

DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

IN WHOSE INTEREST?

Gender and Far-Right Politics in the United States

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This report examines women's and gender politics in the U.S. in the context of far-right nationalist populism and extremism, in three parts.



First, it looks at gendered framings in the Tea Party, evangelical Christianity, and populist frames linking anti-elitism and anti-gender studies, along with the impact of the 2016 election on reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights.



Second, it situates these developments within a gendered and extreme right, including the »Tradwife«, »incel«, and male supremacy movements. Finally, the report turns to counter movements and strategies to combat far-right mobilization, with a particular eye toward gendered aspects.

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1

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. two-party system of government means that smaller and independent parties, while occasionally on the ballot, do not enter into government and play very little role in national, state, or local governance.¹ In contrast to most of Europe, this system means that there are no official far-right parties that are electable or that would aspire to representative power within existing systems of governance. There are no formal far-right campaign narratives, speeches, party manifestos or voter behavior that can be analyzed for gendered perspectives in the same way that one could analyze a party like Greece's Golden Dawn or Germany's Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). However, Trump's 2016 election on a populist nationalist platform allows for an analysis of the gendered dimensions of the appeal of far-right populist rhetoric and policies, even though he represents a mainstream political party, the Republican party. It is also possible to analyze the impact of a populist nationalist Republican administration on policies and legislation related to gender equity, including issues of reproductive rights, contraceptive health care coverage, and protections for the LGBTQ+ community. Perhaps more relevant in the American context – rather than far-right political parties – is examining the gendered dimensions of far-right extremist movements, subcultures, and scenes which are critical in influencing the extreme wing of the Republican Party. U.S. developments like the »alt right« and »alt lite« are cognates to broader global movements like the Identitarians, while the historical legacy of American groups like the KKK or patriot militias (Blee 2002; Belew 2018) have been reinvigorated alongside new scenes and subcultures like the boogaloo bois and internet conspiracy movements like QAnon. Perhaps even more than their legacy counterparts, some aspects of these newer movements have found great influence in mainstream conservative politics and are in turn legitimized by mainstream and right-wing politicians.

The following report focuses primarily on the gendered dimensions of populist nationalism and Trumpism—a term that refers to the peculiar blend of celebrity, nativism, populism and unpredictable leadership that comprise the political trends that led to Trump's election (Sopel 2018; Tabachnick 2016)—in the U.S., including the years leading up to and

following the election of Donald Trump. Specifically, I analyze the role of women and gendered framings in the Tea Party, and the impact of »family values« and masculinity narratives in evangelical Christianity, which were chiefly responsible for the ultimate success of Trump's campaign. I also briefly address issues of the far-right fringe, including extremist groups and scenes, for their gendered dimensions.

¹ I am indebted to Kim Krach, Lauren Schwartz and Vicki Shabo for formative feedback and discussions that much improved this report.

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AGAINST THEIR INTEREST? WHITE WOMEN AND THE TRUMP ELECTION

As a wide variety of observers have noted, a majority of white women voted for Trump across nearly every age bracket. Over 40% of women overall supported him (Jaffe 2017; Setzler and Yanus 2018), but the level of support was higher for white women, with 53% of white women ultimately choosing Trump over the Democratic candidate, Hillary Clinton. Trump's history of sexist and misogynistic remarks, his multiple marriages and reported affairs, and even an infamous audio recording of him bragging about grabbing women's intimate body parts without their consent, did not sway white women voters to vote for Clinton (Jaffe 2017). How can this seeming contradiction be explained? The story of white women's support for Trump is heavily intertwined with the history of the Tea Party movement, the evolution of politics in evangelical Christianity in the U.S., and a decade-plus long populist revival that positions ordinary Americans in existential opposition to elites, science, and current government leadership. These three organizational and social movement developments intersected with gender-related mobilization on themes about traditional motherhood and mothers' commitment and prerogative to protect her children's future; pro-life sentiments, and an effort to redefine feminism as autonomy from government dependence, in ways that fueled Trump's victory.

The question of why »women organize against their own freedom,« as the journalist Seyward Darby puts it in her recent book, *Sisters in Hate*, is complicated (Darby 2020: 115). Some women, like the evangelical Christians described below, believe that men should dominate, women should be submissive, and that this dynamic is ordained by God. Other women believe in a separate-but-equal doctrine, arguing that the sexes are biologically destined to take on separate tasks, with bearing and raising children the primary task of women while men are meant to be breadwinning defenders of their families. Still other women may fight feminism »as a means of self-preservation in the face of male oppression« (Darby 2020: 115). But as Darby argues, some women choose to benefit from systems of oppression, seeing their primary obligation to their racial identities rather than (or in addition to) their gender ones (Darby 2020: 116–117). It is in light of this latter category that we have to understand the motivations of most white women in the 2016 U.S. election.

Across the many analyses that struggled to explain the 2016 election result, it is clear that – along with conserva-

tive men – many conservative women were mobilized to vote for Trump by their adherence to traditional Republican views related to themes like smaller government and lower taxes; by anti-Hillary Clinton sentiment (Tien 2017); and by party loyalty (Setzler and Yanus 2018). Large numbers of Americans vote along party lines, regardless of who the party's candidate is in any given election, and these party loyalties are also racialized; a majority of white women favored the Republican candidate in the last three elections, while most black and Latina women supported Democrats (Tien 2017: 667). The last time a majority of white women voted for a Democratic nominee for president was in 1996—and that majority came 32 years since white women overwhelmingly voted for Lyndon Johnson (Darby 2020: 119).

But most white women are not only motivated by party loyalty or core conservative ideas about small government. They are also mobilized by race, especially the protection of their own white privilege against explicit or implicit American frames that characterize white women as »second in sex but first in race to non-white minorities« (Junn 2017: 348). Harvard University's 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study reported that nearly 70% of white women in the study's over 20,000 respondents somewhat or strongly opposed affirmative action policies (Darby 2020: 119; Massie 2016;).² As Cassese and Barnes (2019) argue, white women's support for Trump can be explained in part by their desire to protect the status quo that benefits them, relative to minority women. The white women's vote on the whole was thus a reflection of »social positioning practices« that aimed to maintain and reinforce their own privilege, despite the fact that the candidate they chose also reinforced men's privileged status over women (p. 687). In the end, the evidence suggests that »the gender gap in politics is really a color line« as the author Alexis Grenell wrote in a New York Times op-ed entitled »White Women, Come Get Your People,« (Grenell 2018; Darby 2020: 119).

Sexist attitudes also strongly determined women's vote in 2016 (Cassese and Barnes 2019). Many white women were motivated to support Trump because of the resonance of

² To access the data in the 2014 Cooperative Congressional Election Study, visit <https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataset.xhtml?persistentId=doi%3A10.7910/DVN/XFXJYY>, accessed September 30, 2020.

his campaign rhetoric with specific, gendered frameworks that seemed to place value on women's roles in the home, even as actual gendered and reproductive rights were threatened in a campaign characterized by repeated sexist and misogynistic remarks and elected officials' behavior that was clearly counter to the »family values« conservatives claimed to hold dear. In this light, it is also important to note that women—including, for example, Kellyanne Conway and Ivanka Trump as well as press secretaries Sarah Huckabee Sanders and Kayleigh McEnany—have played a prominent role in Trump's campaign and presidency, as spokeswomen and advisors. Having successful women as front-facing advocates in the press helped the campaign and the White House imply to the public that it was not hostile to women.

In fact, however, Cassese and Barnes argue that some conservative women develop antipathy or »hostile sexism« toward women who they believe aim to usurp men's power. As it turned out, hostile sexism was the second most important predictor of support for Trump, following political orientation (Glick 2019). In this sense, white women's support for Trump was critically predicated on hostility toward Hillary Clinton – especially for conservative women who embrace traditional gender roles and maintain their privilege by »protecting and prioritizing their relationships with white men.« In contrast, women of color do not reap the same benefits of supporting white male privilege, meaning that the defense of traditional gender roles is deeply intersectional, with incentives that don't apply equally to women in all racial and ethnic groups (p. 688).

Notably, conservative women's framing of motherhood and the validation of their own roles as homemakers was also situated in the context of the nation's memory of some of Hillary Clinton's most notable public blunders, including a 1992 campaign comment when she said that she wasn't the kind of woman who »stayed home and baked cookies,« or a 60 Minutes interview where she said she was not »sitting here like some little woman standing by my man« (Tien 2018: 657). The backlash against Hillary Clinton from stay-at-home mothers was swift and enduring. Gendered frames about motherhood during the Tea Party years and well into the 2016 campaign, especially once Hillary Clinton became the Democratic nominee, were at least partly situated in resistance to the kinds of derisive comments Hillary Clinton made and the perception that not only men, but also »career women« like Clinton disrespected and disregarded the contributions of homemakers and stay-at-home moms. Conservative »feminist backlash« has to be considered in this light and against the fact that Trump was not running against just any Democratic candidate, or even just any woman Democratic candidate: he was running against a candidate who conservative, traditional stay-at-home mothers resented in a deep and abiding way. In contrast, Ivanka Trump—who has been the most prominent woman in the Trump administration, rather than First Lady Melania Trump—has worked hard to contrast her image as a successful businesswoman with repeated social media and public statements about her role as a doting mother (Filipovic 2017).

