morals and the human need for our identities to be recognized. This is an interesting discussion to compare to the draw back in legal protections by the Trump administration. Data from the Pew Research Center that examines the 2025 presidential polls and examining Americans' religious beliefs about the LGBTQ+ community, are utilized to inform and support the main argument. Crucially, the religious rhetoric of the Trump administration and the Republican Party will be researched through its various Executive Orders, Project 2025, and the discriminatory language of the Trump administration and his supporters.

This investigation is critical because it highlights the existential danger the Trump administration poses to the LGBTQ+ community within the U.S. democratic framework. It highlights the negative influence and impact that extreme religious beliefs can have on politics and public policies in a country that is constitutionally obliged to separate church and state.

Donald Trump and religious supporters are normalizing their evangelical political agenda through the Republican party to achieve a conservative America that rolls back decades of LGBTQ+ rights. This narrow and toxic political approach puts the LGBTQ+ community at risk socially and politically after decades of uneven progress.

5. Defining Terms

This section of the dissertation will define the various terms used in research. This ensures a collective understanding of the terms that involve a diverse and wide range of identities. For example, the writing discusses the composition of the LGBTQ+ community, which involves many identities. It can be hard to define these identities as they are ever evolving within society and the images that underpin those identities. It can be liberating to understand and fall into categories within LGBTQ+ identities, while also limiting when we categorize people's existence. This dissertation does not work to perfectly define these lived experiences but rather demonstrates the impact current U.S. politics has on this community.

The Human Rights Campaign has a glossary of these terms published on its website to help spread awareness and understanding of these identities. The term LGBTQ+ is an overarching "acronym for 'lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer' with a '+' sign to recognize the limitless sexual orientations and gender identities used by members of our community" ("Glossary of Terms"). Throughout the writing this term will be used to discuss the community as a whole because Trump's anti-LGBTQ+ agenda targets multiple identities within this community.

A subgroup that will be focused on more specifically is transgender individuals and the executive orders Trump has passed targeting their legal protections. Transgender is defined as "an umbrella term for people whose gender identity and/or expression is different from cultural expectations based on the sex they were assigned at birth. Being transgender does not imply any specific sexual orientation. Therefore, transgender people may identify as straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual, etc." ("Glossary of Terms"). Another identity that Trump's executive orders and Project 2025 impact is gender-diverse people. Boston Medical Center defines this identity as "the community of people who fall outside of the gender binary structure. Other terms for gender-diverse include non-binary, gender expansive, gender fluid, genderqueer, etc." ("LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams 2020").

The Human Rights Campaign defines homophobia as “the fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who are attracted to members of the same sex” (“Glossary of Terms”). It is also helpful to define transphobia as the “discrimination towards, fear, marginalization, and hatred of transgender people or those perceived as transgender. Individuals, communities, policies, and institutions can be transphobic” (“LGBTQIA+ Glossary of Terms for Health Care Teams 2020”). Although these two terms impact people within the same community, they target different groups. It is important to define the terms and demonstrate their differences when looking into the Trump administration, as some of his policies and overall political opinions are homophobic versus transphobic. For example, “prohibiting transgender girls from participating in school sports teams that align with their gender identity” (Warbelow) is transphobic rather than homophobic.

An important term used within the dissertation is politically Conservative Christians in the United States. Pew Research Center describes politically conservative Christians as Faith and Flag Conservatives. They “are highly religious, politically engaged and both socially and economically conservative. They favor a robust role for religion in public life and a smaller role for government in society, and they hold that a strong American military is essential to international affairs. They overwhelmingly identify with the GOP and remain strong supporters of President Donald Trump” (“Beyond Red vs. Blue” 41).

An executive order “is a written order issued by the president to the federal government which does not require congressional approval” (“What are executive orders?”). These are not always used in negative ways that we now see with the Trump administration. However, the orders being passed by Trump directly strip LGBTQ+ people of their legal protections and right to exist. They are unilateral and discriminatory, and they do not need congressional approval.

6. The Notion of a Moral Paradigm Shift

This section of the dissertation will define the concept of a paradigm shift and research various paradigm shifts, using theories, and scholarly voices. This will be done through examining the Overton Window theory, Kwame Anthony Appiah’s discussion on moral revolutions, and Pope Francis’ legacy with the LGBTQ+ community. These concepts will be used to demonstrate how cultural shifts come about and what motivates them, with the example of Pope Francis’ stance on LGBTQ+ people. Francis’ stance is an important example of how positive shifts can come about within cultural and religious beliefs. Paradigm shifts will be

researched to demonstrate changes that occur in politics over time and why this happens. In this case, there has been a shift in the political and social understanding and treatment of the LGBTQ+ community. This can be seen in the mobilization of the Trump administration and his supporters use of Christian conservative rhetoric in their campaigns and policies that target the LGBTQ+ community. All these examples will be discussed in further detail throughout the writing.

Masud Chand describes a paradigm shift as “the term first used by Thomas Kuhn in his famous 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* to describe the process and result of a change in basic assumptions within the ruling theory of science” (Chand). Charles Doyle refers to it in a more social way saying, “it has come to mean a radical change in the generally accepted viewpoint or structure to a new one based on a complete change in thinking, or a belief system that allows the creation of a new paradigm that stands in opposition to the previous paradigm” (Doyle). This definition can be seen within the fight for LGBTQ+ legal protection and inclusivity in society, pushing for the normalization of their existence. However, these strides in progress are being reversed by the Trump administration.

These drawbacks in legal protection could be small moments in history and reversed by the next administration. They could also have a lasting impact on the social and political landscape of the U.S. and the way the LGBTQ+ community is treated. Each day of the Trump administration brings in unexpected policies that opens the doors for more discrimination and hatred towards vulnerable individuals. It is hard to know the lasting impact of Trump’s rhetoric, but in this moment, it advances a discriminatory posture by the U.S. government and the society at large. A paradigm shift refers to a change that is irreversible which is hard to predict within U.S. politics now. The irreversible shift may be in the minds of the American people regarding minorities and their right to respect socially and legally.

6.1 The Overton Window

Various theories are used to understand political shifts and how they are influenced, such as the Overton Window. This is “a model for understanding how ideas in society change over time and influence politics. The core concept is that politicians are limited in what policy ideas they can support. They generally only pursue policies that are widely accepted throughout society as legitimate policy options” (“The Overton Window”). This concept was created by

Joseph P. Overton, who “was senior vice president of the Mackinac Center for Public Policy” (“The Overton Window”).

As cited in Conceptually, Joseph Lehman points out how “the most common misconception is that lawmakers themselves are in the business of shifting the Overton window. That is absolutely false. Lawmakers are actually in the business of detecting where the window is and then moving to be in accordance with it” (“Conceptually”). This helps us to understand the actions of Republican politicians and their allowance of executive orders and political actions. An example of this would be J.D. Vance and his stance on Trump as a president. J.D. Vance is now the Vice President of the United States, working with Donald Trump, but his past comments have shown he has not always been a supporter. Vance has been quoted as saying, “‘I’m never a Trump guy,’ in an interview with Charlie Rose in 2016” (McCarthy). Previously, Vance wrote an article on Trump’s antiwar messages saying “‘Mr. Trump is unfit for our nation’s highest office’” (McCarthy). Why would Vance go from being anti-Trump to being his vice president? This can be explained through the Overton Window and the way that politicians shift their policies and actions to match what the public believes. They do this to become elected or gain power politically, which is seen in the rise of Conservatives supporting Trump. Vance has shifted himself to become Trump’s vice president, not because he agrees with Trump, but in order to gain power from Trump’s supporters.

The Conceptually website goes on to recommend that “a politician seeking to maximize their chances of reelection should determine where the Overton window for key policy issues is, via public opinion polls and other means, so they can successfully campaign on those ideas” (“Conceptually”). This concept of the Overton window is interesting to compare to the political climate of the U.S. today. The Trump administration is not representative of all U.S. political beliefs, rather the representation of the conservative Christian group that heavily supports him. After decades of political activism and so many legislative wins for the LGBTQ+ community, why is there a drastic change with the Trump administration? Past trends in politics show elected officials strategically target the public’s general beliefs to win their positions in government. However, Donald Trump’s presidential election in 2024 shows a change in this trend. This dissertation investigates the religious rhetoric of the Trump administration and the Republican Party and how they use it to shift the political environment surrounding LGBTQ+ rights. Various politicians on the right are stabilizing their conservative party through the

religious undertones of saving America and making it great again. As a result, LGBTQ+ rights are at risk and continue to be stripped (as I shall later demonstrate). These political tactics of religious rhetoric will be discussed in further detail throughout the writing.

6.2 Kwame Anthony Appiah and Moral Revolutions

Kwame Anthony Appiah's ideas of moral revolutions and shifts in culture are another interesting example to investigate when looking into the shift in U.S. politics with the Trump administration. Appiah discusses the concept of honor in moral revolutions in their book *The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen*. Appiah introduces the main argument of the book, asking a "simple question: What can we learn about morality by exploring moral revolutions?" (Appiah 11). Appiah discusses what the potential driving force behind moral revolutions may be. He defines moral revolutions as "a large change in a short time, a moral revolution has to involve a rapid transformation in moral behavior, not just moral sentiments. Nevertheless, at the end of the moral revolution, as at the end of a scientific revolution, things look new. Looking back, even over a single generation, people ask, 'What were we thinking? How did we do that for all those years?'" (Appiah 11).

Appiah explains this idea of identity in honor, saying, "identity connects these moral revolutions with an aspect of our human psychology that was widely neglected by moral philosophers working in English for too long" (Appiah 13). Appiah continues: "we human beings need others to respond appropriately to who we are and what we do. We need others to recognize us as conscious beings and to acknowledge that we recognize them" (Appiah 12). This idea of acknowledgment of our identities is directly connected to the fight for LGBTQ+ rights. This community wants society to acknowledge their right to exist and their well-being. This is what the Trump administration works to reverse: the acknowledgement of queer people's existence and the validity of their identities. Appiah goes on to describe how crucial honor is, explaining, "one reason why it is so crucial is that, like our social identities, it connects our lives together. Attending to honor, too, like noticing the importance of our social identities, can help us both to treat others as we should and to make the best of our own lives" (Appiah 15). Here, we can see the direct connections between Appiah's understanding of morals in society and the reversal of LGBTQ+ legislation. The Trump Administration is diminishing the existence of social identities and the way certain groups should be treated with respect but are instead met with discrimination.

This idea of respect is further discussed in Appiah's book:

Having honor means being entitled to respect. As a result, if you want to know whether a society has a concern with honor, look first to see whether people there think anyone has to be treated with respect. The next thing to look for is whether that right to respect is granted on the basis of a set of shared norms, a code. An *honor code* says how people of certain identities can gain the right to respect, how they can lose it, and how having and losing honor changes the way they should be treated. (Appiah 195)

This definition is interesting to compare to the current political and social atmosphere in the U.S. There has been a reverse in moral revolution, fighting for LGBTQ+ rights, to now where executive orders take away LGBTQ+ individuals' rights to gender affirming care and recognition of gender expression. There is a noticeable lack of honor in the U.S. legislative process. The United States is divided, with people questioning what is happening with the stripping of legal protections, while others believe this is essential to restoring the U.S. to a better version before Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI). A lot of this legislative conflict has to do with identity and the roles that we are expected to fall under in the U.S. The LGBTQ+ community expands our understanding of identities and expectations for people in society. As a result, our understanding of respect and honor must be inclusive to all people within the United States, not just white males.

This section of Appiah's book can be a helpful explanation of what is happening specifically to transgender people's legal protections and rights in Trump's America. Transgender people's entitlement to respect is being stripped with each executive order. Trump's administration is changing the moral code and the social order that was fought for decades. The right to exist, the right to respect, to express, and the right to healthcare. All of these rights and social norms are being stripped by the Trump administration. Transgender people no longer have respect or dignity when they have to explain to others why they are valid in their existence. The rescinding of legal protections will be discussed in further detail in the section titled "Trump's Executive Orders and their Ignorance."

Lastly, Appiah's ideas of moral code can be directly connected to the social and political shift in rights and beliefs surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. Trump has no moral code or adherence to respect that leads to the right to honor in the social hierarchy. Appiah explains this aspect of the honor code:

If you adhere to an honor code, you'll not only respond with respect to those who keep it, you'll respond with contempt to those who don't. So, if you yourself meet the standards, you'll have self-respect; and if you yourself fall short, you will have contempt for yourself, which is shame. If someone doesn't feel shame when they fail (or, at least, when they fail badly), that shows they don't adhere to the code. We say that they are shameless. (Appiah 196)

This idea of honor can be used as a lens to understand the MAGA movement and their beliefs and actions. MAGA believe that they are creating a moral revolution of making America great again. This group believes that left-wing ideologies are destroying America, in this case with wokeism and diverse identities. MAGA believes that certain groups, LGBTQ+, do not deserve honor or respect. They believe this community's identities are lower in the social hierarchy and therefore do not deserve respect. This idea is discussed in the article "The Symbolic Politics of Status in the MAGA Movement" by Biko Koenig and Tali Mendelberg. They point out how "Trump's core supporters were motivated by more than the factors established in the literature, such as economic decline, partisanship, ideology, or social identity. Our findings suggest that much of the explanatory power of these factors comes from their connection to status" (Koenig and Mendelberg 2). The article continues to say, "Political conflict extends beyond contests over material distribution or moral values. It implicates battles for social esteem conferred by institutions, which signal whose values and lifestyles are either favored or disparaged. Importantly, government, schools, workplaces, and media can *symbolically* affirm or deny status. They can do so through the formal work of policy and the informal work of political culture" (Koenig and Mendelberg 2). MAGA as a movement goes beyond politics moving into identity and status of Americans.

Within the MAGA movement and their own community, they believe they hold honor in their own moral revolution of bringing back a traditional America. Their conservative and evangelical ideas on sexuality and gender identity are a set of moral codes in themselves. They believe the woke left brings shame to the American identity and MAGA is restoring the traditional America. MAGA has quickly reversed decades of queer legislative progress within the span of Trump's presidency. They bring their shared beliefs of a traditional America and their common identities of conservative, Christian, white and male, into their movement.

Donald Trump, his administration, and supporters work outside the idea of honor because they lack shame. They feel no shame in taking away transgender people's right to healthcare or queer people's right to live within an anti-discriminatory society. Trump has shifted the moral understanding of who deserves respect, especially within diverse identities. People who align with anti-LGBTQ+ policy and beliefs do not adhere to the honor code.

6.3 Cecilie Eriksen on Moral Revolutions

Cecilie Eriksen investigates moral revolutions and what drives them within “The Dynamics of Moral Revolutions- Prelude to Future Investigations and Interventions.” (Eriksen) Eriksen discusses Appiah's ideas of honor and morals within revolutions, adding to these ideas as well as critiquing them. Eriksen summarizes Appiah's idea of honor as follows: “a change of honor code is what drives, creates, and explains moral revolutions. This is why we should pay particular attention to honor, if we wish to create positive moral and social changes in our society” (Eriksen 782). Eriksen explains that there are levels of change in morals, and not all are considered a revolution. Eriksen also discusses how there are multiple factors within a moral revolution, rather than Appiah's concept of just honor that motivates change. Eriksen points out how “revolutions are characterized by being not only major, but also a radical change” (Eriksen 782).