Gendered themes about motherhood and children, pro-life sentiments, and a reclaimed or redefined feminism in support of traditional and domestic roles came together in three social-political developments: the Tea Party, the politicization of evangelical white Christianity, and populist radical right sentiment. Taken together, these themes and movements ultimately proved to be a mobilizing force for American women. Importantly, however, it was white, Christian women whose support for Trump proved to be so crucial. The following sections focus specifically on the mobilization of white women's support for Trump in the gendered dimension of the development of these three social-political movements.

THE TEA PARTY AND SARAH PALIN'S »MAMA GRIZZLIES«

The Tea Party did not get Trump elected—in fact, one could argue that Trumpism replaced Tea Party mobilization as the dominant force that led to Republican electoral success in 2016. But the Tea Party is an important factor in understanding conservative women's mobilization in the years leading up to the Trump administration, in ways that have had an impact on women's support for Trump and their engagement within the administration. The Tea Party was unique in American political history in many ways, but perhaps most notably because of the significant role that women played in it, including at the most senior levels of leadership. Although men represented well over half of Tea Party members, it was women who tended to be at the helm of leadership and organizing efforts (Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 42–43). In part, this was due to the decentralized structure of the Tea Party, which enabled a wider range of women – from stay-at-home mothers to already politically-engaged conservative women who had found it difficult to break into male-dominated, traditional Republican party spaces – to sweep into Tea Party leadership across the country (Deckman 2016). The Tea Party has long been understood to be a reactionary development, but few have fully acknowledged the extent to which that reactionary mobilization was gendered – both in terms of actual women's participation and in the gendered frames that engaged them.

The Tea Party emerged on the U.S. political scene in 2009 out of conservative »tea party« protests against the Obama administration's tax and homeowners' relief policies. The protests drew on the metaphorical power of the American colonists' Boston »tea party« protests against the British colonial tax on tea (Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 4) – a historical event that has long lived on in American school textbooks and popular myth and memory as the event that sparked the American revolution, becoming a symbol of resistance to government tyranny through civil disobedience (White 2018: 17). Through the strategic use of costumes, symbols, and Boston tea party reenactments, the Tea Party movement received outsized media attention and significant financial and strategic support from conservative organizations (Rosenthal and Trost 2012). Within short order, the Tea Party protests of 2009 and 2010 grew into a national

network of organizations that eventually spanned about 1,000 local Tea Party groups across the country (Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 8). The combination of local, bottom-up mobilization and top-down organizational support meant that the Tea Party movement – and its new form of conservative branding and marketing – emerged as a unique combination of both grassroots and ›Astroturf‹ organizing. (Rosenthal and Trost 2012; Skocpol and Williamson 2016: 11–12; White 2018: 19). ›Astroturf‹ is a term suggesting that—in contrast to organic, ›grassroots,‹ efforts—social movements have been manufactured, organized and paid for by established, elite parties or donors in a top-down manner, even if they have been made to appear as if they are truly grassroots in nature.

The Tea Party was highly significant in American political history, although for a relatively brief period of time. In 2019, CNN’s Chris Cillizza described it as the ›dominant movement in American politics at the start of the decade‹ and as a group that had seized ›control of the Republican Party‹ (Cillizza 2019). The movement faded in the Trump administration, losing its influence completely by 2019, and largely fading from the public’s memory. But the Tea Party had an impact on women’s political engagement in ways that are worthy of attention.

The Tea Party’s grassroots organizational structure enabled new modes of participation from women by relocating political activism from the national level to local communities and mobilizing women who had built their lives around more traditional homemaking roles. As the writer of the *Moms4SarahPalin* blog explained, the Tea Party ›has given women like me, stay-at-home and work-from-home moms, a voice‹ (Deckman 2016: 13). But the Tea Party also worked to redefine ›women’s issues‹ in new ways (Deckman 2016: 16), ultimately drawing women in with a trio of core thematic frames: motherhood and family protectionism; women’s autonomy from government dependence; and a reclaiming and redefining of feminism as based on autonomy rather than choice (Deckman 2016: 19). Taken together, these themes created a new way of framing conservative politics in gendered ways. The new frames presented the arguments that smaller government is better for American families and their children’s future, that government regulation was patronizing to women, and that the federal government aimed to restrict women’s liberties and their ability to defend themselves against government tyranny (Deckman 2016: 3–4). These arguments proved to be especially seductive to conservative women.

Former Alaska Governor and one-time Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin can be credited with much of this reframing, including a direct appeal to what she called ›mama grizzlies‹—moms who are ›rising up‹ and ›banding together, saying no‹ to big government policies that would ›attack their cubs‹ and that weren’t ›right for our kids and for our grandkids‹ (Deckman 2016: 1). Local Tea Party leaders and organizers took up Palin’s call and brought it to women on the ground, arguing that fighting back against big government was a maternal obligation as part of a

mother’s charge to protect their families and their children’s future standard of living. While the motherhood frame had long been invoked in conservative politics, Tea Party women took the framing a step beyond traditional ideologies about gendered roles, situating good motherhood as a political act that involved fighting back against the fiscal threat posed to their families by big government, which would supposedly imperil their children’s future economic opportunities (Deckman 2016: 17). In this way, fighting political and economic positions became situated as a moral engagement on the part of good mothers—a reflection of their care for their families and their children’s future wellbeing. A related frame suggested that gun rights were linked to mothers’ roles as family protectors by arguing that mothers’ defense of their families requires the preservation of the second Amendment (Deckman 2016: 18). This reasserted the intertwining of the personal and the political for women by connecting their roles as mothers to public policies and laws whose revision might be deemed a threat to their families and their ability to protect them.

The Tea Party thus recruited traditional women at the local level by reframing motherhood as a political act. But it also worked to reframe and reclaim the mantle of feminism itself, arguing that the women’s movement push for *equality* with men had been replaced by an emphasis on *choice* in ways that betrayed the original movement’s ideals. Tea Party women argued that liberal feminists’ linking of women’s rights to abortion rights and their emphasis on government regulation of ›fairness‹ as a way of ensuring quality marked an actual betrayal of the original women’s movement goals. Modern liberal feminism, they argued, promotes a patronizing approach that fosters dependence on the government and incorrectly prioritizes reproductive rights over all else. In contrast, conservative feminists argued they were reclaiming the true mantle of the women’s movement by promoting autonomy from government dependence, self-reliance, and personal responsibility (Deckman 2016: 19–21). The Tea Party’s promise to restore women’s agency successfully attracted legions of conservative women who had previously taken a back seat in political movements and activism.

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY, CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM, AND ›FAMILY VALUES‹

The support of white evangelical women for Trump is part of a broader puzzle about white evangelical Christians’ voting behavior in 2016. 81% of white evangelical voters supported Trump on election day, making that group the predominant voting block responsible for his electoral success (Martinez and Smith 2016). Pundits and the public alike struggled to understand how conservatives who had long touted ›family values‹ could ›support a man who flouted every value they insisted they held dear‹ (du Mez 2020: 3). Following a campaign that exuded extreme masculine performativity and misogynistic comments, a recording of Trump bragging about sexual assault, allegations by more than a dozen women of sexual misconduct, including harassment and assault, and reports of ›hush money‹ to a

porn star to keep quiet about an affair reportedly undertaken while his third wife, Melania, was pregnant, support from a majority of women evangelical Christians was all the more surprising (Allen and Stempel 2019; du Mez 2020: 275; Posner 2020: xviii).

A flurry of scholarship emerged in the immediate wake of the election, aiming to explain evangelicals' support for Trump. Analysis of election data showed that policy positions like anti-immigration proved more important than other factors in securing Republicans' support for Trump in the nomination phase (Scala 2020: 17). Other scholars pointed out that evangelical Republicans' strong negative feelings about Democrats make them »unlikely to ever abandon the Republican candidate« (Margolis 2020: 110), regardless of how distasteful they might find him personally. Many analysts also pointed to the importance of flagship issues like abortion and a host of other gendered issues like same sex marriage or LGBTQ+ people in the military as driving conservatives' selection of Trump as their candidate (Franklin and Ginsburg 2019).

Many of the same arguments that explain white women's support for Trump hold for the explanation of white evangelicals' support for Trump, particularly those arguments related to race and the protection of privilege. Amid initial reports that the evangelical vote helped elect Trump, scholars were quick to point out that about a quarter of American evangelicals are non-white, and two-thirds of them voted for Clinton (Gorski 2017: 2). This racial difference in evangelical support for Trump must be understood as part of the gendered story of Trump's electoral success – meaning that we have to interrogate the ways that intersectionality and multiple group identities (Crenshaw 1989; Collins 2002; Cassese and Barnes 2019: 41; Manne 2020) – played a role in white women's and white evangelicals' support for Trump.