Eriksen uses examples to go against Appiah's idea that moral revolutions come from people being motivated by honor. Eriksen uses the example of homosexuality in Denmark, discussing the process of legalizing these rights, making a distinction between the public and private spheres. The first step in progress was through the government and the law, as well as the political atmosphere becoming more liberal. Eriksen points out “what drove and created this moral revolution was not, however, a change of honor codes, but first the political wish to adhere to liberal values and a principle of coherence, and later it was joined by homosexuals', the public's, and the politician's wish to obtain equality” (Eriksen 786). This example in Denmark is the opposite of what has happened in the United States with LGBTQ+ legal protections. The government, specifically the majority of the Republican Party, strives to make the U.S. more conservative. They are capitalizing on the push for Christian conservatism to reverse LGBTQ+ rights and create a more conservative government and country.

6.4 Pope Francis' Legacy within the LGBTQ+ Rights

This section will discuss Pope Francis' legacy within the LGBTQ+ community and fundamental changes he brought to the Catholic Church. Francis' stance shows that there can be change and acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community within religious institutions. There can be cultural shifts in beliefs and understandings that are inclusive rather than dangerous and hateful. Michele Dillon discusses the past beliefs of the Catholic Church and the way Francis shifted these beliefs in their book *Post secular Catholicism: Relevance and Renewal*. This section of discussion is important because it displays how change can progress for LGBTQ+ people even within religious institutions that historically condemned this group. It also brings into question the debate of religion being separate from the state and the challenges that may arise when religion is brought into politics.

The Catholic Church condemned gay activity and marriage for a very long time until Pope Francis was chosen. The language and modern approach Francis took during his time as Pope made strides for the LGBTQ+ community, especially within Catholicism. Before Pope Francis, the Catholic Church used natural law to promote "to be inherently and objectively good in and of themselves, for example, human life, everyday practical reason, the beauty of art and nature, and importantly, the natural structure of human sexual differences and of female and male complementarity" (Dillon 69). This understanding pre-Francis created a clash between the Catholic Church's teachings and the secular and modern world the church resided.

6.5 The Vatican's stance on LGBTQ+ before Pope Francis

Before Francis, "the Vatican emphasized that 'homosexuals' should never be subjected to discrimination and that they deserve full respect and acceptance. The cultural resonance of this anti-discrimination motif, however, is attenuated by the Church's core teaching on sexuality and its condemnation of same-sex relationships" (Dillon 75). The Church believed that no one should be harmed or discriminated against for homosexual acts but would refer to gay marriage and behavior as a sin or a disorder. In 1986, as Dillon explains, the Vatican stated "that 'homosexual activity' is sinful. It is objectively sinful because it 'is not a complementary union able to transmit life.' Therefore, while a 'homosexual inclination' in itself is not sinful (though disordered), 'when persons engage in homosexual activity, they confirm within themselves a disordered sexual inclination which is essentially self-indulgent'" (Dillon 75-76). The Church does not support hatred toward LGBTQ+ individuals; however, the language and overall message of the statement do not support the union of LGBTQ+ people.

Michele Dillon discusses this conflict within the church surrounding LGBTQ+ people, describing how “the Church denounces the discrimination against LGBT individuals. Yet, for some, this may be difficult to reconcile with its categorization of gays as ‘disordered’ or its denunciation of the objective immorality of same-sex relationships” (Dillon 78). This is where Pope Francis’ papacy is an example of how views changed within religion surrounding the LGBTQ+ community.

6.6 Francis’ stance on LGBTQ+

Dillon points out how “Francis’ discourse on gays is particularly striking in its post-secular openness. His words and gestures stand in remarkable contrast with the Vatican’s pattern of condemnation of same-sex relationships and its advocacy against same-sex marriage” (Dillon 81-82). Dillon goes on to explain how Francis’ language choice and understanding of gay people in the eyes of God changed the Catholic Church’s previous understanding. Dillon discusses Francis’ use of the word *gay* rather than *homosexual*, saying,

Francis’s use of the everyday word *gay* marks a significant change in Church discourse. *Homosexuality* is a word that, until Francis publicly invoked *gay*, was the term always used in official Church statements referencing the topic. For him to use the preferred vocabulary of LGBT individuals, the language that has paramount everyday relevance for them, is symbolically disruptive of official Church discourse. (Dillon 82)

Another shift that Francis put into place was the lack of judgment towards gay people. Dillon describes this shift: “Francis’ public, nonjudgmental acknowledgment of the desires and lived realities of LGBT individuals is a clear departure from official Church discourse. Early in his papacy, he infamously states, ‘If someone is gay and he searches for the Lord and has good will, who am I to judge?’” (Dillon 82). Although these are small changes in the Catholic Church’s beliefs towards LGBT individuals, it is the small steps that make the change. Dillon reiterates this saying:

Francis has stated that the Church should seek forgiveness from gay people for how it has treated them. All these gay-friendly nods matter. They become critical moments in the institutionalization of the Church’s acceptance of LGBT individuals, and in forging new paths between the Church and secular society. They convey that same-sex relationships are an everyday reality whose existence may not be as disordered or as sinful as its (still) official, but somewhat silenced vocabulary maintains. (Dillon 83)

Francis made the famous comment during a press conference on a flight saying, “if someone is gay and is searching for the Lord and has good will, then who am I to judge him?” (Francis). Francis continued saying “the Catechism of the Catholic Church explains this in a beautiful way, saying ‘no one should marginalize these people for this, they must be integrated into society’” (Francis). These quotes stated by Francis hold immense importance for the LGBTQ+ community and were monumental steps forward in the acceptance of the community.

The Catechism of Catholic Church articles 2357, 2358, 2359 are other examples of the Catholic Church’s beliefs and ideas about LGBTQ+ people. These articles refer to homosexuality as “intrinsically disordered” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2357). Homosexual acts are described as “contrary to the natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from genuine, affective, and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2357). This being said, article 2358 also says that “they must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, para. 2358). Although the church does not fully accept homosexuality, they still believe in the respect of people with same-sex inclinations and reject discrimination against these people.

This is similar to the stance adopted by Pope Francis in the *Fiducia Supplicans* (2023) which includes discussion on blessings of same-sex marriages. Paragraph 31 states that “a blessing may be imparted that not only has an ascending value but also involves the invocation of a blessing that descends from God” (“*Fiducia Supplicans*,” para. 31). Again, this is not a full acceptance of the sacrament of marriage of same sex couples however, this allows for the blessing of these couples. The Catholic Church has historically condemned homosexuality in all forms but Pope Francis’s allowing of pastoral blessings of these same-sex unions is progress. Homosexual sexual activity is still seen as a sin in these instances, but both documents call for respect and compassion of homosexual individuals and rejection of discrimination. Comparing this to conservative Christian beliefs use religion to excuse disrespect and discrimination is very telling.

Pope Francis is an example of how religious and cultural beliefs can shift positively surrounding the LGBTQ community because of the intervention of a religious leader. This signifies the shift of religion and secularism in society and how the two can both peacefully

coexist. There is still room for religious freedom within society while allowing inclusion and freedom for everyone to exist.

7. The Role Religious Freedom Plays in the Debate about LGBTQ+ Rights

This section will continue the discussion of LGBTQ+ acceptance in Catholicism while specifically discussing the coexistence of religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights. Dillon discusses the concept of religious freedom and LGBTQ+ rights in their chapter “Religious Freedom: The U.S. Bishops and the Shock of the Secular.” This chapter discusses the impact the Affordable Care Act had in the United States and the “Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) regarding religious freedom” (Dillon 97). This chapter aligns with the political and religious debates happening in the U.S. right now with Donald Trump and his policies.

7.1 The Affordable Care Act and Religious Freedom

Dillon is pointing out how the Bishops in the United States believe the Affordable Care Act is against their religious freedom. This is because of the contraception mandate in the act. Dillon explains how President Obama, in March of 2010, “added contraception to the preventative services that would be mandatorily covered by insurance. The initial publication of the mandate did not specify that religious organizations such as Catholic parishes would be exempt from providing coverage for their employees. Thus, by default, this meant that all religious employers would be required to provide contraception coverage as part of their employees’ insurance policy” (Dillon 98). The bishops argued this was against their religious freedom as it forced them to go against their beliefs regarding contraception.

This mandate unveils the conflict of religious freedom and secularism within the United States. As a result, “the religious freedom campaign is not solely about defending a secular democratic right. It is simultaneously a campaign to reassert the Church’s teachings on sexual morality and marriage. They thus execute a push against secularism through the framework provided by the secular value of religious freedom” (Dillon 109). This led the bishops to expand their argument on religious freedom into other areas, like same sex marriage. Dillon described this tactic, saying, “Religious freedom thus became the mobilizing force fusing the political-legal opportunity and the bishops’ moral vision” (Dillon 108). A similar tactic that Donald Trump and his administration use when rescinding LGBTQ+ legal protection is hidden behind the excuse of religious beliefs.

The conflict with the religious freedom debate is the “lack of acknowledgment that there may be other values at stake in the conflict over religious freedom. They seek to have their understanding of religion and religious freedom affirmed by the courts and the government. But they do not appear to consider how their understanding may impede the moral understanding of others, including the valuing of social inclusivity, which is central to liberal pluralistic democracy” (Dillon 112). No single religion should have superiority or governmental decision over people's lives and existence. Religious freedom should be the freedom to worship freely within a country, while not imposing those beliefs on healthcare systems and government policies.

In order for religion and secular beliefs to coincide peacefully, “both secular and religious actors should self-critique their own beliefs and their relative place in a pluralistic society where, by definition, there are diverse religious and secular views” (Dillon 122). Both sectors need to work together to create a society that is open and accepting rather than discriminatory, using their rights to freedom as a tactic. Dillon summarizes this saying, “when people act on what they believe to be true, that, for instance, the Church approves of sexual behavior, the ensuing behavior contributes to creating and reinforcing the new reality, understood by the steadily increasing acceptance and prevalence of same-sex relationships and gay marriage” (Dillon 83). People like Pope Francis and now Pope Leo, and their language and beliefs matter. The way they conduct themselves in society, recognizing their impact and how it can change the beliefs of people, is vital. This leads to a more inclusive and safe society for everyone.

8. Political and Legal Action in the Past and Present for the LGBTQ+ Community

It is important to understand LGBTQ+ rights in a historical context to understand the regression of these rights within the Trump administration. This section will review the changes in the relationship between religion, identity, and politics through U.S. history. This will be done through discussing Douglas Victor Janoff and their book *Queer Diplomacy* and reviewing Barack Obama and Joe Biden’s administrations' progress within LGBTQ+ rights.

8.1 Douglas Victor Janoff’s discussion of LGBTQ+ rights expansion

Douglas Victor Janoff discusses the expansion of LGBTQ+ rights globally as well as in the United States in their book *Queer Diplomacy*. Janoff describes himself as a white Canadian diplomat from the Western world when discussing the LGBTQ+ community's fight for human rights. He discusses the policies that were fought and created in the 90s and 2000s surrounding

the LGBTQ+ fight for equality. Janoff mainly focuses on the policies and how they impacted the overall beliefs and culture surrounding the queer community. This focus on policy displays the importance of representation within governments.

In the introduction, Janoff describes their experience fighting for LGBTQ rights on September 30, 1984, in the International March on the UN for Lesbian and Gay Freedom. The author recounts the demands of the group saying:

The freedom to live openly as lesbians and gay males from our youth to our old age. An end to violence by governments and institutions against lesbian and gay males, including torture and incarceration in prisons or mental institutions. An end to anti-gay violence on the streets and in our homes. An end to all sexual violence. The declassification of homosexuality as a disease by the WHO. Equal rights and equal housing, and employment. Our right to have and keep our children. Quality health care. An end to discrimination in any form against people with AIDS, and increased funding for research and treatment. An end to anti-gay immigration laws. The right to speak openly about our lives and the right to meet and organize freely with our lesbians and gay males (The Cahokian, 2019). (Janoff 2)

Looking through this list of demands, many of them have been accomplished over the years. It is no longer just a fight for lesbians and gay men, but now a diverse group of identities within the queer community. However, we have hit a turning point in culture, specifically within the United States. Conservative politicians have been slowly implementing anti-LGBTQ+ positions in the Supreme Court, political representatives, and now polices that directly impact people's safety and access to proper healthcare seen previously within Project 2025. Janoff reiterates this, saying "indeed, the Western gay and lesbian community's strategic decision to take on a more coherent identity appears to have worked: legal protection and political representation have increased steadily" (Janoff 24). When conservatives in the United States begin stripping the LGBTQ+ community of political representation and legal protection, it leaves this community vulnerable to violence and regression in the fight for rights.

Janoff discusses some of the cultural and political shifts. He discusses the evolution of sexuality in the Victorian era describing the shift as challenging "the 'repressive hypothesis', the myth that sexuality was repressed during the Victorian era. In fact, he believes the opposite: a 'discursive explosion' (Foucault 17) triggered a paradigmatic shift from sexual behavior to

sexual identity” (Janoff 20). Homosexuality was shifting from a behavior to an identity. Janoff describes another shift from the 1970s to early 2000s saying “as gays and lesbians entered the mainstream, the focus shifted from gay ‘liberation’ to gay ‘equality,’ using a mainstreaming ‘civil rights political strategy’ (Epstein 282)” (Janoff 24).

Another important shift that Janoff describes is the normalization of homosexuality rather than it being seen as deviant. Janoff describes the cultural identity as “a ‘homo-normalization’ of LGBT identity has taken root, to varying degrees, in Western states, achieved through legal reform and by accessing political structures. Broadening the institution of marriage to include LGBT people has helped to construct a homonormative Western subject” (Janoff 28). Not only is it the fight for legal protection but also progress in normalizing diverse identities outside of heteronormativity. This sort of social safety has started to regress within the Trump administration, especially within the legal protection of LGBTQ+ rights.

8.2 Previous administrations contributions to LGBTQ+ rights

Researching the Obama and Biden administrations policies for the LGBTQ+ community while comparing it to the Trump administration unveils a dangerous shift in policy and culture. The White House’s website has a published fact sheet outlining the “Obama Administration’s Record and the LGBTQ Community.” The Obama administration created a task force on bullying that created a website that includes “resources and assistance for LGBT youth, including examples of community groups that offer support and options to seek counseling” (“Office of the Press Secretary”). The Biden administration in May of 2024 made their final decision on implementing Section 1557 of the Affordable Care Act, which is home to the law’s major discrimination provisions... The final rule reinstates and expands upon many of the 2016 regulations from the Obama Administration and is a reversal from much of the 2020 Trump Administration rule” (Dawson et al.). Overall, “1557 provides nondiscrimination health care protections to individuals in protected groups, including prohibiting denial of benefits, coverage, program participation, and otherwise unequal treatment based on these factors” (Dawson et al.). There have been changes back and forth on Section 1557 between the Obama, Biden, and Trump administrations.

At the end of Biden’s term, his administration made a final rule on section 1557 Non-Discrimination of the Affordable Care Act (ACA). The Biden administration’s “Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) finalized a long-awaited revised regulation implementing

Section 1557 of the ACA. Section 1557 prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex and applies to health programs and activities receiving federal financial assistance (referred to as covered entities)” (Dawson et al.). This is an important ruling for LGBTQ+ rights, specifically looking into gender affirming care. Under the Trump administration, these efforts have been reversed “President Donald Trump’s administration signaled a policy reversal on transgender healthcare, issuing executive orders such as Protecting Children from Chemical and Surgical Mutilation and Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism. These orders laid the foundation for rescinding Obama and Biden era interpretations of Section 1557” (Fattahian and Fepelstein)” (Dawson et al.).

Looking through the strides that have been made for the LGBTQ+ community legally and the social impact they have had demonstrates the severity of danger the Trump administration poses to the LGBTQ+ community. The legal protections that have slowly made progress have been erased overnight within the Trump administration. Along with this is a dangerous shift in society that now normalizes anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric, not only stripping people of legal protections but also creating ignorant beliefs.

9. Division of the Political Parties in the U.S.

9.1 Republican vs. Democrat

This section will discuss the deep divide between the Democratic and Republican parties to help us understand the political climate of the U.S. The division of the political parties gives insight into each party's beliefs and how they stabilize their supporters in order to win elections. In this case, the division looks at the 2024 presidential election and the ways the Trump administration used religious undertones to mobilize his supporters. Donald Trump is setting back LGBTQ+ rights, especially anti-discriminatory laws and access to healthcare for transgender individuals. The article “How Does Party Position Change Happen? The Case of LGBTQ+ Rights in the U.S.” by David Karol gives some insight into this data. Karol gives background on the Republican and Democratic parties' stances on LGBTQ+ rights. There has been progress in LGBTQ+ rights from the 1970s onward, but with gradual change. Karol explains this concept by arguing “that when a new group is ‘incorporated’ in a party coalition, change in the party’s issue positioning is gradual and conversion and turnover among elected officials both matter” (Karol 1737).

Karol's article gives insight into the ways in which political parties' opinions evolve, bringing into view the difference between personal background and constituency factors with legislators. Karol explains this by discussing "the parties polarized as Democrats become more supportive of LGBT rights while Republicans changed little. In each case this trend is evident among continuing MCs, who often took new stands, as Democratic Representatives' stand became more aligned with party and less relates to personal background or constituency factors" (Karol 1745). Karol points out how "even if a majority of Republican voters now endorse gay rights, politicians give weight to 'policy demanding' activists who aid campaigns and may have extreme views on issues they care intensely about" (Karol 1739). It is not always about the overall opinion of the group, but rather the loudest of the group who are the most active. In the 2024 election and administration, this is the religious conservatives. They may not represent the majority of Americans' beliefs, but their voices and anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric are the loudest.

9.2 Democrat's gradual acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community

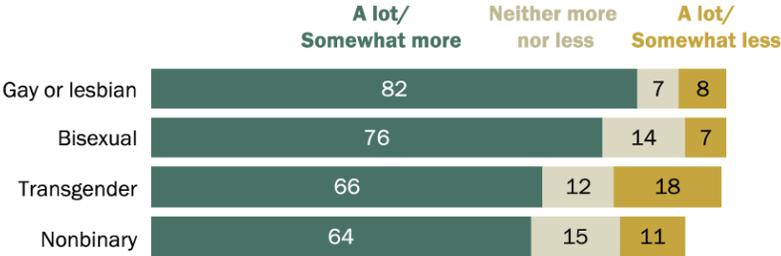
To continue on with Karol's theory surrounding the ways in which politics evolve, we can look into the Democratic Party and its gradual shift in acceptance and rights for the LGBTQ+ community. Karol explains the Democrats' slow acceptance over time as "the new group's presence in the party encourages more politicians to appeal to it. Increased support from the party's officeholders then leads more members of the group to support the party, which in turn impels more party politicians to represent the group. This dynamic may play out over decades" (Karol 1738). This is seen with the slow progress of LGBTQ+ rights in the military, anti-discrimination, and the right to same-sex marriage. This shift did not happen overnight but through decades of pro-LGBTQ+ activism. Karol points out how "fifteen years ago, Democratic candidates could still win LGBT support without supporting same-sex marriage or transgender rights. No longer. Ideological and partisan consistency are *not* policy consistency" (Karol 1747). Politicians change their stance on issues in accordance with the loudest or most influential group, not necessarily what they believe in themselves. This could explain the Christian rhetoric that is being pushed into the government by the Republican Party and the Trump administration. This further deepens the divide between political parties, where Democrats identify as pro-LGBTQ+ while Republicans are seen as either less focused on this movement or anti-LGBTQ+.

9.3 Data showing growth in acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community

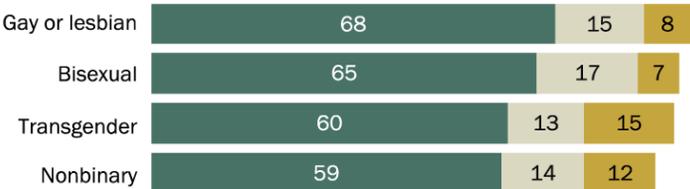
This concept can be explained with data from the Pew Research Center that shows a rise in LGBTQ+ acceptance while Trump’s administration simultaneously rescinds legal protections. The average American is not against LGBTQ+ people; rather, Trump uses anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric to mobilize his political party, and Christian conservatives, through the spreading of misinformation. When looking into data surrounding LGBTQ acceptance, we can see there is a rise in acceptance. The Pew Research Center has data from surveys that demonstrate this growth below.

Majorities of LGBTQ adults see more acceptance for gay, lesbian, trans and nonbinary people now versus a decade ago

% of LGBTQ adults saying that, compared with 10 years ago, there’s ___ social acceptance in this country for people who are ...



% of LGBTQ adults saying that, 10 years from now, there will be ___ social acceptance in this country for people who are ...



Note: Shares of respondents who didn’t offer an answer or said they are not sure are not shown.

Source: Survey of LGBTQ U.S. adults conducted Jan. 8-19, 2025. “The Experiences of LGBTQ Americans Today”

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Fig. 1. On LGBTQ acceptance Pew Research Center.

9.4 The Trump administration’s anti-transgender rhetoric and its effectiveness on the American people’s perception

However, the data shows a difference in the acceptance of gay and lesbian versus transgender and nonbinary. Pew Research Center published data that demonstrated how “Americans have grown more supportive of restrictions for trans people in recent years.” The

research “finds that majorities of U.S. adults favor or strongly favor laws and policies that require trans athletes to compete on teams that match their sex assigned at birth (66%). Ban health care professionals from providing care related to gender transitions for minors (56%)” (Pew “Americans Have Grown More Supportive of Restrictions”). Although there is a rise in acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, transgender individuals are under attack.

The Trump administration is specifically targeting transgender individuals as a method of scapegoating and othering. Oskooi describes this method saying, “discrimination is also conceptualized as a form of ‘othering’ a process in which marginalized populations are cast as undeserving, threatening, or inferior, especially during political or public health crises” (Oskooii 1). As a result “this othering fuels scapegoating, excluding targeted groups from sociopolitical and economic life” (Oskooiii 1). This “morality-based discourse and related legislation directly encourage anti-trans public sentiment by deceptively suggesting that trans people pose a threat... As these policies are disguised within arguments of ‘morality,’ the stigma and discrimination therein become increasingly insidious” (DuBois et al 4). The Trump administration and the Republican party are specifically targeting the transgender community as a political tactic. They use anti-transgender legislation framing it as a morality issue, and creating false images that children need to be protected from transgender athletes and students. For example, the numerous executive orders of the Trump administration, “Protecting Children From Chemical and Surgical Mutilation” or “Keeping Men Out of Women’s Sports.”

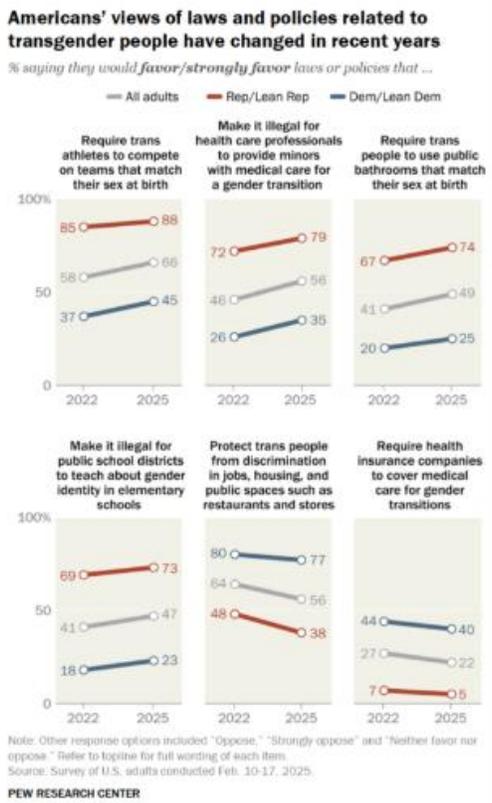


Fig. 2. On attitudes to trans people Pew Research Center.

The Pew data above demonstrates the effectiveness of Trump’s anti-transgender legislation that is being framed as moral protections of children and young athletes. American’s that subscribe to Trumps rhetoric have fallen victim to the false information being circulated about transgender athletes and students. Parents are now in fear that their children will be indoctrinated in school if surrounded by transgender peers or having conversations about these identities. They are being fed the idea that children are receiving mutilation surgeries. There is no surprise the data above would show rising numbers in anti-transgender legal protection and restrictions when your own government frames this community as dangerous and inferior.

This anti-transgender rhetoric is also being used in conservative teachings by extreme Christians. An example of this extreme Christian movement can be seen in the “#DONTMESSWITHOURKIDS” that states “our nation is in a crisis- families are being ripped apart at the seams by an agenda determined to sexualize out kids. ENOUGH IS ENOUGH. Mama bears across the nation are rising up to join the #dontmesswithourkids movement and pray, fast, and stand for their families” (“#DONTMESSWITHOURKIDS”). The website states

that “the National Education Association believes your children belong to them, to teach and indoctrinate in the ways of LGBT, social justice, and beyond” (“#DONTMESSWITHOURKIDS”). The Founder of the movement, Jenny Donnelly, states that “one in five Generation-Z self-identify as LGBTQ+, and there are still states where abortion remains legal” stating that “this is why we created Prayer Hubs, small groups (2-10) who gather to pray once a month to bring change to every sphere of culture!” (“#DONTMESSWITHOURKIDS”). Not only is this movement spreading false information that children are being indoctrinated when learning about LGBTQ+ identities, it is also used as a movement for mothers. The website describes the movement as inviting mothers “to bravely STAND for Truth to protect God’s design for family and gender” (“#DONTMESSWITHOURKIDS”).

This is just one example of anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric within conservative Christianity, that specifically targets transgender youth inciting the idea that LGBTQ+ education and awareness is indoctrination. Conservative Christians simply do not have enough knowledge or understanding of the transgender identity nor do the sources they get their information from. They hold prejudice views within their own Christian communities while being fed false narratives by the news and their own government. Donald Trump is using conservatives’ fear and ignorance to gain support to back up his hatred. Trump and conservatives are aware of the lack of knowledge Christians generally have on the LGBTQ+ community, specifically gender diverse identities. The conservative party are using Christianity to morally frame their transphobia.

Along with this, diverse gender identities change our understanding of the world around us and how individuals should fit into their prescribed gender roles. In the article “Gender Ideology, the Far Right, and LGBTQ Politics” Murib explains the threat LGBTQ+ people pose to conservative Christians’ understanding of family. Murib describes when the debate of gender ideology emerged explaining how “gender ideology thus entered the story as an opportunity for The Vatican to return control over populations to centralized institutions of power, namely, religious entities such as the Catholic Church but also aligned state governments” (Murib 467). Gender ideology became a topic of debate in religion because it challenges the idea of nuclear families. Murib points out how “‘gender ideology,’ was the assertion that the differences between men and women are salient, stable, and complementary because they emanate from natural sexual dimorphism responsible for reproduction. This insistence on biological

complementarity in service of sexual reproduction implicitly targeted gay men, lesbians, and bisexuals, and all those whose sexuality, family formations, and gender expression fell outside the normative and disciplining confines of the gender binary and nuclear family headed by two married heterosexual parents” (Murib 467).

People like Donald Trump and the conservative party are mainly made up of white heteronormative men who hold traditional and outdated ideas of marriage. As a result “ the condemnation of nonnormative sexuality by far-right political actors intersects with white supremacy to create conditions of severe precarity for migrants, lesbians and gay men, and unmarried women, who are similarly constructed as perverse and abnormal” (Murib 467). When conservative Christians lack general knowledge on the LGBTQ+ community while purposefully being presented with false information framing gender ideology as abnormal. Trump and the conservative party are taking advantage of Christians and their beliefs surrounding a nuclear family.

When looking at the data from the data from the Pew survey, overall, LGBTQ people see a rise in acceptance. When looking at an article published in February of 2025, “*fewer* Americans now express support for laws and policies that: protect trans people from discrimination (down 8 points since 2022). Require health insurance companies to cover medical care for gender transitions (down 5 points)” (Pew “Americans Have Grown More Supportive of Restrictions”). There has been a shift in opinions of transgender people and their rights within the U.S. that has created a divide. Pew discusses this divide saying “as was the case in 2022, there are wide partisan gaps in views of trans issues. Republicans are much more likely than Democrats to express support for policies that limit protections for trans people (by margins of 43 to 50 points). In turn, Democrats are much more likely than Republicans to support policies that safeguard trans people (by margins of more than 30 points)” (Pew “Americans Have Grown More Supportive of Restrictions”). This is also an interesting trend to investigate. Why are the political parties so divided on transgender policies?

Is the drop in transgender legal protection a result of the Trump administration and the Republican Party's fixation on transgender rights? Has the demonizing and false information about transgender people influenced the American people negatively? This drop in support for transgender people can be explained through the divide between the two political parties in the U.S.

The source Vox has a video that touches on the surface of the Trump administration and “How Trump makes extreme things look normal.” The narrator explains how “the Overton window has moved. The result is news coverage with dramatically low expectations, where success for Republicans doesn't mean governing well, it just means not being Trump. Trump delivers a normal sound speech and suddenly he's presidential” (Vox 5:24-5:41). He continues pointing out how “the bar is so low there is no real room to have a serious policy debate about anything” (Vox 5:55). When looking at survey polls from the Pew Research Center there is an overall growth in American's support for the LGBTQ+ community. However, the Trump administration and his republican peers have used white conservatives to stabilize their party and gain control. Most Americans do support the LGBTQ+ community, but conservative politicians are using the political beliefs of a specific group to stabilize themselves politically. This demonstrates concepts such as the Overton Window and the idea that politicians are working in terms of how to get elected rather than what they truly believe.