One way that white evangelical support for Trump can be explained is by analyzing the view of the majority of conservative evangelicals who are white Christian nationalists, particularly as it relates to the latter group's romantic nostalgia for an imagined, past Golden Age (the 1950s) and fears of an apocalyptic future (Gorski 2017). White Christian nationalists report high levels of national pride, pro-military sentiments, animosity toward Muslims, nativism, opposition to interracial marriage, and a belief that the country is on the wrong path forward (Gorski 2017: 5–6). This »wrong path« is infused with a wide variety of threats to family values and traditional gender roles, especially around abortion, an issue the far right had already used to link »fetal salvation to rescuing America's future« and the need to combat moral degeneracy, evil, and national decline all at once (Franklin and Ginsburg 2019: 4). In this light, evangelical voters were attracted to Trump's promises to restore a sense of simplicity and greatness to the nation and counter cultural changes they felt had taken the country in the wrong direction. The New York Times' opinion columnist Brent Staples (2016) describes this phenomenon as »voters who long for ›Leave it to Beaver,‹«—in reference to the nostalgia-laden television

show that depicted a white, suburban world in the 1950s. Trump's 2016 electoral campaign, steeped in nostalgia for the supposed Golden Age of the 1950s and restorative promises of a utopian future; laden with racist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim remarks; and filled with masculine bluster thus appealed to a wide range of conservative men and women who felt threatened by demographic and social change. These changes included fears about immigration and birthrate-driven shifts in whites' majority status, but also views on abortion, insurance coverage of contraception, transgender bathroom access, same-sex marriage, gays in the military, and the right to deny service to gay people based on religious views (Gorski 2017). As many others have already argued, this complex interplay of factors related to the far right's positions on gender, reproductive rights, LGBTQ+ rights, feminism, and »family values« drove conservatives and evangelicals, including women, to vote for Trump. For the religious right, Trump was not just a president who would defend white Christians' future. He was a »divine leader« sent by God to deliver power back into the hands of the Christian right, reinstating authority to its proper place and thereby saving America (Posner 2020: 8)

THE CHRISTIAN HOMESCHOOLING MOVEMENT AND THE CULTURE WARS

The Christian homeschooling movement plays a particularly important role in this regard. Following nearly two decades of steady growth, by 2016, 1.7 million American children were homeschooled, about two-thirds of whom were in religious families (Du Mez 2020: 189). According to the 2012 National Household Education Surveys (NHES) Program, 64% of parents who homeschool list »a desire to provide religious instruction,« as an important or very important reason why they homeschool, while 77% list »a desire to provide moral instruction.«³ Homeschooling is not only the purview of religious families, and even before the COVID-19 pandemic, the practice was rising rapidly among non-religious families, for reasons that include dissatisfaction with local schools to issues of schedules and children's special needs (Silva 2018). The issue of local and family control over school curriculum is also embedded in broader debates about funding and school choice, which Trump adamantly supports and which are often intertwined with discussions about the separation of church and state and the use of public funds for private, religious schooling. In this light, the Trump's appointment of pro-school-choice advocate and devout Christian Betsy DeVos as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education was seen as a win for evangelical Christians and their role in shaping public policy (Rizga 2017). DeVos has long been a vocal advocate of the importance of integrating faith with public leadership. In a 2001 speech after her term as chair of the Michigan Republican Party, for example, DeVos argued for the critical importance of having »believers involved in public life« (Reitman 2017).

³ See statistics at the U.S. Department of Education website, <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oi/nonpublic/statistics.html>.

Her appointment cemented the administration's position on public schools and the role of the government in funding and supporting them. DeVos, who had never attended or sent her children to public schools, is a champion for voucher programs, which allow parents to use public funds to pay for private and parochial school tuition.

But it is Christian homeschooling itself which is framed in virtuous terms, such that dedicated homeschooling parents are seen as fighting back against public school indoctrination in ways that hold substantial support among evangelical and conservative Christians⁴ and that also factor into evangelical women's support for Trump more broadly. Homeschooling curriculum is a »steady source of teachings on militant patriarchal authority and Christian nationalism« and the reinforcement of »biblical patriarchy (Du Mez 2020: 188 and 189), situating husbands as the breadwinning head of the household and wives as submissive, supportive homemakers and mothers who will raise children in an environment promoting chastity, purity, heritage, tradition, and family values. White evangelicals »believe that men and women are different and that men are natural leaders,« while women are in charge of home and family life and responsible for the moral upbringing of children (Monk-Turner 2020: 30). In addition to reinforcing traditional gender roles, this frame places mothers at the helm of warding off a wide variety of cultural threats to their families, including threats from liberalism, abortion, Islam, immigrants, the decline of religion, gendered pronouns and LGBTQ+ people. The mobilization of evangelical Christian women in the 2016 election, in many ways, was the culmination of a decades-long effort by the Christian right to encourage »housewives outraged by moral decline... to get involved in politics« (Posner 2020: xv). In so doing, the Christian right also ensured that the issue of moral threats to Christian families and to the nation more broadly remained a front-line issue for voters.

The kinds of perceived moral threats from rapid cultural change that evangelical Christians perceived as vital to the nation's future—such as same sex marriage and transgender rights—were heightened for evangelicals in the wake of Barack Obama's election in ways that mobilized them into action (Du Mez 2020: 238). In part this came from a series of legal and policy changes that galvanized Christian evangelicals around a perceived culture war. This included the Pentagon allowing women into combat in 2013 and the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU)'s lawsuit against a cake shop owner for refusing to make a cake for a same-sex wedding. When the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage in 2015, followed by an Obama administration challenge to North Carolina's restrictions on transgender bathroom usage, evangelicals stoked »a sense of

embattlement« among followers (Du Mez 2020: 240–241). Coupled with the ongoing, perceived threat posed to families from perceived permissive abortion laws, all of these gendered issues laid the groundwork for Trump's campaign promises to protect religious freedom and preserve Christian traditions. Trump's »promise to put 'pro-life' judges onto the Supreme Court« sealed the deal, given the central importance of abortion and the goal to restrict abortion rights among evangelical Christian communities nationwide (Monk-Turner 2020: 35). Following the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the nomination of Amy Coney Barrett, whose personal views on abortion and support for an anti-choice organization have raised concerns among pro-choice advocates, abortion has remained front-and-center as an issue in the 2020 Presidential election and the potential confirmation of Barrett before the election (see, e. g., Kirchgassner 2020). In this way, evangelicals have created an ongoing sense of urgency around national elections by linking them to moral, Christian values and the imperative to rescue a nation from perceived decay.

RESTORATION THROUGH MASCULINITY

It wasn't just gendered issues that motivated voters. The very *framing* of the Trump campaign around national decline and promised restoration was equally important. Trumpists view the lost Golden Age as rooted in a moral decline, which can only be interrupted through a virtuous restoration in order to prevent the nation from coming to an apocalyptic end times populated by invaders and rapists who threaten the purity of white women. Their nation is perceived as under siege, threatened by leftists, multiculturalists, immigrants, communism, Muslims, globalists, »radical Islam« and transgender warriors. Parents—and especially mothers—are called on to protect and defend their families and the future of their children against all of these threats and more. Highly rooted in metaphors of »pollution and purification, invasion and resistance, apocalypse and salvation, corruption and renewal,« the nation's virtuous restoration is above all else gendered, because decline and weakness were »brought about by docility and femininity,« and a »return to greatness« requires a reassertion of dominance, masculinity, and manly bravado (Gorski 2017: 11 and 9). A heroic leader whose aggressive, militant masculinity was »not restrained by political correctness or feminine virtues,« for many evangelicals, was just the ticket (Du Mez 2020: 253). As Du Mez explains: »With the forces of evil allied against them, evangelicals were looking for a man who would fight for them, a man whose testosterone might lead to recklessness and excess here or there, but that was all part of the deal... Trump embodied ›American strength,« and would project that globally as well (p. 260–61).

In other words, American voters did not rally around Donald Trump *despite* his hypermasculine and heteronormative bluster, but rather *because of it* (Glick 2019: 721). This was true for evangelicals, whose support for Trump was the culmination of an »embrace of militant masculinity, an ideology that enshrines patriarchal authority and condones the

4 These debates continue well into 2020. For example, Donald Trump, Jr. tweeted in response to a March 2020 *Washington Post* article about insufficiencies in COVID-19 remote schooling, »I'd wager the average homeschooled kid in America fares better in virtually any metric than (sic) the average public/leftist indoctrination school kid.« Tweet by Donald Trump, Jr. on March 28, 2020 at 12:56 pm, available at: <https://twitter.com/donaldjtrumpjr/status/1243945071604621314?lang=en>

callous display of power, at home and abroad« (du Mez 2020: 3). But it was true for voters outside of the evangelical community, too. In the end, hostile sexism was a more important predictor of favorable attitudes toward Trump than religiosity, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, education, age, marital status, and income (Glick 2019: 721). Trump was elected because he was the kind of »real man« whose »rugged masculinity« reminded (white) voters of a time in America when »all was right with the world« (du Mez 2020: 271).

In sum, growth in evangelical Christianity and a resurgence of Christian nationalism intersected with specific, gender-related mobilization that had accelerated during the Tea Party movement shortly after the election of Barack Obama. Together, these developments helped fuel broader support from women for Trump than observers had expected. But the story of gender and the far right is not only about electoral results or the ways in which women vote. Gender is also central to the far right's attacks on knowledge, especially in the U.S. through assaults on the higher education sector which are often framed within critiques of gender studies.

POPULISM, ANTI-GENDER STUDIES, AND ANTI-SCIENCE

The populist nationalist resurgence that swept across Europe, India, Brazil and other places globally also came to the U.S., although in the guise of a mainstream party. Populism—which I define as both a schema (way of thinking) and a rhetorical strategy—positions the ordinary, pure people against the corrupt elites (Bonikowski 2017; Canovan 1999; Bonikowski 2017; Brubaker 2017; Miller-Idriss 2019, 2020; Mudde 2004; Müller 2016). Populist nationalism, in turn, extends the pure people-corrupt elite framework to one in which the perceived threat includes all »others.« This framing broadens the sense of threat to »others« but also intertwines the »corrupt elite« with those others by arguing that corrupt elites promote their own self-interest in ways that neglect or harm the pure people. In populist nationalism, the people's purity is at risk from immigration, demographic change, or other perceived »pollution« from invaders or infestations. Populist nationalist leaders argue that a stronger state is necessary in order to protect the pure people from the threat posed by Muslims, immigrants, non-ethnic others and more (Brubaker 2017; Berezin 2019; Kubik 2018; Miller-Idriss 2019; Woods et al 2020).

POPULISM AND ANTI-GENDER STUDIES

In the United States, these populist nationalist frames are also heavily anti-science, railing against established expertise and higher education, with gender and gender studies a particular target. For the American far right, higher education is the predominant scapegoat for the decline of Western, Christian civilization and far-right ideological values. Gender studies and feminism thus become part of a larger

set of far-right targets related to biased universities and higher education institutions being part of a broader ostensible »cultural Marxist« plot to inculcate youth with leftist ideas as a precursor to a revolution. After the failure of Marxists to overthrow capitalist societies by force, so the argument goes, leftists have moved to a strategy of cultural hegemony, using universities as a vehicle to inculcate youth with liberal ideas and forced ideologies (Miller-Idriss 2020). Gender is a key target for such claims, drawing on recent changes in campus practices related to gender-neutral bathrooms and the growing use of alternative pronouns. Campuses are said to be sites of »subversive leftist activity« (Posner 2020: 156), awash with radical »feminazis« who will emasculate or usurp men of their rightful power and place and brainwash impressionable young students into submission to political correctness (Miller-Idriss 2020).

Gender is also key to attacks on higher education beyond the populist nationalist part of the far-right spectrum. Far-right favorite Jordan Peterson tells people to »abandon universities (which have been hopelessly corrupted by their adoption of »women's studies«) in favor of trade schools« (Phillips-Fein 2019). Far-right provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos created a post-secondary-education »Privilege Grant,« for which white men were exclusively eligible, so that they could be »on equal footing with their female, queer and ethnic minority classmates.«⁵ Meanwhile, gender studies as a field is regularly attacked and discredited by the far right as an instrument of »gender ideology« and as going against supposedly »real« scientific evidence from fields like biology and evolutionary psychology (Krämer and Klinger 2020: 253). Feminist approaches were already threatening to the far right because of their challenge to traditional gendered roles, but populist nationalists position this threat as intentionally manipulative in the field of gender studies, which they argue aims to »corrode« existing gender roles, destroy traditions, and undermine family values (Krämer and Klinger 2020: 258). Universities thus pose a serious danger to Western civilization and the Christian religion in ways that amount to what one right-wing writer warns is »cultural treason« (Posner 2020: 156).

POPULISM AND ANTI-SCIENCE

It is important to note that far-right attacks on knowledge and expertise, including gender studies, exist in a broader American context that is perhaps best characterized by what Tom Nichols calls a »campaign against established knowledge« (Nichols 2019).⁶ This includes attacks on the credibility of facts and arguments, specialized experts, and the free press. National surveys have documented that Re-

5 The Anti-Defamation League reported that, in March 2018, Yiannopoulos announced that the charity administering the grant had closed. »Milo Yiannopoulos: Five Things to Know,« ADL, n.d., accessed February 27, 2020, <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/milo-yiannopoulos-five-things-to-know>.

6 Also see the discussion in Adam Frank, »Why Expertise Matters,« NPR, April 7, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/sections/13.7/2017/04/07/522992390/why-expertise-matters>.

publicans have especially poor views of higher education, with 59 percent (compared to 18 percent of Democrats) reporting in 2019 that colleges have a negative impact on the way things are going in the country (Parker 2019). The mainstream right's declining trust in higher education, combined with a growing populist climate of anti-intellectualism and broader attacks on expertise, creates fertile ground for more-extreme attacks on higher education from the far right. The overall effect nationally is to weaken »the legitimacy of sources of knowledge« and undermine shared ways of understanding and explanation (Miller-Idriss 2020; Muirhead and Rosenblum 2019: 5–7). The impact is especially clear in the COVID-19 era, in the resistance of many Americans to follow basic public health recommendations like mask-wearing, listen to scientific experts about the risks of transmission, and consider the facts about a potential vaccine. Notably, the far right is a disproportionate generator of health misinformation online, with more than a quarter of websites sharing health misinformation on Facebook from the far right of the political spectrum, compared to less than 3% from the far left (Avaaz 2020). Billions of views of health misinformation have been documented on Facebook's platform alone over the past year (Avaaz 2020). The exponential growth of such misinformation, particularly as it relates to COVID-19 and a potential vaccine, are particularly important to understand for their gendered implications, since they often target women through their roles as mothers and as caregivers to elderly parents. Women are also drawn to anti-vaccination discussions through engagement in adjacent online communities related to health, wellness, dietary supplements, homeschooling, homesteading, and natural living. In the coming months, it will be critical to develop better understandings of the gendered dimensions of new cross-ideological support for right-wing political positions related to COVID-19, including anti-government opposition to shelter-in-place orders and opposition to a COVID-19 vaccine among an emerging coalition of anti-vaxxers, suburban mothers and far-right militias.

What's happening in the U.S. is, of course, consistent with other global attacks on knowledge and expertise, which are a critical step in undermining the public's source of factual information and creating broader receptivity to propaganda and extreme ideologies (Stanley 2018). But in the U.S., they are also the legacy of decades of conservative critiques of the academy's purported liberal bias, dating at least to McCarthy's hunt for communist academics in the 1950s and periodically surging under varying political administrations (Miller-Idriss 2020; Social Science Research Council 2018). Far-right attacks on higher education and science today, however, differ from mere conservative attacks for the ways they position higher education as part of a broader global plot to undermine traditional family values, promote a nefarious »gender ideology,« and eliminate the »natural« differences between the sexes. These attacks include hostility to constitutional rights for women and LGBTQ+ people, including legal challenges to transgender bathroom laws and the Obama administration's repeal of the transgender ban in the military (Hosie 2019).

WHOSE IMPACT? THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION'S POLICY LEGACY ON GENDER AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

Trump's victory brought a range of challenges to women's reproductive rights and existing protections for LGBTQ+ people in the United States. It is worth noting that Trump's track record on LGBTQ+ issues prior to his election was somewhat complicated. He described himself in 2013 as »evolving« on the issue of same sex marriage, had pledged in 2016 to be a »real friend« to LGBTQ+ people (Olorunnipa 2019), and criticized North Carolina that same year for restricting transgender bathroom access.⁷ His views on abortion were clearer, at least in terms of how he presented himself to his base. He campaigned on anti-abortion promises, including a commitment to appoint pro-life judges and saying on the campaign trail that women should have some sort of punishment for abortions—a statement he revised, after protest, to say that it is the doctors who perform abortions who should be punished (Diamond 2016). But it was really Trump's Vice President Mike Pence—a devout evangelical Christian—whose views on issues of gender, women's reproductive rights, and LGBTQ+ protections resonated strongly with the Christian right, in ways that were likely calculated to bring »evangelical credibility« to Trump's ticket (Jacobs, Smith and Yuhas 2016). In his prior roles as Indiana Governor and as a U.S. Congressman, Pence had a long record of co-sponsoring or voting for bills or policies that challenged reproductive, abortion, and LGBTQ+ rights, including legislation that »sought to redefine rape« and restrict abortion access, attempts at the state level to make it legally required for women to hold burials or cremations for fetal tissue, and efforts at the national level to allow HIV funds to support »conversion therapy.« As governor, he passed a law allowing Indiana businesses or individuals to discriminate against LGBTQ+ people and has publicly spoken out against same-sex marriage, which he believes will cause »societal collapse« (Girard 2017). During the campaign and throughout the administration's first term, Pence has been broadly supported by evangelical Christians; evangelical leaders »liken him to a prophet restoring conservative Christianity to its rightful place at the center of American life« (Coppins 2018).

It didn't take long for these views to have an impact. On the administration's first full day in power, Trump reinstated the »global gag rule,« a Reagan-era policy that stripped funding from any international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who provide abortion services or even discuss abortion with women (Graves 2017; Grossman 2016). Staffers at the State Department were ordered to »scale back language in a global human rights report that historically had addressed women's rights, family planning, and abortion« as well as sexual, racial and ethnic discrimination (Posner 2020: 180). Sweeping attacks on abortion rights came from every angle. Much of these efforts centered on efforts to »defund« Planned Parenthood, a century-plus old organization

⁷ See »2016 presidential candidates on LGBTQ issues,« *Ballotpedia*, n.d., available at: https://ballotpedia.org/2016_presidential_candidates_on_LGBTQ_issues, accessed August 24, 2020.

that provides low or no-cost reproductive health care to over 2.4 million clients annually across the U.S.—nearly 75% of whom have incomes below the federal poverty level. These services include contraceptive access, sex education, sexually transmitted disease (STD) treatment, reproductive health care and abortion care. Planned Parenthood’s website has a database of abortion clinics searchable by postal code, which include both referrals to Planned Parenthood clinics or, if abortion services are not provided there, other health care providers that can help.⁸ In short, Planned Parenthood is often the first »go to« resource for women facing an unwanted pregnancy, especially if they lack the means to seek expensive, private clinic care or counseling. The organization also works with advocates and partners overseas and has a lobbying arm that supports political candidates, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars per year on federal lobbying on women’s health legislation (Ackley 2011).