This concept of party polarization and the impact it has on voters' choices is further discussed in “Elite cues and public polarization on transgender rights” by Philip Edward Jones & Paul R. Brewer. Jones and Brewer discuss how data “show[s] that citizens are more likely to follow their party's cues on issues when elites are more polarized. Likewise, Levendusky (2010) argues that greater polarization clarifies issues for voters and increases their propensity to align their views consistently. When elites send clear and polarized cues, the public appears to follow” (Jones and Brewer 72). This is a strategy we have seen being used by the Trump administration. The U.S. is more divided on transgender rights than before. Trump's rallies were loud and clear with their messages surrounding transgender people. Jones and Brewer explain this idea by discussing how “the intensity of the communication flow influences which citizens are likely to receive and accept these messages (Zaller 1996). In less-intense message environments, only the most aware are likely to receive elite cues” (Jones and Brewer 73). U.S. citizens have to be actively aware and informed, seeking out information about politicians and their policies in order to make proper decisions. Jones and Brewer point out that “one of the most consistent findings from 70 years of survey research is that the average citizen's knowledge of, and attention to, politics is low (Converse 1964, 2000). Given the costs of becoming more informed, citizens frequently rely on political elites to guide their policy attitudes (Downs 1957)” (Jones and Brewer 72). As a result, politicians' beliefs and the way they debate and discuss these beliefs are

very important. When politics is confusing or polarized, the way legislators approach issues like transgender rights massively impacts the turnout of these elections and, therefore, transgender people's lives.

When Donald Trump goes on dangerous smear campaigns against transgender rights, this attracts the Christian Conservatives and uneducated voters who do not have strong opinions on these issues. When asked what Trump will do to improve schools in the Bronx he proceeded on an anti-transgender rant saying “no transgender, no operations, you know they take your kid, there are some places, you boy leaves to school and comes back a girl, without parental consent” (“Trump Talks to Voters” 0:57-1:09). This is not legal in any state across the U.S. Trump offers no evidence to back his claim. Rather than answering the question, Trump rambles on about false and dangerous accusations surrounding schools.

Another example of these ignorant speeches is when Trump went on an ignorant and false rant at the “America First Agenda Summit” in 2022, saying:

Federal, state, and local governments should aggressively enforce existing statutes to stop the perverted sexualization of minor children. You have the statutes. The society that refuses to protect its children is a society that soon will not be able to protect anybody. This is a hallmark of cultural and social decay against which we should fight back very hard and very soon... the sickos who are pushing sexual content in kindergartens or providing puberty blockers to young children who have no idea what a puberty blocker is, neither do I by the way... let's just say there not good, are not just engaged in acts of depravity in many cases they are breaking the law and they should be held fully accountable. (“President Donald Trump at America First” 39:15-40:32)

Pew research shows that “voters were sharply divided in 2024 by whether they have a college degree. Voters with a four-year degree or more education, who constitute about 40% of all voters, favored Harris by a double-digit margin (16 percentage points), while those without a college degree favored Trump nearly as much (14 points)” (Hartig et al.). When voters are less inclined to do their own research and are more likely to be influenced by the marketing of the campaign, false information is dangerous and impacts the polls. This Pew statistic shows a division in education within U.S. voters and the strategy the Trump administration took. They targeted citizens who are less educated and, therefore, more likely to believe these ignorant speeches above about gender reassignment procedures within schools.

Another element of the study is the characteristics of the groups, and their beliefs. Brewer and Jones point out how “respondents who hold higher levels of authoritarianism, more disgust sensitivity, less egalitarian attitudes, more conservative ideologies, and greater religiosity view transgender people less warmly and are less likely to support their rights” (Jones and Brewer 72). This is a trend seen within the political divide in the U.S., especially around LGBTQ+ debates on their rights. Conservatives stay unsupportive of LGBTQ+ rights while liberals and democrats' support grow. Karol also points out this trend out saying “the religious right’s effect on LGBTQ+ issues has been to forestall change among GOP politicians. Republican elites were not supportive of gay rights before their alignment with the religious right, yet said little about a topic then widely seen as beyond pale. Yet despite dramatic shifts in public opinion since then, even among Republicans, most GOP MCs remain unsupportive” (Karol 1739).

This trend relates back to the Overton window and the political repeal of LGBTQ+ rights during the first months of Trump’s second term. Karol asks the important question of whether “the turnover explains the change we see, with newer cohorts of Democratic MCs taking more pro-LGBT rights stands than their elders? Or do changes of position by legislators underlie the parties’ increasing divide on the issue?” (Karol 1742). The political window is not shifting but rather becoming even deeper and divided between Republicans and Democrats, and their support of the LGBTQ+ community.

9.5 The Role of Religious Affiliation on Party Division

This subsection discusses the role of religious affiliation in the political party division in the U.S. This helps understand the stabilization of the Republican party through religious rhetoric and deeper party division that has led to the decline of LGBTQ+ rights in the U.S. Trump feeds his supporters the idea that the country is under attack from more diverse and inclusive movements, using vulnerable groups in the U.S. as scapegoats for issues the country faces. Again, he stabilizes the conservative group with the belief that America can be fixed with religion and traditional ideas. Hickel and Murphy argue, “the coupling of civil religious themes with ideological/partisan goals holds the potential to exacerbate pre-existing divisions. Doing so not only validates the beliefs of those who share one’s predistortions but also denigrates one’s opponents as an ‘un-American’ existential threat to the nation’s sacred foundations (Hickel and Murphy 254). This political tactic by Trump and his peers can be connected to the justification of rescinding LGBTQ+ rights through executive orders and documents like Project 2025. Things

that seemed unimaginable in 2024 are now a reality because of Trump's administration, his peers, and his followers. He has made himself into a savior of traditional America and capitalized on the idea that LGBTQ+ inclusion is destroying America. This tactic feeds into the deep divide in U.S. politics during Trump's presidency.

Gert and Susanne Pickel demonstrate this gap and the impact it has on U.S. politics in their article "A God Gap Driving a Revolution from Conservative to Far Right in the United States, With Significance in Europe?" Pickel describes the God gap as "the significant difference in voting patterns and party support between voters with deeply or zealously religious beliefs on one side and more mainline religious practitioners and nonreligious voters on the other side. This God gap appears to be a central driver of the widening contrast between liberal Americans and Americans who vehemently oppose abortions, homosexuality, and transgender, sexual and gender diversity" (Pickel 3). This divide only hurts American people driving debates on who deserves basic human dignity and rights. The article asks the important question "to what extent do white evangelical Christians and their understanding of religion support a polarization in the United States?" (Pickel 4). The God gap is further explained in detail saying its "observed that religious people (or churchgoers) tended to vote more strongly for Republicans than for Democrats. This is because certain policy positions overlapped with those of Republicans... Churchgoers are also significantly more opposed to homosexuality than nonchurchgoers" (Pickel 6).

This divide is prevalent in the political parties today, with the Republicans pushing for traditional Christian families, arguing against any policy or group that goes against this idea. The American Christian Caucus describes their family values on their website saying "at the American Christian Caucus, we hold steadfast to conservative Christian values that recognize the sanctity of the family unit as designed by God: a sacred union between a father, mother, and child. In today's cultural landscape, we face challenges from forces and organizations promoting the redefinition of family under banners of inclusiveness and social justice movements like wokenism and gender identity" ("Family Values").

Pickel describes this concept of divide, pointing out how conservative Christians "demand that the Republicans adopt corresponding policies (Wuthnow 1989). Their most important theme is the preservation of the traditional family and, in connection with this, rigid rejection of virtually every form of abortion, homosexuality, and other forms of gender and

sexual diversity” (Pickel 7). The more the Republican Party aligns with the rejection of LGBTQ+ rights, the deeper the divide between the two political parties will become. Pickel uses data to show the impact religion has on this divide in the chart below.

Table 1 Ethnoreligious voting in presidential elections (in percentages). (Authors’ own composition based on Pew Research Center data)

	2004		2008		2012		2016		2020	
	Kerry	Bush	Obama	McCain	Obama	Romney	Clinton	Trump	Biden	Trump
General	48	51	53	46	50	48	51	42	52	42
White Protestant, evangelical	21	79	26	73	20	79	16	81	15	84
White Protestant, nonevangelical	44	55	44	55	44	54	39	58	43	57
Black Protestant	86	13	94	4	95	5	89	9	91	9
White Catholic	43	56	47	52	40	59	37	60	42	57
Hispanic Catholic	65	33	72	26	75	21	67	26	65	33
Jewish	74	25	78	21	69	30	71	24	68*	30*
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon)	19	80	–	–	21	78	25	61	–	–
Other religions	74	23	73	22	74	23	62	29	64	32
Unaffiliated	67	31	75	23	70	26	68	26	71	26

Analysis: “How the Faithful Voted: 2012”; Mormons 2008 not surveyed; “How the Faithful Voted: A Preliminary 2016 Analysis”; Most White Americans Who Regularly Attend Worship Services Voted for Trump in 2020; “Jewish Virtual Library 2022: U.S. Presidential Elections: Jewish Voting Record,” Pew 2020a, b, 2016; Catholic Newsagency 2022

Fig. 3. Ethnoreligious voting in presidential elections (Pickel 12).

As the gap widens, “it was hardly a coincidence that the polarization between Democrats, who tended to be progressive on women’s rights and equality issues, and Republicans, who were traditional to this point of being backward on lifestyle issues, was deliberately deepened. This positioning of the Republicans was now entirely in line with white evangelical Christians” (Pickel 14). The political divide has a strong religious influence that directly impacts LGBTQ+ people. The data shows that Christians notoriously have not supported the community’s rights, and this is being demonstrated within Trump’s political actions so far. Conservative Christians get their ideas about LGBTQ+ people from various sources such as interpreting the Bible literally, statements from advocacy groups and their websites like the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. This website states that they “deny that God has designed marriage to be a homosexual relationship” (*Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood*). This website

has articles published titled “The Body God Gives: A Biblical Response to Transgender Theory.” Politicians and news outlets play a massive role in how Americans access their current events. The 700 Club is another example of where Christians find their news and ideas surrounding the LGBTQ+ community. The 700 Club is included in the “Christian Broadcasting Network hosted by Pat Robertson, Terry Meeuwsen, and Gordon Roberston” with their evidencing being made up of “62% Republican” (“The 700 Club”).

The Christian Broadcasting Network’s “LGBTQ-related content uses right-winged framing and often discusses subjects like anti-LGBTQ groups litigation and the dangerous practice of conversion therapy. It frequently quotes extreme anti-LGBTQ groups and highlights ‘ex-gay’ or ‘ex-trans’ people who claim that conversion therapy helped them change their sexual orientation or gender identity” (Gogarty).

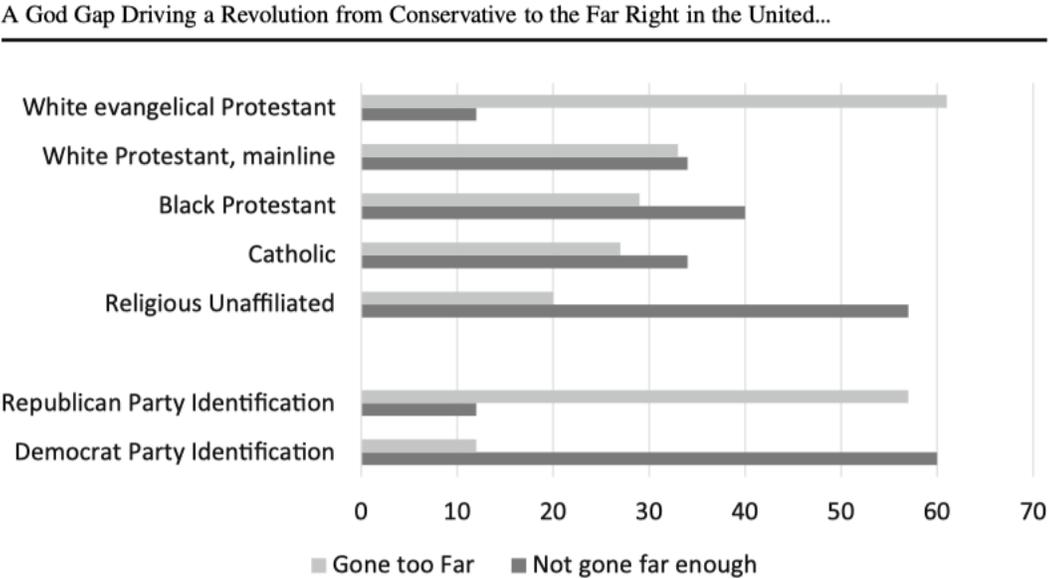


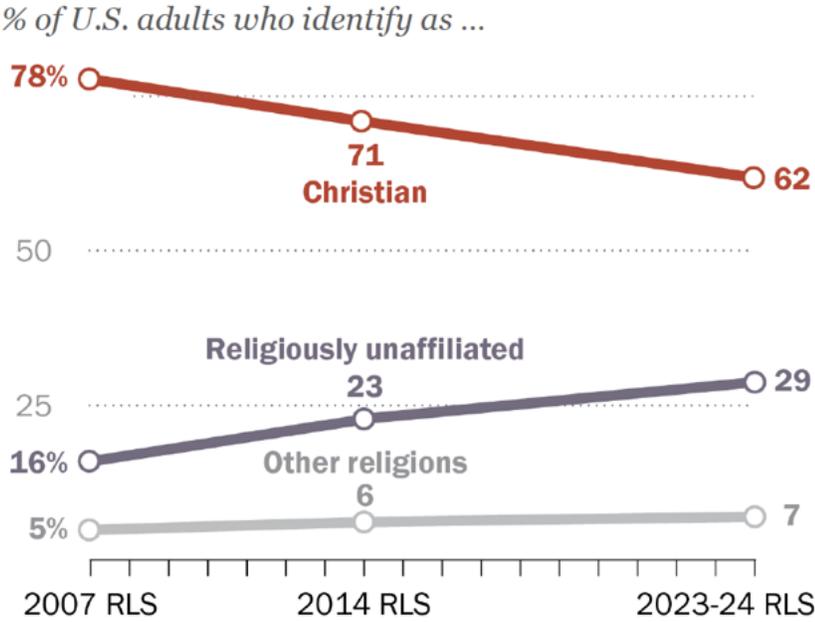
Fig. 2 View on transgender issues and party identification, n= 4573. (Brown 2017; Smith 2017; Survey August and September 2017; Pew Research Institute; Research Center American Trend Panel)

Fig. 4. A God Gap Driving a Revolution (Pickel 17).

When looking into the religious beliefs in the United States, there has been a drop in religious affiliation. Pew Research has survey polls on the American people's religious affiliations stating, “in the 2023-24 Religious Landscape Study (RLS), 62% of respondents identify as Christian, which is lower than the Christian shares measured in the 2007 (78%) and the 2014 (71%) studies” (Smith et al.). Rather than a rise in Christian beliefs, there is a

solidification of Christian conservatism driving the Republican Party’s decisions and stances. The Trump administration is capitalizing on conservative Christians, which although a small group, is one that has strong beliefs.