Planned Parenthood is thus not only a powerful lobbying force for the Democratic party and its candidates, but is perceived as a direct threat to the Christian right and to the »family values« that evangelical Christians and conservative Republicans hold dear. For this reason, the organization has been one of the primary organizations targeted by the far right in the U.S., along with advocacy groups and legal organizations like the American Civil Liberties Union and the Southern Poverty Law Center. Along with other medical providers, Planned Parenthood is already restricted from using federal funds for abortion services under the 1976 Hyde Amendment, which blocks federal Medicaid funding for abortion services except in cases of rape or incest or where the mother’s life is in danger.⁹ But The Trump administration sought to »defund« Planned Parenthood further, advancing those efforts through a wide variety of means, from stopping women from using government health programs like Medicaid and Title X to access care at Planned Parenthood health centers, to efforts in campaign speeches and advertisements, presidential budgets, health care reform bills, tax reform legislation, federal resolutions and regulations, and through the nomination or appointment of anti-Planned Parenthood judges and officials.¹⁰

The challenges to women’s reproductive rights are not only federal ones, however, and they go well beyond challenges to Planned Parenthood. State legislatures were emboldened by the Trump administration’s moves to restrict abortion (Grossman 2017). In 2019 alone, over thirty states introduced legislation that would ban or restrict abortion, includ-

ing a ban in Alabama of nearly all abortions and so-called »heartbeat bills« in several other states, which ban abortion after a fetal heartbeat is detected, typically around week six of a pregnancy (Lai 2019; Shaw and Duford 2019). More than half of those laws have already been passed, while others have been temporarily blocked by judges or are currently being challenged in court. In some cases, individual U.S. states are deliberately passing abortion bans or restrictions that they know violate federal protections established under the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* case, with the explicit intent of bringing a case to the U.S. Supreme Court; many state lawmakers believe that judicial appointments and changes during the Trump administration have made the Supreme Court more favorably inclined toward possible changes in federal abortion right protections. Nine states currently have restrictions on abortions that are unconstitutional and are currently blocked by courts in ways that would not be possible in a post-Roe environment, while seven states have laws that would maximally restrict abortion if Roe is overturned (Guttmacher Institute 2020).

Women have thus been more likely to face difficulty in obtaining abortions or even preventative care at abortion-providing facilities as a result of Trump administration policies and efforts. But they also faced new challenges in preventing pregnancies to begin with, due to new policies allowing employers and health insurers to deny birth control coverage if their reasons for doing so were religious or moral in nature.¹¹ Starting in 2012, the Affordable Care Act (ACA) had mandated that women receive no-cost contraceptive coverage from their private insurance plans, with only two exceptions: houses of worship were exempt from the requirement, as were health plans that were in place prior to the ACA becoming law in March 2010. Eight years of subsequent litigation ensured that women’s rights to contraception coverage were constantly pitted against employers’ rights to deny that coverage on religious or moral grounds. The Trump administration swiftly came down on the side of the employers, issuing new regulations in October 2017 that expanded the religious exception (Behn et al 2019; Keith 2020; Sobel et al 2018). In July 2020, following nearly three years of legal challenges, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the Trump administration’s regulations in *Little Sisters of the Poor v. Pennsylvania*, with a 7–2 majority. Only Justices Ginsberg and Sotomayor dissented (Liptak 2020).

The impact on LGBTQ+ and transgender rights has been equally harsh. Starting on inauguration day with the literal erasure of mentions of LGBTQ people from Department of Labor, Department of State and White House websites, the Trump administration implemented dozens of policies, regulations and judicial nominations rolling back prior protections for LGBTQ+ people. A draft executive order was leaked less than two weeks into Trump’s presidency that would give any individual or organization the right to refuse to do business with anyone based on gender identity, sexual iden-

⁸ Read more about Planned Parenthood and its services at <https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/facts-figures>, accessed August 24, 2020.

⁹ Read more about the 1976 Hyde Amendment and the exceptions granted in 1994 for rape, incest or when the mother’s life is in danger, at the Planned Parenthood Action Fund site, <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/issues/abortion/hyde-amendment>, accessed August 24, 2020.

¹⁰ See information at Planned Parenthood’s website, <https://www.plannedparenthoodaction.org/tracking-trump/policy/planned-parenthood>, accessed August 21, 2020.

¹¹ See documentation at the Transequality’s website, <https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration>, accessed August 21, 2020.

tity, marital status, or whether they had had premarital sex or an abortion (Posner 2020: 3). Although that executive order was eventually scaled back to one with more general language, other formal rollbacks of protections for LGBTQ+ people from a variety of federal agencies followed, bringing about the loss of protections against discrimination in housing services and homeless shelters, new requirements that schools must ban transgender students from participating in school sports or lose federal funding, and rollbacks of protections for transgender people in federal prison facilities, to name just a few.¹² Trump's administration also reversed the Obama administration policy allowing transgender people to participate openly in the military (Jackson and Kube 2019).

Across the board, in sum, the Trump administration's policies threatened or reduced health care access for millions of pregnant women (or those seeking to prevent a pregnancy), along with health care access and protection from discrimination for millions of gay and transgender persons (Franklin and Ginsburg 2019). Threats to rights and rollbacks to protections against discrimination are only part of the story of the gendered impact of the Trump administration, however. Through a wide variety of cuts, policies, rollbacks and legislative efforts, the Trump administration's impact on women and children has been far-reaching. This has been most publicly evident in the administration's immigration policies and bans and their direct and damaging effect on vulnerable women and children and separated families. After the Trump administration's push to separate undocumented immigrants began, horrifying images and audio of undocumented immigrant children and women held in cages leaked to the public, along with repeated reports of sexual assault and harassment by Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers. A June 2020 presidential proclamation promising restrictions on foreign workers particularly targeted spouses and children, effectively separating families by not allowing legal visa holders to bring their families to join them. The effect was to force voluntary deportations, as employed foreigners return to their home countries in order to reunite with their families (Anderson 2020).

But there have been quieter, less public effects for women and children as well. It is hard to overstate the impact of a variety of Trump administration policies on issues like childcare, food stamps and food assistance, after school and summer learning programs, and weakened resources and protections for victims of domestic violence, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and more, through changes that will have a generational impact in ways that disproportionately impact women and children (Frothingham and Phadke 2017). There is perhaps no clearer example than the lack of paid maternity leave. The U.S. has »the most family-hostile public policy of any OECD countries and is one of two countries on the planet with no paid family leave,« as the sociologist Caitlyn Collins recently wrote in a searing Harvard Business

Review essay detailing the experiences of two new mothers in Sweden and the U.S. (Collins 2020). Under the Family and Medical Leave Act, U.S. workers are entitled to up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave, but only under strict conditions: they must have worked for the employer for at least a year (and for at least 1,250 hours in the past year) and at a location with 50 or more employees. It is the barest of protections, with no financial support. For parents who do return to work, the cost of childcare is often prohibitive, putting new parents in an impossible position: returning to work, for many, is more expensive than staying at home.

The Trump administration has mobilized some Republican interest in paid leave, at least in part through the influence of Ivanka Trump. The administration signed an act that includes 12 weeks of paid leave for parents in the federal government to care for newborn or newly adopted children, for example. But its other efforts in this area—including a now-expired pilot program to provide employers with small tax credits for offering paid leave to their workers--- have not produced meaningful change.¹³ The administration's new Advanced Support for Working Families Act, for example, is set up as a loan rather than paid leave, providing what the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities describes as »no net new financial help for families« (Shabo 2020; also see Rolfes-Haase and Shabo 2020).

But there has been no significant mobilization among women in the U.S. to demand paid leave, outside of within individual state or regions, where some progress has happened. As of July 2020, for example, workers in Washington DC are entitled to up to eight weeks of paid leave to care for a new child, or up to six weeks to care for another family member with health needs under the new Paid Family Leave Program. From a global perspective, these policies barely scratch the surface of what paid leave should do. The puzzling fact remains that the issue is not raised as a priority in national elections and women across the country do not mobilize around it in significant numbers.

Finally, it is important to note that the Trump administration will have an outsized impact in the legal arena for decades to come through a near record-breaking number of federal judge appointments. As of June 1, 2020, Trump has appointed (and the Senate has confirmed) 197 Article III federal judges, who are appointed for life terms—second only to Jimmy Carter in the number of federal judges appointed at this stage of the presidency. Trump has also appointed two Supreme Court judges, a record-breaking number of U.S. Court of Appeals judges (52), and an additional 142 district court judges (Reynolds 2020). A November 2019 White House briefing statement described these efforts as a »historic restoration of the judiciary« and noted that Trump is appointing a »historic number of Federal judges who will interpret the Constitution as written« in ways that will »reshap(e) the courts for years to come« by tipping »the bal-

¹² See documentation at the Transequality's website, <https://transequality.org/the-discrimination-administration>, accessed August 21, 2020.

¹³ I am indebted to Vicki Shabo, Senior Fellow at New America, for email exchanges and data on the Trump administration's paid leave efforts.

ance of numerous Federal courts to a Republican appointed majority.«¹⁴ As National Public Radio's Carrie Johnson explained in summer 2020, after the number of Trump-confirmed federal judges topped 200, many of the nominees are in their 30s and 40s, representing decades of judicial rulings to come, including on abortion access and voting rights issues (Johnson 2020). This means that the Trump administration has ensured a trickle-down legacy on issues of gender and reproductive rights that will last generations. This issue has only taken on greater significance in the wake of Supreme Court Ruth Bader Ginsburg's death in September 2020 and the subsequent nomination of Amy Coney Barrett, whose potential confirmation is widely perceived to threaten *Roe v Wade*.

¹⁴ See the White House Fact Sheet, »President Donald J. Trump Is Appointing a Historic Number of Federal Judges to Uphold Our Constitution as Written.« November 6, 2019, available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-appointing-historic-number-federal-judges-uphold-constitution-written/>, accessed August 24, 2020.

3

FROM ›TRADWIFE‹ TO THE ›WHITE BABY CHALLENGE‹: GENDER AND THE U.S. EXTREME RIGHT

Men dominate the extreme right in the United States, just as they do globally. Women represent just 5.8% of the 2,226 violent far-right extremists and terrorists who were active in the U.S. between 1948 and 2019—compared with 25.7% of far-left extremists and 6.7% of Islamist extremists.¹⁵ But although their engagement in violence has remained relatively small, women have always played a significant role in racist and far-right movements in the U.S., such as the Ku Klux Klan (Blee 1991, 2002). The protection of white women's bodies also has long been key to the justification for white supremacist policies in the U.S., including segregation laws and discriminatory lending practices that created and perpetuated »white propertied power« (Bonds 2019: 2–4). White women were at the helm of the fight against school integration and the creation and maintenance of various forms of institutional racism in the U.S. (Gershon 2019; McRae 2018). That role has rarely been acknowledged as significant, despite a robust scholarship from Black feminists and others pointing out that women are not only used as a way of mobilizing men to join white supremacist movements (to defend them against ›invaders‹ or ›rapists‹), but are also individuals who »support, participate in, and promote white supremacy, hate, and racialized violence« (Mattheis 2019: 130, citing Lorde 2007, Hill Collins 1989, David 1983, and hooks 2014; also see Belew 2018). In recent years, women's roles in the far right have grown in new ways, in part due to the ways that social media has enabled a broader range of entry to the movement. These new engagements make it clearer than ever that women are not merely enablers of far-right extremism, but core to its creation and maintenance in powerful ways.

One area of growth comes out of the so-called ›Tradwife‹ (traditional wife) movement and an associated set of social media influencers who are reshaping the ways that women engage. The Tradwife movement, which dates to about 2015, advocates for women choosing to live »traditional feminine« lives as homemakers and submissive spouses, in contrast to feminists, whose supposedly pro-women choices have led to unhappy lives as either single, childless »old

Maids« or overstretched working mothers who outsource the care of their children to other women, as the Tradwives claim. Importantly, the Tradwife movement emphasizes that traditional lives and women's roles are a choice, notably echoing earlier conservative framings of choice and autonomy over rights-based equality (Darby 2020: 152; Rottenberg and Orgad 2020). The Tradwife movement itself is rooted in many young women's sense of discontent with mainstream society and capitalist systems that—in the U.S., in any case—make balancing motherhood and work a near-impossible task, with virtually no childcare support, limited sick leave, and few protections for women who need time away from work for childcare or eldercare responsibilities (Collins 2019). This set of conditions has driven the rising appeal of a range of nostalgia-oriented practices among millennials, from homesteading and farm collectives to a surge of interest in carpentry, knitting, calligraphy and other artisan skills (Kirkman 2016). A generation of women and men who are disillusioned with the stresses of modern life have found communities of like-minded others to share do-it-yourself skills and tools, whether in Instagram and YouTube accounts or in real life »makerspaces« (Kirkman 2016). The Tradwife movement situates itself right in the thick of these efforts to live »more authentically« and find an alternative path (Folk 2020) in ways that have proven appealing to millennials and Generation Z women.

The Tradwife movement calls on women to embrace traditional gender roles by eschewing paid work outside the home, dedicating their lives to domestic fulfillment through the care of household, husband, and children (Darby 2020; Hunt 2020). It argues that »every woman has the power to be happy if she does what's natural to her feminine existence« and resists being a »wage slave« or a miserable »single and childless« woman without purpose (Darcy 2020: 154). Dozens of YouTube accounts are dedicated to the phenomenon, deploying women clad in vintage, 1950s era dresses, heels and lipstick happily dusting and cooking in an image of picture-perfect domestic bliss (Kelly 2018). In and of itself, the movement might simply be a fringe outgrowth of the kind of millennial retreat to homesteading and carpentry described above. But the Tradwife's valorization of tradition, heritage, and a romanticized past against a seemingly chaotic and unnatural present made it ripe for co-optation by the far right as a »new and effective recruiting tool for the growing intersection between toxic masculinity and

¹⁵ National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). »Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS).« Research Brief, May 2020. Available at: https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_PIRUS_ResearchBrief_May2020.pdf, accessed August 18, 2020.

white supremacy» (Christou 2020). The Tradwife framing of submissiveness to men's needs also aligns clearly with male supremacist and men's rights movements and with an »alt right« that struggled to recruit women (Christou 2020). In the end, the Tradwife movement produced women like Ayla Stewart, known as the »Wife With a Purpose« after the name of her blog, whose early forays into feminist, pagan, raw foodist-vegan spaces eventually evolved into a militant belief in women's obligations as homemakers and mothers and then into a »virulent strain of white nationalism« (Kelly 2018). Ayla would ultimately become well-known for issuing a »white baby challenge« to encourage white women to have at least as many white babies as she had had – six – in order to compensate for the threat to white civilizations supposedly posed by falling birthrates and demographic shifts.

Before she issued that call, however, Ayla and her Wife with a Purpose blog had moved out of the Tradwife space and into the white supremacist ecosystem by connecting with women more firmly in the heart of the »alt right« scene and its online ecosystem. One of Ayla's blog posts—which blamed feminized, weak European societies for allowing a »mass influx of migrants/refugees/Islamic invaders« (Darby 2020: 134)—caught the attention of Lana Lokteff, host of an online white supremacist television show, who encouraged women to engage in the white nationalist movement (Darby 2020: 136; Mattheis 2019: 128). »A nation is your extended family, your tribe, your support system,« Lokteff once told viewers, and even though women are »too emotional for leading roles in politics,« they should still engage: »When women get involved, a movement becomes a serious threat« (Darby 2020: 238). In another speech, Lokteff told her audience that women have power and are the »key to the future of European countries not only as life giver but as the force that inspires men« (Mattheis 2019: 129). Over time, Lokteff's rhetoric, especially in online videos, became increasingly extreme. She began appearing as a guest on a variety of »alt right« and white nationalist podcasts and YouTube shows, and some of her own videos were banned from YouTube for offensive content (Darby 2020: 250).

Lokteff and other women influencers within the extreme far right draw on many of the same narratives that the Tea Party so successfully used to activate women's engagement. As Mattheis shows, Lokteff draws on three primary discursive strands: women's power within gendered complementarity, women's roles as homemakers and »life givers,« and white men's defense of Western civilization as a romantic gesture to white women (Mattheis 2019: 138). For the far-right, Lokteff and other women like her asserted, women are celebrated as nurturers whose men would defend them against all manner of threats to their purity—and in so doing, the far right will secure the future of white civilization.

One intriguing recruitment channel for these messages is in narratives about food. Ideals about food, cooking, and nurturing white families have long intersected with gendered understandings of proper roles as wives and mothers within the far right. Metaphors about food and gardens abound in the language used by white supremacist extremists to talk

about women and mothers. As Victoria Garland asserted in a 2017 article in the white supremacist magazine *American Renaissance*, women »have been providers in our own right, tending gardens, helping in the harvest, and preserving food for the lean season. (...) our schoolrooms were places where raw talents were cultivated (...) We have held the home front when our men were called to defend us from invaders« (Darby 2020: 143).¹⁶

Far-right women and groups give guidance to women on their household chores, including the importance of cooking pure food and maintaining their family's health as well as gardening tips, homeschooling curricula and organic recipes. The YouTuber »Blonde Butter Maker« has a series of videos sharing organic recipes for nut milk and berry preserving along with messaging about white European paganism (Miller-Idriss 2020). Women have organized bake sales to fund white-supremacist groups and offer guidance to one another about food, cooking, and natural living. Food is a connective thread that links women's worlds at home with broader communities outside the domestic sphere. Kathleen Blee describes white supremacist recruitment among women taking place through mundane activities like grocery shopping and community picnics, or during discussions about the threats from chemicals that could poison their children's food and water, which »could segue into talk of other noxious influences,« such as ideological or racial ones (Blee 2002, cited in Darby 2020: 143–4). In an analysis of one white-separatist group's discourses on gender and motherhood, healthy food and a holistic lifestyle was found to be key to a »racially pure home.« This guidance is shared through newsletters or websites with names like »Women's Frontier.« Organic, raw fruits and vegetables are particularly encouraged, contrasted with the »billion dollar jew food industry« that threatens the »health and vitality« of white people (Rogers and Litt 2004: 108–09). In these cases, hate is honed through nutritious food, lovingly prepared by white women for their families (Miller-Idriss 2020).

There is, therefore, a long history of the far right leaning on ideas about women's traditional roles as homemakers, caregivers of children, and preparers of food to socialize women into their roles and obligations within the movement. But today, such messaging bridges the extreme and the mainstream in new ways. In Indiana, a Tradwife known online as »Volkmom« who was outed as part of Identity Evropa – an identitarian movement that advocates for a white ethnostate – made national news when she was revealed to be the same person selling vegetables with her husband at a local farmers' market (Darby 2020: 227). Farmers markets in the U.S. are a domain that has traditionally been associated more with the progressive left than the far right.