Long-term decline of Christians, rise of religiously unaffiliated Americans



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown. "RLS" stands for Religious Landscape Study. Source: Religious Landscape Study of U.S. adults conducted July 17, 2023-March 4, 2024.

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Fig. 5. Long-term decline of Christians (Pew "Religious Values and the 2024 Election.").

It is important to note the number of conservative Christians who voted for Trump and how this group was used to stabilize Trump’s election. Donald Trump’s Christian conservative support has grown strong during his second term. Pew research data from voting patterns in the 2024 election shows that “Trump’s margin among all Protestant voters increased to 26 percentage points in the most recent election (from 19 points in 2020), with 62% of Protestants favoring him. Trump’s gains among Protestants included small but significant gains from defectors: 5% of Protestants who voted for Biden in 2020 switched to Trump in 2024” (Hartig et al.). As the parties become more polarized in their beliefs culturally and politically, there becomes a larger gap between the parties.

Donald Trump, his supporters, and various other politicians in the U.S. strategically use conservative Christian's strong beliefs to support their anti-LGBTQ+ legislation and agendas. This mobilization of conservatism is dangerous to LGBTQ+ rights. Pew Research Center has data showing “voters who support Joe Biden and Donald Trump have starkly different views of the role of religion should play in the U.S. government and politics” (Pew “Religious values and the 2024 election”).

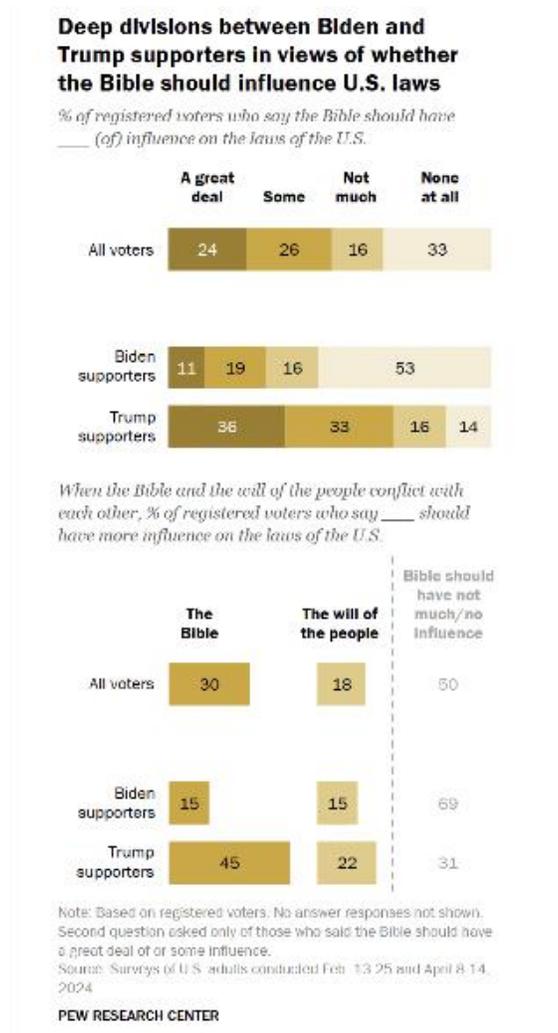


Fig. 6. Deep Divisions (Smith et al.).

R. Stephen Warner discusses paradigm shifts within religion in their article “Work in Progress Toward a New Paradigm for the Sociological Study of Religion in the United States.” Warner looks at the difference between the new and old paradigm shifts of Christianity, comparing the European shift to the American shift. The article discusses how religion aligns with Americans' identities and is no longer a private sector within the United States. Religion is

no longer about beliefs but rather people's identities and social circles. Warner explains this concept, saying that, "religion itself is recognized in American society, if not always by social scientists, as a fundamental category of identity and association, and it is thereby capable of grounding both solidarity and identities" (Warner 1059).

The treatment and overall beliefs surrounding the LGBTQ+ community in today's United States government and society can be explained through Warner's article. Conservative Christians within the U.S. see their religion as a part of their identity, political beliefs, and overall beliefs. Warner discusses the divide between the right and the left on the political spectrum. Warner points out how "denominations are fading relative to nationwide special purpose groups on each side of the divide between religious 'left' and 'right'. On the left are such organizations as People for the American Way, Witness for Peace, and Clergy and Laity Concerned; on the right are the Moral Majority, Focus on the Family, and Religious Roundtable" (Warner 1066). There is no longer a separation of state and church when conservatives use religion as a tool to gain support politically. When conservative Christians in the United States believe in the erasure of the queer community, they vote for politicians who will remove various legislation surrounding the queer community. They will vote for politicians who hold the same beliefs and surround themselves with a community that identifies as conservative. This can be seen in the data previously discussed, from the 2024 election data, which shows the demographics of conservative Christian's predominantly voting for Trump.

Looking through the data of various studies and articles, a common theme of polarization arises among U.S. politics, especially within the Trump era. The polarization of the two political parties gives rise to identity politics and stern stances on political issues.

"Gender Ideology, the Far Right, and LGBTQ Politics" by Zein Murib explains why the Republican party uses attacks on the LGBTQ+ community as a political strategy. The strategy involves a moral position of traditional heteronormative families and identities. Trump supporters and the Republican party in general "position themselves as champions of tradition by vocally criticizing these developments as leftist, communist, totalitarian, pro-LGBTQ, or feminist, all which function as synonyms for threats to the normative social order" (Murib 467). Murib explains this political strategy pointing out how "gender ideology is just the newest way to refer to political mobilizations that scapegoat gender and sexual minorities to assert explicitly heteronormative and white supremacist nationalist projects" (Murib 468). For example,

“proponents of legislation banning transgender girls from competing in sports mobilize the language of fairness and care about the safety of nontransgender girls, leaving transgender girls on the sidelines” (Murib 468). The Republican party is using its leverage against gender minorities as a way of stabilizing and scapegoating. They point fingers at a vulnerable group blaming them for woke movements framing them as dangerous and indoctrinating, while indoctrinating youth about the traditional image of what a conservative Christian family should look like.

When there is an immense gap between the two parties, this leads to strict stances on issues, and no middle ground can be found. Politicians work to stabilize their supporters rather than gain new ones. This leads to the identity politics that can be seen usually with the religious right and the non-religious left. This divide and specific influence of conservative evangelical Christians is also discussed in the article “A Conservative (R)Evolution? Constitutional-Political Crises, Trumpism, and Long-standing Trends of Conservative Transformations in the United States and Beyond” by Julia Simon and Jared Sonnicksen. This article investigates the polarization of recent American politics, looking through history “thus zoom[ing] out from Trump in order to acknowledge the multiple and often longer-term influences, conflicts, institutions, and conditions conducive to current developments as well as the range of actors that have been relevant in shaping them” (Simon and Sonnicksen 216).

Simon and Sonnicksen point out “four key factors that have resurfaced repeatedly at different times throughout U.S. history and that have threatened its democracy: political polarization, severe conflict over who belongs in the political community, high and rising economic inequality, and executive aggrandizement” (Simon and Sonnicksen 217). The article goes on to discuss the differences in the political party's identities pointing out how “the GOP has shown comparatively lower levels of social heterogeneity than the Democratic Party and has, most importantly, become ‘bound together by a common conservative identity’” (Simon and Sonnicksen 219). Many conservatives come together in their party, connecting through their religious beliefs and the idea that these beliefs should be incorporated within the government.

9.6 Political Tactics of the Republican Party

This subsection will discuss the various political tactics used by the Trump administration and the Republican Party to gain reelection in 2024. This can be seen in the stabilization of uneducated and religious conservatives who helped Trump secure his presidency. This section is

important because it demonstrates how politicians shift their beliefs and morals to fit the beliefs of their constituents. In turn, this has led to the decline in LGBTQ+ legal protection and support in the U.S.

9.7 Enforcing the idea of a traditional American family

When Donald Trump and his peers describe the concept of a traditional America, they are referring to a country that is made for white, straight men. A country that does not include diversity or inclusion and strips vulnerable groups of their legal protections. Flavio R. Hickel Jr. and Andrew R. Murphy discuss this concept of traditional America in their article “Making America Exceptional Again: Donald Trump’s Traditionalist Jeremiad, Civil Religion, and the Politics of Resentment.” This source discusses the message behind the “Make America Great Again” motto that “reflects a romanticized Golden Age predating transformative social change with respect to sexuality, gender roles, and civil rights” (Hickel and Murphy 248). Trump has strategically created an image of America that needs to be fixed through religion and traditional ideas. Hickel and Murphy explain this concept, “at the heart of Trump’s traditionalist civil religious jeremiad lays an assertion that the pursuit of ‘political correctness’ by Washington D.C. elites has generated policies that not only threaten the life, liberty, and material well-being of the populace, but have also produced an existential crisis for the nation” (Hickel and Murphy 252).

The Trump administration and GOP’s recent target of gender ideology “emphasize the nuclear family as the primary social unit of the polity, rhetoric stressing safety for (certain) children as future citizens, and the repudiation of gender fluidity in favor of a strict sex binary grounded in biological difference with the aim of sexual reproduction. Far-right attacks on gender ideology work because these discursive tactics lay an ideological foundation for linking the regulation and control of families and reproduction with nation and racial purity” (Murib 466).

Donald Trump's second presidential election is an example of how politics have evolved in the U.S., with certain ideologies defining parties and politicians. His campaign is one big marketing scheme utilizing the ideologies of conservatives to gain support. Simon and Sonnicksen explain how “Trump successfully ‘turned his party into a formidable vehicle for advancing his personal purposes and augmenting his power, while raising troubling questions about the stability of American democracy’ (Galvin 2020, p. 135)” (Simon and Sonnicksen 221).

Ideas of the ‘traditional American family’ and Making America Great Again imply there is something wrong with the current progress of the U.S. This idea of purity and bringing the bible back into schools and the government creates the idea that religion will fix America. Trump and his party have created the idea that anything or anyone straying from the normalization of conservative Christian ideology is wrong and must be ostracized.

The news source *Them* points out that “the choice of Vance was likely intended to help Trump shore up support among white, lower-income voters in the Midwest, where President Joe Biden is considered vulnerable in the 2024 race. According to poll averages from FiveThirtyEight, Trump leads Biden by more than nine points in Vance’s home state of Ohio” (Lang). Taking this statement and comparing it to Brookings's poll data from the 2024 election, there is a correlation between evangelical voters and the working class. Brookings reports that “Trump won 86% of white evangelical working-class voters, up from 84% in 2020, and increased his spread with those voters by 5 points (from plus-68 points versus Biden to plus 73 points versus Harris)” (Dilulio). Although there has been a drop in overall religious affiliation in the U.S., there has been a rise in Trump’s support from conservative Christians, which has stabilized the Republican Party while dividing the political parties deeper. As a result, we can infer that this stabilization and identity politics of the Republican party as Christian has had an impact on the anti-LGBTQ+ legislation in the U.S. Conservative Christians hold beliefs that lean towards traditional and less inclusive views.

9.8 Voter mobilization

Pickel discusses the concept of voter mobilization, where the political party works to strengthen the party and its beliefs rather than working to expand. This is seen within the conservative party and their unity over Christian values. Pickel explains, “if one looks closely at the campaigns, one sees that they focus more strongly on voter mobilization than on voter recruitment. Against the background of a specifically religious socialization, combined with a class-specific political socialization, selective mechanisms of perception of the respective political situation occur” (Pickel 19). The anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric the Trump administration circulates, combined with the ideas of the traditional American family and bringing Christianity into schools, threatens queer lives. This can be seen through the various anti-LGBTQ+ legislation that has been introduced to schools and the United States in general. For example, Iowa has become “the first state to remove gender identity from its civil rights code under a law”

signed into effect on July 1, 2025 “meaning transgender and nonbinary residents are no longer protected from discrimination in their job, housing and other aspects of life” (Fingerhut).

“The law also explicitly defines female and male based on reproductive organs at birth and removes the ability for people to change the sex designation on their birth certificate” (Fingerhut). The anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric is legally taking away queer rights of protection while also invalidating gender diverse individuals rights to authentic expression.

These conservative beliefs are being used to unify the Republican party while polarizing the party's divide. Donald Trump has used anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs “to mobilize their own potential voters and, less importantly, to win over voters from the other party. It makes sense for them to take the clearest possible positions and to campaign for their approval, or, in other words, to appeal to the more radical segments of their potential supporters” (Pickel 21).

Within the 2024 election there has been “heightened relevance and direct involvement of GOP-adjacent groups, actors, and institutions that promote especially ‘purist’ candidates and/or ‘ultra-free-market fundamentalists[t]’ agendas through performing a range of different tasks (including voter mobilization, the vetting of possible candidates, and the preparation of legislative acts) and by commanding vast financial resources and leveraging even personal connections” (Simon and Sonnicksen 221). Trump's administration does not represent the average American; his administration demonstrates the tactics of politics that work towards reelection and power rather than legislation for and by the American people. Trump has slowly set up the U.S. government to implement conservative Christian views accomplished through “repeated norm-breaking nomination and confirmation processes under Trump, though also spearheaded by Republican leaders, especially in the Senate, that cemented a reliable conservative 6-3 Supreme Court majority, as well as through several subsequent ‘party-line’ 6-3 rulings. With extensive ramifications, they reinterpreted and chipped away at crucial constitutional provisions and protections” (Simon and Sonnicksen 221). The three new justices Trump has appointed to the Supreme Court are another example of the political tactics Trump has used to be reelected.

9.9 Trump planting seeds within the first presidential term

During Donald Trump's first term as president, he made political moves that set up the Supreme Court and the House of Representatives to align with his political beliefs. Trump appointed three new justices to the Supreme Court: Neil M. Gorsuch, Brett M. Kavanaugh, and

Amy Coney Barrett. All three of these justices, who will serve for the rest of their lives, have political beliefs that put LGBTQ+ rights at risk. Neil M. Gorsuch's stance on the LGBTQ+ community can be inferred through his dissertation, written under the supervision of John Finnis. “Finnis, a prominent law professor at Oxford and Notre Dame, is a critic of the Court’s decisions about choice in intimate matters, specifically its support for abortion rights and same-sex marriage” (Brettschneider). This matters when a justice of the Supreme Court for life holds these values when making life-altering decisions about the LGBTQ+ community and their rights.

Another justice appointed by Trump is Brett M. Kavanaugh. The Human Rights Campaign has released a report on Kavanaugh “Brett M. Kavanaugh: Wrong for the LGBTQ People. Wrong for the Supreme Court.” The report states that:

Kavanaugh's broad body of work speaks volumes about the type of justice he is likely to be, if confirmed. In particular, Judge Kavanaugh's record on reproductive rights, the right to privacy, and religious liberty indicates a potent combination of ideological views that could significantly and unnecessarily reshape constitutional doctrine and nondiscrimination protections as they apply to LGBTQ persons. (The Human Rights Campaign 2 “Brett M. Kavanaugh”)

The last justice appointed by Donald Trump was Amy Coney Barrett, who holds strong views on the rights of transgender individuals. The Human Rights Campaign quotes her opinion on Title IX protections and misgendering transgender people. The report quotes Barrett saying, “people will feel passionately on either side about whether physiological males who identify as females should be permitted in bathrooms, especially where there are young girls present” (HRC Staff). Title IX is defined as “no person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (20 U.S. Code, sec.1681). The ruling was amended in 2020 by the Biden administration that expanded the definition of sex. The Biden administration

issue[d] these final regulations to provide greater clarity regarding: the definition of ‘sex-based harassment’; the scope of sex discrimination, including recipients’ obligations not to discriminate based on stereotypes, sex characteristics, pregnancy or related conditions, sexual orientation, and gender identity; and recipients’ obligations to provide an

educational environment free from discrimination on a basis of sex (“Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex” 33,476).

This was reversed through the various executive orders by the Trump administration in 2025, which will be discussed in further detail below. Essentially, these executive orders discriminate against transgender students by misgendering them within federally funded educational institutions.

These three justices are meant to serve the American people as a whole, bringing unbiased opinions to the court while making major decisions for the U.S. These justices hold biased and anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs within their opinions in the highest court in the country. This is why executive orders can be passed, stripping transgender people of their rights. Trump used unprecedented and norm-breaking political tactics to gain and stabilize supporters to push discriminatory agendas. He did not adapt to the Overton Window but rather shifted it himself and capitalized on a conservative Christian ideology. There is a gap within the U.S. political parties and their beliefs surrounding LGBTQ+ rights. When the majority ruling aligns with conservative Christian ideology, there will be a shift in legislation in the U.S. The Trump administration and its supporters are a threat to democracy, especially to the LGBTQ+ community and their rights.

9.10 Conservative Christians

When looking into Trump’s policies and beliefs, his supporters and republican peers tend to bring religion into their political debates. They speak of making America great again by turning to evangelicalism and traditional family structures. Donald Trump and his colleagues use religion in their politics while sometimes leading sinful and irreligious lifestyles. For example, “when *The Wall Street Journal* reported that Trump Organization lawyer Michael Cohen had arranged a \$130,000 hush money payment weeks before the 2016 presidential election to keep the adult entertainer, director, and entrepreneur from publicizing her claim she has an extramarital affair with Donald Trump” (Gorissen 98). There is also the incident on a radio interview when Trump was asked his favorite bible verse, with his response, “I think many. I mean, when we get into the Bible, I think, so many. And some people, look, an eye for an eye” (Shabad). Donald Trump claims to be a Christian, but when asked to name his favorite bible verse, he has no real answer.

Why do evangelical Christians support Donald Trump so loyally? Maybe it is not his actual devotion to leading a Christian lifestyle, but the common beliefs the two groups hold.

Trump speaks of a traditional family and creating changes that would reinstate white and heteronormative ways of life as the cultural norm. Trump uses white evangelical Christian's beliefs to gain support in his presidential election and policies. Thompson described this political tactic in their article "Does it Matter if the President Isn't Pious?" Thompson points out how "Republican elites often deploy covert cues to mobilize religious support (Albertson 2015). Covert cues do not directly reference God or their Christian faith (Calfano and Djupe 2009), instead relying on specific references to biblical passages that are detected by religious groups such as evangelical Protestants who are typically loyal to the Republican Party (Schwadel 2017)" (Thompson 766-767).

Thompson also discusses how evangelical Americans increasingly feel as though they are a minority within their country. As the culture progresses within the United States surrounding DEI and overall human rights, some of these values do not align with Christianity. For example, same-sex marriage, gender-affirming care, sex education, and the various gender identities that have been protected under the Biden administration. Thompson makes the important point that "as America becomes an increasingly plural nation along religious lines, elites such as Trump have come to view these changes as an opportunity to activate cultural threat and mobilize support among those who feel as though their beliefs are becoming increasingly marginalized as a result of consequence of these changes" (Thompson 769). Trump is using religion to push his agenda within U.S. policies, stating that he is bringing back traditional views and ways of life. He is targeting the evangelical population for their support within his presidency, while being unable to quote his favorite bible verse.

Thompson summarizes this tactic, saying, "white evangelicals perceive that Christian America is declining, making them feel as though they are a religious minority. Political elites then frame issues such as the decline of Christian America in a way that appeals to these threat perceptions" (Thompson 770). Donald Trump is not making America great again rather using fear tactics to stabilize his political party in order to win the 2024 election. Trump is using the support of Christian Americans and the weaponization of religion to support and defend his dangerous political opinions.

Trump uses religious language within his speeches and posts on Twitter to gain popularity among the Christian population. Ceri Hughes discusses this within their article "Thou Art in a Deal: The Evolution of Religious Language in the Public Communications of Donald

Trump.” (Hughes) The United States government is meant to have a separation of state and church, but within the Trump era, the lack of separation is being used as a political tactic. Hughes points out “that Trump uses both general ‘religious terms’ and explicit terms evoking God (‘God terms’) at a significantly higher rate than all of his predecessors. This is argued to be evidence of an example of strategic utilization of religious rhetoric within the political sphere” (Hughes 4826). Not only does this go against the concept of separation of church and state, but it takes advantage of Christian voters.

There is evidence that shows Christians do not necessarily see Trump as Christian but agree with him on his various policies. Hughes states how “Trump’s increasing level of use of Christian religious language helps afford an interpretation of him as a Christian individual: His use of this language likely helps (particularly white Evangelicals) supporters make peace with their support for him” (Hughes 4827). This religious language is also used to create a divide between white evangelicals and other religious or non-religious groups. In Trump's rallies, tweets, and debates, he discusses making America Christian, resulting in the othering of various groups. Hughes discusses this concept, saying, “this language is employed as an aid to the populist trope of ‘othering’: (Christian) religious language is commonly proximate with concepts of ‘Americanness,’ whereas words associated with Islam are proximate with concepts of radicalism and terrorism” (Hughes 4827).

9.11 The dehumanization of transgender people

This sort of shift was set up in 2016 in Trump’s first term, where he used fearmongering and propaganda to dehumanize children and adults who are transgender. Politicians' dangerous beliefs surrounding this group have worked to reverse transgender rights within schools and sports. Quinan explains this tactic, describing the “uptick in anti-trans bills has been achieved by demonizing gender nonconformity through advertising campaigns and devising political rhetoric. Juxtaposed against a picture of white female fragility, these campaigns have portrayed trans individuals as sexually predatory, mentally unstable, deceitful, and socially disruptive” (Quinan 6). Quinan discusses this concept of political tactics of stabilization in the Republican Party, saying:

After the Supreme Court affirmed the constitutional right to same-sex marriage in 2015, conservatives found themselves without a key issue around which they could mobilize supporters and donors. After searching for a fresh cause of uniting their base and

garnering national attention, the issue of trans identity, especially among children, gained significant traction. This legislative push started with a focus on what has since become a cause célèbre for conservative politicians: trans girls’ participation in youth sports... They then turned their attention to fervently introducing bills prohibiting access to gender affirming care, including puberty blockers (Nagourney and Peters, 2023). (Quinan 6)

10. Anti-LGBTQ+ Policy in the U.S. Government and Political Beliefs

This section will discuss the various anti-LGBTQ+ legislation being passed within the United States. This is seen through Project 20205 and Trump’s executive orders that have been enacted to minimize LGBTQ+ rights or completely discard them. This section demonstrates the unprecedented and blatant bias of the Trump administration and the Republican Party.

10.1 Data showing rise in hate crimes against the LGBTQ+ community

Although Pew research suggests there is a growth in LGBTQ acceptance among Americans, there are statistics that show a rise in hate crimes against the queer community in recent years. On the U.S. Department of Justice website, the FBI Releases 2023 Hate Crime Statistics with the section “Bias Motivation for Victims of Single-bias Incidents in 2023” reporting that "18.4% were based on sexual orientation” (“The U.S. Department of Justice”). This is a large percentage of hate crimes targeting people based on sexual orientation. Although this report aligns with Biden’s presidential term, the anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric has been on the rise since 2016 with Trump’s first election.

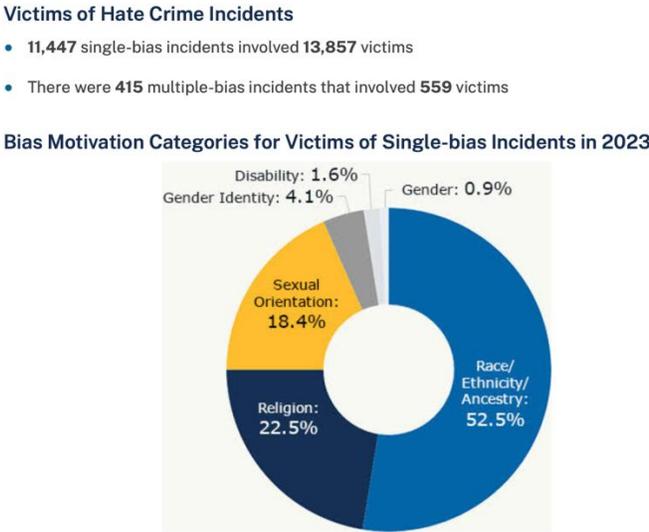


Fig. 7. Bias Motivation Categories (“FBI Releases 2023 Hate Crime Statistics”).

Along with the hate crime data above, an even more recent study done by GLAAD and Axios demonstrates a rise in “anti-LGBTQ+ incidents against select targets” (Lotz). The charts below show a rise in anti-LGBTQ incidents in local government, educators and librarians, and overall transgender people. This data aligns with the second term of Donald Trump and the executive order and reversal of anti-discriminatory legislation. Zachary L. DuBois discusses this correlation in their article “The Impact of Sociopolitical Events on Transgender People in the US.” DuBois pulls data from a 2021 study that shows how “Trump rallies have been recognized as contributing directly to escalations in hate speech and hate crimes targeting marginalized populations throughout the United States (Feinberg, Branton, and Martinez-Ebers 2019; Warren-Gordon and Rhineberger 2021)” (DuBois 5). The rise in anti-transgender rhetoric can be connected to Donald Trump’s campaign and election in 2024. The dangerous and false information being spread about transgender people, along with the religious undertones of traditional Christian families, can contribute to this drop.

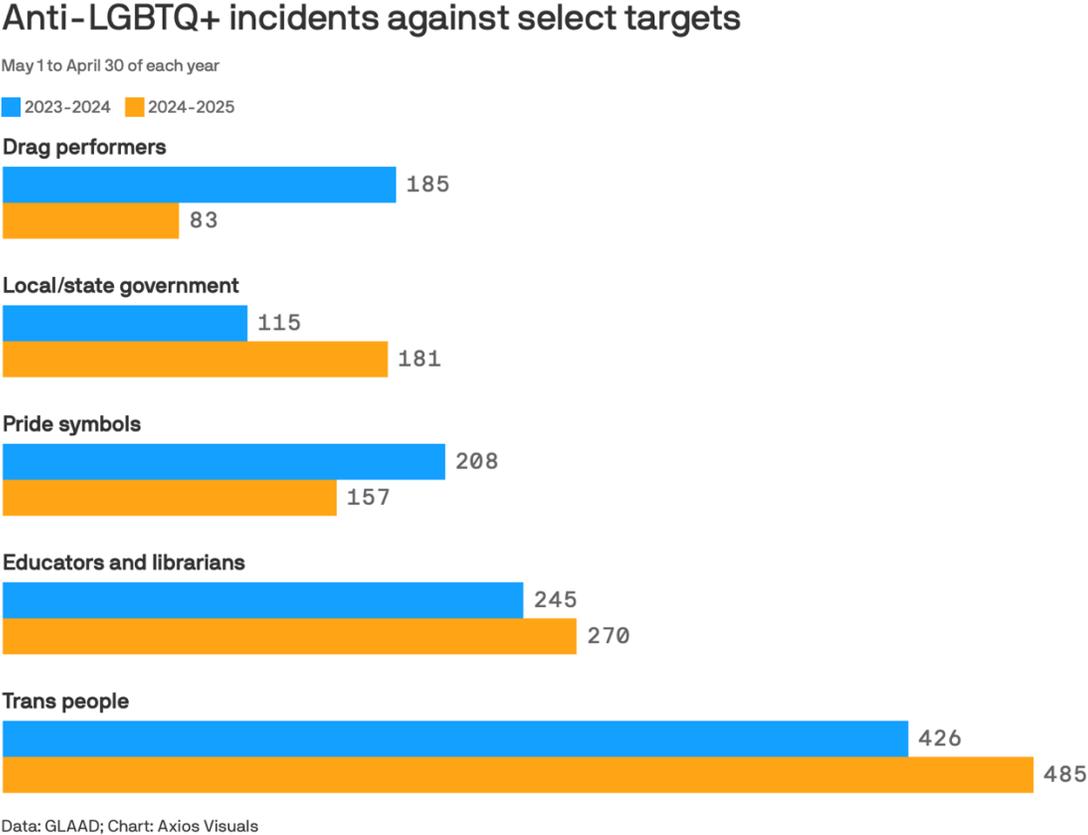


Fig. 8. Anti-LGBTQ+ incidents (Lotz).

10.2 The impact of overturning LGBTQ+ legal rights

Trump's administration's repeal of LGBTQ+ points to concern for the cultural impact this will have. Changing protection laws is not a minor political move and influences citizens' understanding of minorities like the LGBTQ+ community. Rebecca J. Kreitzer and other discusses these changes in political opinion in their article "Does Policy Adoption Change Opinions on Minority Rights? The Effects of Legalizing Same-Sex Marriage." This article points to the political divide within the U.S., looking into "a unique panel survey of Iowa registered voters conducted immediately before and after the Iowa Supreme Court's decision regarding same-sex marriage to estimate the possible effect of policy adoption on changing opinions toward minority rights" (Kreitzer et al. 795). Although this is one survey on one specific court decision, it is an example of the impact these kinds of legislative repeals can have. Kreitzer explains this further, talking about how

Policy feedback is especially important for scholars of minority rights because policies can have a legitimizing or stigmatizing effect on the targeted populations (Mettler and Soss 2004; Pacheco 2013). Statewide policies: especially those adopted by initiative or referendum, can make the public less sympathetic to minorities when their rights are subjected to popular vote (i.e., Donovan and Bowler 1998; Gamble 1997; Hajnal, Gerber, and Louch 2002). (Kreitzer 796)

When looking into Trump's executive orders and changes in legislation in Illinois, Texas, Tennessee, and South Dakota, it is important to understand that "there is reason to question the causal directionality of such studies of policy responsiveness. The relationship between policy and opinion may be dynamic, wherein policy responds to opinion, but opinion changes based on changing policy (Wlezien 1995)" (Kreitzer et al. 797). Kreitzer also discusses how "prior literature on opinion change in response to policies and judicial outcomes predict that the policies and court decisions signal new norms and confer legitimacy on the government's preference" (Kreitzer et. al 799). The study found that "only 63 percent of respondents that supported civil unions prior to the decision do so afterward. Almost a quarter of this group moved to the more conservative position of opposing both civil unions and same-sex marriage after the decision" (Kreitzer et al. 801).