Women have also mobilized deliberately and effectively for the far right and the »alt right« around food issues on social

¹⁶ To read the original post by Garland, »What Role for Women in Our Movement?,« dated October 17, 2017, see the *American Renaissance* website at <https://www.amren.com/commentary/2017/10/role-women-movement/>.

media, embedding narratives about white nationalism into discussions of cooking, homemaking and traditional marriage in a way that millennial women appear to find particularly appealing. In vlogs, blogs, and other online formats, women across the far right share organic recipes while detailing their experiences growing vegetables, practicing white European paganism, being a housewife, and homeschooling children. Importantly, the videos and messaging package motherhood, femininity and tradition as counter-cultural – a resistance to the mainstream, whose definition of feminism, such women argue, exclude the traditional choices that they make (Stern 2019: 109). »Complacency is poison, traditionalism is the antidote,«¹⁷ one Blond Butter Maker video asserts, while another video from tells viewers to remember that »You are your own authority, and you choose which direction your life goes.«¹⁸

In this way, modern far-right women use the language of empowerment and feminism to promote traditional gender roles around motherhood, homemaking, the purity of food and nourishment, and being supportive wives (or »Tradwives«), all couched within subtle or overt calls to restore and defend white civilization or preserve European heritage. The »Tradwife« movement—with origins in millennial women’s resistance to the impossibility of work-life balance, modern neoliberal societies, and capitalist systems that left them overstretched and in debt to massive student loans and childcare expenses – thus became a gateway to far-right and white supremacist content.

Food – and white women’s role in preparing it – thus turns out to be a particularly rich domain to embed messages about identity, tradition, culture, and obligations to families, households, and the homeland, as well as narratives of rebellion against an unjust state or liberal elites. But the emphasis on food isn’t limited to themes related to traditional gender roles or cooking organic food for one’s family. There are a variety of other ways that food is being used to mobilize the far right, often in gendered ways. Meat consumption, for example, has been championed by the right as a celebration of manliness and a way of rejecting the left’s calls for vegetarianism as a strategy to reduce greenhouse gases. Others on the far right have called for tofu boycotts because of the fear that soy-based estrogen would emasculate young men (Miller-Idriss 2020).

Overall, however, it is millennial far-right women who are the primary producers of nationalist content related to food, as well as its intended audience. And the new content of these efforts is designed to resonate specifically with millennial and Gen-Z women in the ways described above, as part of a broader shift to more ecological lifestyles, homestead-

ing and homeschooling, and do-it-yourself (DIY) philosophies. In this way, nationalist ideas are packaged as part of a reactionary nostalgia for a simpler, purer time that has distinctive gendered components related to women’s roles in the kitchen and as mothers. The embrace of traditional women’s roles is framed as a choice or even a reframing of feminism for the ways in which it goes against the mainstream. But this framework has caught an older generation of feminists and activists—who came of age in an era when feminism was more clearly situated as a rejection of traditional gender roles—off-guard. It simultaneously opens the door for women’s embrace of traditional roles to be co-opted by broader male supremacy movements.

MALE SUPREMACY AND IDEOLOGICAL MISOGYNISM

Male supremacy is an ideology based on the superiority of men over women. It is a belief system rooted not only in general patriarchy but in the absolute inferiority of women as a sex, and in men’s entitlement to women’s servitude (sexually, domestically, and in the care of children and household). It is an oft-unrecognized part of the far-right spectrum in the U.S., and one that only recently has begun to be more systematically integrated into understandings of far-right extremism—largely as a result of several incidents of extremist violence directed toward women in North America, at a California sorority, a Florida yoga studio, and in a Toronto vehicle-ramming attack which together killed eighteen people and injured dozens more. The perpetrators of those attacks were »incels« – involuntary celibates. Incels are filled with rage directed toward attractive women (called »Staceys«) because they are denied sex and affection given to »Chads« – the alpha males who hoard women and sex in ways that leave lesser men without. But the incel movement is not only, or even primarily about sex, as Kate Manne thoughtfully articulates: it is about »some men’s toxic sense of entitlement to have people look up to them steadfastly, with a loving gaze, admiringly – and to target and even destroy those who fail, or refuse, to do so« (Manne 2020: 18). Manne points out that this sense of entitlement is the same one shared by men responsible for domestic violence and intimate partner violence (Manne 2020: 19).

Incels overlap in significant ways with white supremacist movements, and with the widespread online trolling and harassment that first emerged in Gamergate—a 2014 online movement that launched a flood of misogynistic abuse against women in the gaming industry. Far-right provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos became a journalist at Breitbart, the far-right news network once headed by former Trump advisor Steve Bannon, after Yiannopoulos championed Gamergate and its fight against the »social justice warriors« and »snowflakes« of the overreaching liberal left. Gamergate, as has been well-documented, became a spark for an online ecosystem of young men’s disaffection and alienation, which eventually intersected with far-right and white supremacist extremist narratives (Salter 2018; Lees 2016; Urquist 2019). The contemporary far right in the U.S., including

¹⁷ The Blonde Butter Maker’s YouTube channel is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCW9mamBv3maRhnCOFXf9d4A/about>, accessed November 1, 2019. Also see analysis of her channel in Stern, Proud Boys, 101–9.

¹⁸ See TheBlondeButterMaker, »Who Is the Blonde Butter Maker?« YouTube, September 8, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YHcgnVT_1ZY.

the emergence of the »alt right« and the online ecosystem that supported it, is unimaginable without these gendered developments (Miller-Idriss 2020).

The male supremacist movement is made up of a growing and toxic mix of men's rights activists, violent incels, and ideological misogyny. As an ideology, »men's rights« dates back nearly 50 years, emerging in reaction to the women's rights movement and ultimately evolving into an organized movement in the 1990s (DiBranco 2017). Male supremacy is rooted in decades-long retrenchment of traditional patriarchy and anti-feminism, but its violent fringe, as evidenced by toxic online harassment, targeted violence, and an online »manosphere« that advocates rape and inspires extremist mass attacks, has grown dramatically in recent years (DiBranco 2017; Manne 2020, Nagle 2017). The online male supremacist community Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), for example, rates women based on their Sexual Market Value (SMV), a subjective value of sexual attractiveness assigned by men that goes down if women have too many sexual partners, among other factors (Ebner 2020: 53–55).

Notably, online spaces have been key to the reactionary online discourse and harassment that characterizes the manosphere (Nagle 2017), especially following the 2014 Gamergate saga.

Gamergate's 2014 torrent of misogynistic hate, online threats, and abuse against women in the gaming industry was readily incorporated into the »alt right« and broader attacks on politically correct culture, feminism, social justice warriors, and the liberal left's supposed efforts to indoctrinate youth (Salter 2018: 255).

4

COUNTER-MOVEMENTS AND (SUCCESSFUL) STRATEGIES

The response to far-right mobilization in the U.S., including the election of a populist nationalist candidate, was swift and far reaching. Broad coalitions of social movement groups emerged to protest Trump's election in the streets, to sit in protest of the so-called Muslim ban at airports, and to protest the separation of families at the southern border (see Roth 2019). New non-governmental organizations dedicated to progressive organizing emerged, including The Coffee Party, a group formed in reaction to the Tea Party that uses the tagline »civility, unity, integrity.« The Poor People's Campaign launched in summer 2018, with the goal of uniting economically marginalized people across demographic lines in order to push for change—launching what their website describes as »a new organism of state-based movements« and nonviolent civil disobedience.¹⁹ Other organizing within unions (Feffer 2020) and in climate and environmental groups like Extinction Rebellion rounded out coalition group protests with lobbying efforts and direct action such as traffic blockades. Existing groups and individuals who had long focused on combatting the far right also organized in new ways. The Anti-Defamation League created a new Center for Extremism in 2019, while a new consortium of academics in North America, the Consortium on Hate and Political Extremism (CHPE) began meeting virtually and in person starting in 2018.

BLACK LIVES MATTER, THE »WALL OF MOMS,« AND UNION SUPPORT

Women and LGBTQ advocates literally took to the streets to protest Trump's election, in joyous »queer dance« and »glitter gay bomb« dance parties outside a number of administration officials' and associates' homes, including most famously Mike Pence's temporary home, but also the homes of Stephen Miller, Ivanka Trump, outside Trump Tower in New York, and in demonstrations in cities like Baltimore and Philadelphia in advance of Trump visits or GOP meetings. Rainbow flags flew from dozens of homes throughout Pence's residential neighborhood, ensuring that he would see them on his daily commute. The January 2017 Women's March on Washington (WMW), colloquially referred to as

the »women's march« or the »pink pussy hat« march, drew over four million protesters to the streets across the country in what was ultimately the largest protest in U.S. history. Similar protests were held globally. Notably, the WMW was regarded both as a success for its ability to bring »new« activists to the street and was heavily criticized for lack of inclusivity, lack of diverse representation among organizers, and because the white women organizers appropriated the march's original name (the Million Woman March) from earlier, black-led marches (Traister 2017). Three women of color joined the organizing team, renamed the event and helped forge the event's ultimate success, in part by ensuring that the event pushed women to recognize how issues of women's rights are inextricable from issues of race and class – hoping for an end result that would mean a more authentically intersectional feminism (Traister 2017). The march itself turned into an organization (Women's March, Inc) with core sponsorship from major progressive organizations, including the Democratic National Committee and the National Organization for Women. But the organization itself continues to be plagued by critiques of racism, anti-Semitism, and anti-LGBTQ sentiment, and an overall lack of diversity among participants (Vesoulis 2019).