An element within the survey was the characteristics of the people in each group, the ones who supported the civil union of same-sex marriage and those who did not, after the Supreme Court decision. The survey found that "positive change in the direction of favoring

same-sex marriage across gender, education, income, and age groups, as would be expected, with evangelical Christians less likely to change their opinion on marriage rights. We also see more change in favoring same-sex marriage among individuals with gay or lesbian friends, family, or coworkers” (Kreitzer et al. 801).

Overall, Kreitzer’s survey and article point to the importance surrounding policy changes, discussing how:

A growing body of research has shown the effect of policies such as non-discrimination and same-sex marriage on the health and well-being of gays and lesbians. The social stigma of being a sexual minority can affect mental health (Hatzenbuehler 2009).

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual identifying people living in states that extend anti-discrimination protection are less likely to experience psychiatric disorders (Hatzenbuehler, Keyes, and Hasin 2009). (Kreitzer et al. 798)

These policy changes, such as Trump’s executive orders, not only change the public’s mind in terms of the LGBTQ+ community negatively, as well as impacting the well-being of the community.

Scholarly research shows evidence of the negative impacts of Donald Trump’s anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. This can be seen within the article “The impact of 2024 Anti-Transgender Legislation on Youth” by Elana Redfield, Kerith J. Conron, and Christy Mallory. The article discusses the various laws that restrict transgender youth, including bans on gender-affirming care, bans on sports participation, school bathroom and facility access, and gender-affirming pronouns. Redfield discusses how “an estimated 120,000 transgender youth, nearly half of all transgender youth in the U.S., live in one of 27 states where at least one anti-transgender bill has been enacted” (Redfield et al, Apr. 2024 30). An example of one of these bans is anti-pronoun laws that “establish a right for a parent to know about a young person’s change in pronouns. These bills require school staff and other state employees to disclose a young person’s transgender status or gender exploration to parents. Another form of anti-pronoun law empowers teachers and other state employees to refuse to use an affirming pronoun” (Redfield et al. 21). This law allows for the state, or in this case, schools, to violate student privacy and the right to express themselves freely. When allowing people to misgender others, this sends the message that there is a lack of respect and protection for the LGBTQ+ community, especially for youth.

There is a direct correlation between the anti-LGBTQ+, specifically transgender, legislation being passed and trans protection being reversed within the U.S. government. The article “A Narrative Synthesis Review of Legislation Banning Gender-Affirming Care” by Jessie Melina Garcia Gutiérrez et. al, gives insight into the impact of anti-trans legislation being passed. Gutiérrez et al point out how “there is strong evidence that access to gender affirmation, or being recognized by one’s gender identity, is associated with decreased gender dysphoria for trans individuals, including trans youth” (Gutiérrez et al. 44). Although these laws or lack of laws impact a small percentage of Americans, the impact is extensive.

The data presented in this article was released in 2024, demonstrating major impacts on transgender individuals' mental and physical health. This data is from before Donald Trump’s second term, so it is important to recognize the impact of new legislation being rolled out now. For example, executive orders surrounding transgender athletes, access to bathrooms within schools and public places, and the changes the Trump administration has implemented to the definition of sex, gender, and the expression of it. Gutiérrez et al discuss “the link between legislation and well-being has also been documented; trans individuals living in states with nondiscrimination policies based on gender and thus, more sources of gender affirmation report better overall health outcomes than trans individuals that reside in states with policies targeting health and rights of trans people, particularly states that have significant amount of introduced and passed bills that ban or restrict GAC to trans communities and youth” (Gutiérrez et al. 45).

Gutiérrez et al pull this information from the study in the article “Does Policy Matter? The Impact of State and City Anti-Discrimination Policy on the Discrimination Experiences of Trans and Nonbinary people” by Maks Truszczynski et. al. This study found “that anti-discrimination policies at both the state and city level were associated with fewer reported discriminatory experiences. In fact, city-level antidiscrimination policies in general halved the total average number of discriminatory experiences that participants reported” (Truszczynski et. al, Sept. 2022 1791). The study also found that “participants in states with a higher religiosity score reported more discriminatory experiences” (Truszczynski et al. 1791). The study discussion goes on to point out that “a more traditional, conservative, and religious social environment (measured by religiosity) was associated with more discriminatory events” (Truszczynski et al. 1792). There is no questioning the data that Trump’s administration and the anti-transgender rhetoric have an impact on the lives and well-being of transgender people. More

specifically, this impacts trans youth and their experiences within education. Gutiérrez et al discusses how “in educational settings, trans youth are more prone to bullying and harassment leading to increased absenteeism as compared to their cisgender counterparts” (Gutiérrez et al. 45).

Overall, several qualitative studies have found that anti-trans legislation has led to an increased mental health burden in trans youth. Specifically, trans youth have increased rates of depression, suicidality, and anxiety compared to their cisgender peers” (Gutiérrez et al. 47). The data speaks for itself: anti-trans legislation protects nobody, it is used as an erasure tactic and has no positive impacts. Rather than helping vulnerable groups, it targets transgender adults and youth. These various executive orders, such as “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government,” posted on the White House website, protects no one. Gutiérrez et al’s article proves that the only ones impacted are transgender people, and the implications it has are dangerous. Gutiérrez et al state that “anti-trans legislation is also associated with increased gender dysphoria for trans youth who wish to medically transition, given their inability to access GAC. In addition, these policies are associated with concerns for physical health in the trans youth who are more likely to experience violence based on their gender identity” (Gutiérrez et al. 47).

In the United States today, with the Trump administration, more anti-LGBTQ+ policies are being pushed through Congress, specifically targeting transgender people. Homophobia is being placed at the forefront of many politicians' policies and overall attitudes. This kind of behavior from politicians and world leaders allows for cultural beliefs surrounding the LGBTQ+ community to regress and become dangerous. This is a step back from the progress that had been made within the Obama and Biden administrations.

Ron DeSantis signed into law the “Don’t Say Gay” bill, which “stated that its purpose was to ‘prohibit classroom discussion about sexual orientation or gender identity in certain grade levels or in a specified manner” (National Education Association 2). The original law was signed in 2022 but has been expanded in 2023, “prohibiting the use of pronouns consistent with one’s gender identity, expanding book banning procedures, and censoring health curriculum and instructions” (‘National Education Association” 2). This law prohibits children from expressing their authentic gender identity and orientation, creating the image that these kinds of identities are harmful and need to be removed from educational settings. This is a push backwards in

education, reinforcing heteronormativity and gender binaries that lead to discrimination within school. This kind of law leads to more ignorance and hatred toward the LGBTQ+ community, signaling to children the idea that diverse identities are unacceptable.

To understand the severity of Trump's executive orders, it is helpful to lay out the progress of LGBTQ+ rights and how they have regressed. An example used is Illinois in July of 1961, when "Illinois became the first state to decriminalize homosexuality by repealing its sodomy laws" ("LGBTQ Rights Milestones Fast Facts"). Now, in 2025, we have Trump's United States that works to take these rights away and create a culture that demonizes transgender youth. Now, in the state of Illinois, there are bills that restrict bathroom access, require all IDs to reflect one's sex rather than gender identity, ban drag shows, and place age restrictions on gender affirming surgeries. Introduced by Senator Andrew Chesney, a bill that "requires the Secretary of State to implement changes to require all Illinois-issued identification documents to reflect the holder's sex as defined in the Act" while also amending "the Illinois Human Rights Act to delete 'gender-related identity' from the definition of 'sexual orientation'" (Illinois General Assembly, SB 2078). Another attack on the LGBTQ+ community in Illinois was introduced by Senator Chris Balkema which "creates the prohibition on government sponsored sexual performances" referring to the ban of "vogue type movements, or male or female impersonators who provide entertainment that appeals to the prurient interest of persons under 18 years of age" (Illinois General Assembly SB1783) or put more simply, drag shows.

Lastly, Representative Tom Weber introduced a bill that "provides that sex-reassignment procedures are prohibited for patients younger than 18 years of age" while also stating that "the Department of Financial and Professional Regulation shall revoke the license of any physician who willfully or actively violates the prohibition of sex-reassignment procedures for patients younger than 18 years of age" (Illinois General Assembly, HB 3819). Illinois went from being the first state to decriminalize homosexuality to a state that places restrictions on drag shows, describing them as adult sexual shows, and access to proper identification that reflects one's gender, and access to reaffirming procedures for transgender youth.

It has become apparent that the anti-LGBTQ+ attacks are on transgender peoples, which raises the question of why they are specifically being targeted. This can be explained through the conservative party's political tactic to use another minority as a scapegoat. Aaron and Francis explain this political strategy saying, "as opposition to same-sex marriage waned as an effective

social issue, conservative groups conducted polling to identify other issues regarding sexuality that could best excite the public. That polling turned up opposition to transgender people participating in sports consistent with their gender identity and transgender minors' access to gender-affirming medical care" (Aaron and Francis 353). This is deliberate and "the result of careful planning by national conservative organizations to harness the emotion around gender politics,' anti-transgender sentiment gained steam, reaching the firestorm it is today. This was no accident, but rather a 'well-organized effort to put this on the map'" (Aaron and Francis 353).

The various language used by the Trump administration and Republican party frames gender identity as a dangerous concept that the far-left radicals are using to indoctrinate children. Donald Trump "has proposed a ten-point 'Plan to Protect Children From Left-Wing Gender Insanity' and likened gender-affirming care for minors to 'child abuse' and 'child sexual mutilation.' He has promised, if elected, to 'revoke every Biden policy promoting the disfigurement of our youth' (Aaron and Francis 353). Aaron and Francis point out that "today's anti-trans laws are arguably the outcome of a multi-year project to drum up energy among social conservatives about these issues, in the wake of falling political interest in opposing same-sex marriage and even abortion" (Aaron and Francis 354). The rise in transphobia is not by chance but the careful planning of the conservative party. Same-sex marriage has become socially accepted widely within the United States so the targeting of lesbian and gay men would not gain as much traction. There is now more of a distinction in identity between gay and transgender individuals which has allowed the conservatives to create fear and false information surrounding gender identities. Conservatives have taken the deviance from the gender binary as an attack on traditional family structures while creating the image that transgender people are dangerous and indoctrinated.

10.3 Trump's Executive Orders: A Commentary

This subsection will investigate Trump's executive orders in detail to point out the misinformation and blatant anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric. Trump and his supporters have used religious rhetoric to push their conservative Christian agenda, and these executive orders are the result of this ignorance.

On Donald Trump's first day in office of his second term, he signed various executive orders that impacted workplace discrimination for the LGBTQ community, redefined gender and sex, and restricted access to proper healthcare. On the official White House website, published

January 20, 2025, is an executive order, “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring Biological Truth to the Federal Government.” This order states that “across the country, ideologues who deny the biological reality of sex have increasingly used legal and other socially coercive means to permit men to self-identify as women and gain access to intimate single-sex spaces and activities designed for women, from women’s domestic abuse shelters to women’s workplace showers” (Exec. Order No. 14168). The order goes on to state that:

Gender ideology’ replaces the biological category of sex with an ever-shifting concept of self-assessed gender identity, permitting the false claim that males can identify as and thus become women and vice versa, and requiring all institutions of society to regard this false claim as true. Gender ideology includes the idea that there is a vast spectrum of genders that are disconnected from one’s sex. Gender ideology is internally inconsistent, in that it diminishes sex as an identifiable or useful category but nevertheless maintains that it is possible for a person to be born in the wrong sexed body. (Exec. Order No. 14168).

The order also attacks transgender youth, rescinding the following resources:

- (i) “The White House Toolkit on Transgender Equality”;
- (ii) the Department of Education’s guidance documents, including:
 - (A) “2024 Title IX Regulations: Pointers for Implementation” (July 2024);
 - (B) “U.S. Department of Education Toolkit: Creating Inclusive and Nondiscriminatory School Environments for LGBTQI+ Students”;
 - (C) “U.S. Department of Education Supporting LGBTQI+ Youth and Families in School” (June 21, 2023);
 - (D) “Departamento de Educación de EE.UU. Apoyar a los jóvenes y familias LGBTQI+ en la escuela” (June 21, 2023);
 - (E) “Supporting Intersex Students: A Resource for Students, Families, and Educators” (October 2021);
 - (F) “Supporting Transgender Youth in School” (June 2021). (Exec. Order No. 14168)

This executive order strips transgender youth of their rights within educational institutions. It is transphobic and creates false information surrounding transgender people’s access to single sex spaces. This order creates the image that transgender people are dangerous and use their transition to abuse women in intimate spaces. The reality is that people who are

transgender should have access to proper single sex spaces; they are not the ones abusing, but the ones being abused and harassed in these spaces. The School of Law Williams Institute reports that

While we have found no evidence of increased harms to people who are not transgender when transgender people are allowed to use restrooms and other gendered facilities according to their gender identity, it is a consistent finding across studies and over time that transgender people report being denied access to these spaces and experiencing verbal harassment and physical assault from others in these spaces (Flores et al 3)

Another article reported that “the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Alliance Network (GLSEN) conducted a school climate survey of 7,898 LGBT students aged 13–18 years, from all 50 states. Of the transgender students in the survey, 59.2% were required to use the bathroom of their assigned natal sex, and 63% avoided using bathrooms in schools because they felt unsafe or uncomfortable” (M. P. Callahan and K.T. Zukowski 120).

A more specific case that involves abuse and discrimination involves a transgender student in Missouri named R.F. She experienced discrimination in locker rooms and bathroom access to facilities that matched her gender identity. R.F. was reprimanded for using the girl's bathroom while experiencing harassment for other students. It was reported that “R.F. was using the boys’ restroom, fearing further discipline, when a male student in the restroom pointed at R.F. and said to another male student in front of her: “Maybe I should rape her.” (R. F. v. Platte R-3 School District 8). R.F. eventually was approved for virtual learning curriculum after the incident but “before the learning curriculum was formally approved, R.F. attempted to go back to school in person but was met by additional harassing comments from her classmates related to the rape threat made against her” (R. F. v. Platte R-3 School District 9). This sort of discrimination is not uncommon for transgender students in schools and prohibits their ability to have a safe and inclusive learning environment. The governing of queer bodies to this extent is invasive, transphobic, dangerous, and backed by no data. No one wins in this executive order when transgender people are directly targeted and stripped of their right to exist safely.

Again, to understand the severity of Trump’s presidency, it is important to show the changes made from Biden's administration to Trump’s administration. In the first 100 days of his presidential term, Biden passed an executive order:

Preventing and Combating Discrimination on the Basis of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation (EO 13988), Advancing racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government (EO 13985), Enabling All Qualified Americans to Serve Their Country in Uniform (EO 14004), Establishment of the White House Gender Policy Council (EO 14020), and Guaranteeing an Educational Environment Free From Discrimination on the Basis of Sex, Including Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity (EO 14021). (Medina and Santos)

This is the exact opposite of what Trump's administration accomplished in the first 100 days in office. Trump's executive orders strip the LGBTQ+ community of various legal protections through executive orders. On the White House official website, there is an executive order posted January 28, 2025, titled "Protecting Children from Chemical and Surgical Mutilation." Within this order, Donald Trump states that "across the country today, medical professionals are maiming and sterilizing a growing number of impressionable children under the radical and false claim that adults can change a child's sex through a series of irreversible medical interventions" (Exec. Order No. 14187). What Donald Trump is talking about is the gender affirming care that transgender youth and adults should have access to. The National Library of Medicine defines a transition as a "process during which persons change their physical, social, and/or legal characteristics consistent with their affirmed identity" (Kralik). Donald Trump describes chemical and surgical mutilation as:

The use of puberty blockers, including GnRH agonists and other interventions, to delay the onset or progression of normally timed puberty in an individual who does not identify as his or her sex; the use of sex hormones, such as androgen blockers, estrogen, progesterone, or testosterone, to align an individual's physical appearance with an identity that differs from his or her sex; and surgical procedures that attempt to transform an individual's physical appearance to align with an identity that differs from his or her sex or that attempt to alter or remove an individual's sexual organs to minimize or destroy their natural biological functions. This phrase is sometimes referred to as "gender affirming care. (Exec. Order No. 14187)

This definition and phrasing are incorrect and dangerous. No children receiving gender affirming care are receiving surgical mutilation, which is against the law. Transgender and

gender diverse patients go through an extensive process before receiving physically altering surgeries. On the website “Trans Health Care,” the process is outlined as:

1. Gender Dysphoria, persistent, well-documented gender dysphoria.
2. Informed consent, the patient must provide informed consent for the surgery.
3. Psychosocial assessment, a psychosocial evaluation by a licensed mental health professional, is usually required.
4. Living in the desired gender role, the patient has lived in their desired gender role for a certain period, often at least 12 months, prior to surgery.
5. Age requirement. (“World Professional Association for Transgender Health”)

Although there is no recommendation on specific ages for the surgery, “the SOC generally recommends that the patient be at least 18 years old to undergo gender-affirming surgery (“World Professional Association for Transgender Health”). The website states in bold that “it is extremely rare for patients under 18 to receive genital surgery. (“World Professional Association for Transgender Health”).

Donald Trump’s executive order also states that it will “convene States’ Attorneys General and other law enforcement officers to coordinate the enforcement of laws against female genital mutilation across all American States and Territories; prioritize investigations and take appropriate action to end deception of consumers, fraud, and violations of the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act by any entity that may be misleading the public about long-term side effects of chemical and surgical mutilation” (Exec. Order No. 14187). Again, these statements are false, backed by no medical evidence, and create the false image that young adults are encouraged to transition and can easily access this procedure. The process people go through to transition is long, with various checkpoints before anything can be performed. No one is pushing these kinds of surgeries on children, and in turn, it is a long process to access gender affirming care.

This is also seen within education in another Trump executive order titled “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling.” The order states that schools are “steering students toward surgical and chemical mutilation without parental consent or involvement, or allowing males access to private spaces designated for females may contravene” (Exec. Order No. 14190). Again, there is no evidence of schools steering students toward surgical and chemical mutilation without parental consent or involvement. This is illegal and impossible, seeing as it is rare for surgical transitions under the age of 18, and the process that people must undergo to be cleared for the surgery.

10.4 Project 2025

Britannica defines the document *Project 2025* as a “wide-ranging set of conservatives to ultraconservative recommendations regarding U.S. government structure and policy, as well as a plan of action to facilitate their implementation. Designed and prompted by the Heritage Foundation, a prominent right-wing think tank, the Project was intended for use by the next president should a conservative candidate win the presidential election of 2024” (Duignan 9 Sept. 2025). The document states that “our political class has been discredited by wholesale dishonesty and corruption. Look at America under the ruling and cultural elite today: Inflation is ravaging family budgets, drug overdose deaths continue to escalate, and children suffer the toxic normalization of transgenderism with drag queens and pornography invading their school libraries” (Project 2025 1).

This kind of statement and word choice is incorrect and dangerous, describing drag queens with pornography while implying that transgender individuals have been indoctrinated. This is the kind of literature and legislation that is being used to target transgender youth. These narratives surrounding the United States' politics and society are false and dangerous. They allow for anti-LGBTQ+ beliefs and policies within education that are seen with Trump's executive orders. This creates stigmas towards the queer community and normalizes hatred.

This trend can be explained through the divide and polarization within the United States and the identity politics that impact anti-LGBTQ+ legislation being passed by the Republican Party. The document is formally called “Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise-Project 2025 Presidential Transition Projected by the Heritage Foundation.” The Heritage Foundation defines its mission on its website, saying, “Heritage's mission is to formulate and promote public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense” (Heritage Foundation).

The first chapter of the document “A Promise to America” is by Kevin D. Roberts, who is also a member of the Heritage Foundation. Robert outlines the intentions, saying:

The next conservative President must make the institution of American civil society a hard target for woke culture warriors. This starts with deleting the terms sexual orientation and gender identity (“SOGI”), diversity, equity, and inclusion (“DEI”), gender, gender equality, gender awareness, gender-sensitive, abortion, reproductive health, reproductive rights, and any other term used to deprive Americans of their First

Amendment rights out of every federal rule, agency regulation, contract, grant, regulation, and piece of legislation that exists. (Heritage Foundation, Mandate 5)

This section of the document is outright discriminatory, stating the next Republican president will openly work to not only rescind queer rights but also their existence legally. There is a clear lack of knowledge behind this document, as sexual orientation is not just a queer term, reproductive health is not just about abortion, and removing these terms is an example that “deprives Americans of their First Amendment rights” (Heritage Foundation, Mandate 5). The motives behind a document like Project 2025 work to suppress not only the rights of LGBTQ+ Americans as well as women, people of color, and overall diversity. The Mandate for leadership is much bigger than removing inclusive vocabulary. Instead, it works to remove the rights of various groups of people in America. The Trump administration and republicans backing this document are using this sort of language and rhetoric to exclude and other the LGBTQ+ community.

Another chapter titled “Department of Education” by Lindsey M. Burke begins discussing the mission of the Department of Education, saying, “in our pluralistic society, families and students should be free to choose from a diverse set of school options and learning environments that best fit their needs” (Heritage Foundation, Mandate 319). This is a concept that most Americans would agree upon, but the meaning behind the words in this document is much different. Burke discusses the use of non-binary categories among high school-level interscholastic athletes and the data collection put in place by the Biden administration. Burke states that the new administration should “work with Congress to amend Title IX to include due process requirements; define 'sex' under Title IX to mean only biological sex recognized at birth; and strengthen protections for faith-based educational institutions, programs, and activities” (Heritage Foundation, Mandate 333). This one amendment alone goes against the mission statement above that allows families to choose from diverse learning environments that fit the students' needs. This discriminates against gender-diverse students' right to exist while also bringing religious beliefs into publicly funded education. These ‘faith-based educational institutions’ are not diverse faiths but Christian beliefs that discriminate against LGBTQ+ students. This is unconstitutional, going against the separation of state and church and overall freedom of American citizens.

Project 2025, specifically within the Department of Education, targets LGBTQ+ students' right to exist and their privacy. The Heritage Foundation believes these transitions will lead to more positive impacts on the U.S. education system. Many of these claims are not backed by real data or research. Project 2025 states that “facilitating social gender transition without parental consent increases the likelihood that children will seek hormonal treatments, such as puberty blockers, which are experimental medical interventions” (Heritage Foundation, Mandate 333). There are no gender transitions happening without parental consent; in many states, transitioning has been made impossible for transgender youth. This is happening in Tennessee, Texas, and South Dakota.

In the Supreme Court case of *United States versus Skrmetti, Attorney General and Reporter for Tennessee, et al*:

Tennessee joined the growing number of States restricting sex transition treatments for minors by enacting the Prohibition on Medical Procedures Performed on Minors Related to Sexual Identity, Senate Bill 1 (SB1). SB1 prohibits healthcare providers from prescribing, administering, or dispensing puberty blockers or hormones to any minor for the purpose of (1) enabling the minor to identify with, or live as, a purported identity inconsistent with the minor's biological sex, or (2) treating purported biological sex and asserted identity. (United States v. Skrmetti 1)

In 2023, Texas passed a bill “relating to prohibitions on the provision to certain children of procedures and treatments for gender transitioning, gender reassignment, or gender dysphoria and on the use of public money or public assistance to provide those procedures and treatments” (Texas S.B. 14, 2023).

In 2023, South Dakota passed a bill stating that:

a healthcare professional may not, for the purpose of attempting to alter the appearance of, or to validate a minor's perception of, the minor's sex, if that appearance or perception is inconsistent with the minor's sex, knowingly:

- (1) Prescribe or administer any drug to delay or stop normal puberty;
- (2) Prescribe or administer testosterone, estrogen, or progesterone, in amounts greater than would normally be produced endogenously in a healthy individual of the same age and sex;

- (3) Perform any sterilizing surgery, including castration, hysterectomy, oophorectomy, orchiectomy, penectomy, and vasectomy;
- (4) Perform any surgery that artificially constructs tissue having the appearance of genitalia differing from the minor's sex, including metoidioplasty, phalloplasty, and vaginoplasty; or
- (5) Remove any healthy or non-diseased body part or tissue. (South Dakota S.B. 1080).

Not only do these laws ban gender-reassignment procedures for children, but they also ban the use of puberty blockers, administering hormones, and, in Texas, prohibit children from living as a gender that does not align with their sex at birth. Burke continues saying that “research has not demonstrated positive effects and long-term outcomes of these treatments, and unintended side effects are still not fully understood” (Heritage Foundation, Mandate 333). This statement is also false, spreading misinformation surrounding transgender youth and their access to healthcare. This statement makes gender affirming care seem experimental and unsafe when it can save transgender youth, allowing them to feel safe in their own bodies. Burke continues saying, “there is no scientific or legal basis for redefining ‘sex’ to ‘sexual orientation and gender identity’ in Title IX. Such a change misrepresents the U.S. Supreme Court’s opinion in *Bostock*, threatens the American system of federalism, removes important due process protections for students in higher education, and puts girls and women in danger of physical harm” (Heritage Foundation, Mandate 338). Including gender-diverse vocabulary within educational institutions does not put anyone at risk. This helps bring awareness to the diverse identities within society, allowing students to express their gender and sex identities openly. Spreading transphobic and false information harms and risks women and girls.

The U.S. government is targeting transgender youth not only in schools, as well as their access to health care. There are many contradictions within Project 2025, speaking of freedom and protection while actively spreading misinformation about transgender youth. This is done in an attempt to bring back the traditional values of the United States that allow faith-based education. This sort of structure uses religion, Christianity, as a weapon to defend homophobic beliefs in the United States government. This is a step back from progress made politically and socially within the U.S. This sort of shift in the culture is marked by the rise of conservatism from Trump’s first term to his second. These are conscious choices and ideologies that Trump’s administration is pushing in politics. Trump, Republicans, and their supporters are going out of

their way to target the LGBTQ+ community using undertones of religious beliefs. By contrast, Pope Francis and his papal legacy surrounding the LGBTQ+ community is an example of how a person in a position of power can work to help the LGBTQ+ community within religious beliefs.

11. Conclusion

The United States was built on the belief that “all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness” (United States “*Declaration of Independence*”). Donald Trump, his supporters, and conservative Christians as a whole pose a threat to the foundational beliefs of the United States. There is no life, liberty, or pursuit of happiness when Americans are stripped of their legal protections and freedom of expression. Students are being forced to abide by the gender binary, which has detrimental effects on their mental and physical health. This also opens the door for bullying and violence toward transgender people when their identity is constantly being singled out and marginalized. When schools are encouraged to create discriminatory curriculum and policies that undermine the diverse identities of Americans.

The Trump administration has strengthened its political party through deepening the party division in the United States, capitalizing on conservative Christianity, which has resulted in the rescinding of LGBTQ+ legal protections. Religion has been used as a political tactic to push certain agendas by the Trump administration. U.S. Congressman Sean Patrick Maloney states that he is “a strong supporter of religious liberty. But it should not be distorted and twisted into a weapon to enable discrimination. Scrubbing the White House website of references to gay people has nothing to do with religious freedom. It has everything to do with the Trump administration’s assault on the LGBTQ community” (“*Administration’s Religious Liberty Assault on LGBTQ Rights*” 2). He continues stating that “the administration has rapidly turned ‘religious liberty’, in quotes, into a pretext and excuse for denying LGBTQ citizens the ability to participate equally in all aspects of the economy and society” (“*Administration’s Religious Liberty Assault on LGBTQ Rights*” 4).

This change in politics and beliefs surrounding the LGBTQ+ community has been investigated through the concept of paradigm shift. To reiterate, Doyle refers to a paradigm shift as “a radical change in the generally accepted viewpoint of structure to a new one based on a complete change in thinking, or a belief system that allows the creation of a new paradigm that

stands in opposition to the previous paradigm” (Doyle). Trump’s administration has changed the United States’ beliefs on inclusion and acceptance. He has opened the door for a shift that breeds ignorance and hatred in the United States. He has shifted the understanding of what is deemed socially and morally acceptable in order to strengthen his own political party through the deepening of political division. Audre Lorde explains how

You do not have to be me in order for us to fight alongside each other. I do not have to be you to recognize that our wars are the same. What we must do is commit ourselves to some future that can include each other and to work toward that future with the particular strengths of our individual identities. And in order for us to do this, we must allow each other our differences at the same time as we recognize our sameness. (Lorde)

This has also been explained through the theory of the Overton Window and the way politicians adapt their policies and beliefs to fit the beliefs of their constituents. Although not all Americans support anti-LGBTQ+ policies, conservative Christians have strengthened their political party through their beliefs to elect Trump in 2024. Trump and his peers, such as J.D. Vance, have recognized their opportunity for election and shifted their policies in 2024. This is seen in J.D. Vance, who at one point did not support Trump as president but now sits as the current Vice President for Trump. These political tactics are not uncommon and not detrimental by nature, but in the 2024 election, they pose a threat to the life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness of certain Americans. This is being done through the guise of religious liberty and protection when, in reality, Republican politicians are searching for reelection and power.

Executive orders, Project 2025, and various legal amendments to state legislation are framed as fixing America. This is far from the truth and only hurts Americans attempting to exist in an equal and inclusive environment. Nobody is harmed when transgender individuals receive gender-affirming care. If anything, transgender lives are saved when they have access to gender-affirming care. A study from 2022 shows that “receipt of gender-affirming care, including puberty blockers and gender-affirming hormones, was associated with 60% lower odds of moderate or severe depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality over a 12-month follow-up” (Tordoff et al.). This can be explained through Kwame Anthony Appiah and their conversation on *Moral Revolutions*. Appiah states that “we human beings need others to respond appropriately to who we are and what we do. We need others to recognize us as conscious beings and to acknowledge that we recognize them” (Appiah 12). Proper healthcare, inclusive language and

education, and legal protections create a country that is prosperous. Not the policies and beliefs of Trump's America.

The division of the political parties in the United States is threatening the livelihoods of everyone involved. Trump has used this division to secure a second presidential term with no regard for the impact he has had on party division and legal protections of the LGBTQ+ community. The anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric does not just impact the queer community; it impacts all Americans and their right to freedom.

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