The grassroots Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement did not emerge as a response to recent far-right mobilization per se – rather, it was a direct response to generations of structural racism, ongoing white supremacy and police brutality against Black Americans. It was founded after Trayvon Martin, a 17-year old Black boy who was walking through his relatives' gated Florida community eating a bag of skittles candy, was shot by neighborhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman (Botelho 2012). Zimmerman claimed self-defense and was acquitted at trial. It took seven years for BLM's efforts to truly reach the mainstream in the summer of 2020, after the murder of George Floyd sparked protests where thousands of mostly young people across the country took to the streets for months of demonstrations, still ongoing at the time of this writing. But the seven years in-between the emergence of BLM and current protests reflected a gradual awakening on the part of white Americans, prodded along by key public figures like NFL football player Colin Kaepernick, whose 2016 decision to take a knee during the singing of the national anthem sparked national controversy. This gradual awakening was also nudged through years of public writing and analysis by Black schol-

¹⁹ See the Poor People's Campaign at <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/about/>.

ars – including Tressie McMillan Cottom, Ibram X. Kendi and Safiya Umoja Noble—who brought everyday racist experiences and the ways they are rooted in generations of inherited structural inequalities into stark relief (Cottom 2019; Kendi 2019; Noble 2018). Finally, a combination of cell-phone cameras and social media platforms had brought ordinary Black Americans' experiences of racist microaggressions, bias, and police brutality onto handheld devices everywhere in ways that made the continued experience of structural racism, bias and police brutality undeniable.

But although the BLM movement was started by three Black women organizers, it was initially primarily organized around the experiences of Black men and boys, making names like Tamir Rice, Michael Brown, Treyvon Martin, Philando Castile, and Eric Garner nationally and globally recognizable in ways that the names of Black women and girls killed by police were not – ultimately »shaping our understanding of what constitutes police brutality, where it occurs, and how to address it« (Chatelain and Asoka 2015: 54; Kelly and Glenn 2020). Within a couple of years, an internal push among BLM activists refocused attention on the impact of police brutality on Black women and others, including the poor, elderly, and LGBTQ+ people. The Say Her Name movement, founded by Kimberlé Crenshaw's African American Policy Forum in 2014 as part of the overall BLM movement, pushed for Black women to be included in the national discussion about police reform and racial justice (Kelly and Glenn 2020).

Throughout most of the BLM movement, changes were slow and primarily observable outside of government and administrative bodies. In higher education, for example, university campuses began to remove the names of racist men from buildings, including at Princeton University, where the name of former President Woodrow Wilson, whose racist ideas and policies were long well known, was removed from the School of Public and International Affairs in summer 2020 (more than six years after Princeton's Black Justice League called for the renaming).²⁰ Other universities have gradually come to make similar changes or committed to financial restitution for the descendants of former slaves they once owned, as Georgetown University did in 2019.²¹ These changes in the university sector portended the tidal shift in public opinion about the Black Lives Matter movement that took place in summer 2020, in the wake of the brutal death of George Floyd.

The 2020 racial injustice protests that erupted in the wake of George Floyd's murder at the hands of a Minneapolis police officer were sweeping, drawing a more racially diverse

cross-section of protesters than ever before and launching a national reckoning about race and structural racism. The mayor of Washington, DC had »Black Lives Matter« painted in giant letters on the street leading to the White House and had the plaza renamed Black Lives Matter Plaza, with similar street murals following across the country. Entrenched protests in places like Portland, Oregon; Washington, DC; and Seattle, Washington stretched into the fall. In Portland, a group of mostly white, suburban mothers organized the »Wall of Moms,« reaching out to a local Black-led non-profit called »Don't Shoot Portland« to help organize support at local protests. Hundreds of mothers clad in yellow t-shirts and singing lullabies appeared at the protests »to act as a literal wall,« as founder Bev Barnum described it in a media interview. By late July 2020, the group had 30,000 followers on twitter and another 14,000 on Facebook and Instagram. »A mom recognizes a bully when she sees him on the playground,« Barnum described, comparing local police officers to bullies and noting that she had not been previously politically active. But watching the protests that unraveled locally, Barnum noted, »if there was ever a primal mom rage, I felt it (...) It just woke me up« (Ann 2020).

On July 20, 2020, union members across the country signed on to a »Strike for Black Lives,« organized by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). Union members had already been mobilizing and protesting for weeks by that point, with notable examples like the Minneapolis bus drivers refusing to transport protester to jail in the city's Metro Transit buses as the George Floyd protests got underway in May 2020. As Minneapolis bus driver Adam Bruch explained on Facebook, »as a transit worker and union member I refuse to transport my class and radical youth to jail. An injury to one is an injury to us all« (Moattar 2020). The Strike for Black Lives quickly drew support from dozens of other unions and coalitions, including the American Federation of Teachers, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, the United Farm Workers, the United Food and Commercial Workers, the Amalgamated Transit Union, the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, and more.²²

DEMOCRATIC MOBILIZATION AND »SHE SHOULD RUN« CAMPAIGNS

Progressive leadership also mobilized in reaction to far-right populism in the U.S., especially in reaction to Trump's election. Groups like the National Organization for Women launched voter mobilization campaigns.²³ Nonpartisan organizations like »She Should Run« emerged, seeking to »dramatically increase the number of women considering a run for public office.«²⁴ Even children's toys reflected the chang-

²⁰ For the Princeton Black Justice League statement about the 2020 renaming, see <https://medium.com/@blackjusticeleague15/a-statement-from-the-black-justice-league-in-response-to-the-removal-of-the-wilson-name-853153b6c12f>

²¹ See coverage of Georgetown's and Princeton's decisions in The Chronicle of Higher Education, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/how-universities-can-respond-to-their-slavery-ties/>, and <https://www.princeton.edu/news/2020/06/27/president-eisgrubers-message-community-removal-woodrow-wilson-name-public-policy>.

²² Read about the Strike! for Black Lives at <https://j20strikeforblacklives.org/about/>

²³ See more about the National Organization for Women and voter mobilization at: <https://now.org/now-foundation/voter-mobilization/>.

²⁴ To learn more about She Should Run, see <https://www.sheshouldrun.org/what-we-do/>.

ing mood; in 2020, Mattel released a new line of racially-diverse, politically-themed Barbies, including a political candidate, a campaign manager, a fundraiser, and a voter doll (Shamo 2020).

Voter mobilization efforts showed success in the 2018 mid-term elections, as a record-breaking number of women won House of Representative (235 women) and Senate (22) nominations. Major increases in women of color nominees were also evident. The 2018 elections brought the first Native American and Muslim women to Congress, and saw the first Democratic woman of color elected as a state governor (in New Mexico). A record-breaking number of women (6) were candidates in the presidential primary process in 2019, and the first woman of color became the Democratic Party's Vice-Presidential nominee. Kamala Harris, Joe Biden's running-mate, is the third women in history to be the vice-presidential pick (following Geraldine Ferraro and Sarah Palin) and the fourth woman on a major party's presidential ticket (following Ferraro, Palin, and 2016 headliner Hillary Clinton).²⁵

Not all of these successes were a result of traditional Democratic party mobilization. Many were due to what the media have referred to as an »increasingly powerful progressive campaign apparatus,« made up of groups like the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, Justice Democrats, Our Revolution, and Indivisible. These groups have pushed the Democratic party to become more progressive. The Indivisible Movement, for example, emerged out of the Indivisible Guide, written by three former Democratic staffers to suggest ways to organize locally and how to lobby and put pressure on state representatives and congressmen. The movement »borrowed tactics of the Tea Party« to mobilize grassroots support (Roth 2019: 501). Justice Democrats is a federal political action committee (PAC) that solicits and uses donation money to train and support progressive candidates to run as »primary challengers against out-of-touch Democratic incumbents and organizing to hold the party accountable to our issues.«²⁶ Several progressive primary wins against decades-long Democratic incumbents—including the victories of now well-known Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressley—helped demonstrate the success of the strategy (Rakich and Conroy 2020).

LEGAL EFFORTS: CIVIL RIGHTS PROTECTIONS AND PRIVATE LITIGATION

A number of legal efforts have been part of progressive resistance to far-right mobilization over the past several years, including the blockages of state legislation on abortion described above, as well as the June 2020 US Supreme Court landmark civil rights law ruling protecting gay and transgen-

der employees from workplace discrimination. The latter's historic decision ruled that gay, lesbian, and transgender employees are protected under the 1964 Civil Rights Act in what has been described as a »huge victory for the LGBTQ community and a major loss for the Trump administration, which had sided with employers« (Totenberg 2020).

Lawsuits have also stymied the extreme far right in recent years. Taylor Dumpson, a former American University undergraduate student who received a torrent of online harassment after the founder of a neo-Nazi website, Andrew Anglin, allegedly initiated a »troll storm« against her, won a \$700,000 lawsuit in DC court in what was likely the »first time a court has ruled that racist online trolling activity can interfere with one's equal access to a public accommodation.« Dumpson's victory effectively drove Anglin and his neo-Nazi website underground (Schmidt 2019). Integrity First for America (IFA)—a nonprofit group that uses the courts to fight »back against efforts to dismantle the norms that have kept America strong,« filed a lawsuit against the organizers of the 2017 Charlottesville, VA Unite the Right march, alleging coordination and planning of racially-motivated violence. In late August 2020, a federal court ruled that the previous October 2020 trial will be postponed until the health risks of COVID-19 can be mitigated.²⁷

Other lawsuits, court orders, temporary injunctions, and more have been a steady part of counter protests and mobilization against the far right, including efforts that have blocked deportations, state legislative actions against reproductive rights, and more. Not all of these efforts have been successful, and the 2018 Supreme Court ruling upholding the Trump administration's third Muslim ban illustrated.²⁸ The 2020 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in *Little Sisters of the Poor v. Pennsylvania*, which upheld the Trump administration's expansion of the religious exemption for employers' health care coverage of contraception, described in greater detail earlier in this report, is another example. But the steady use of legal action to force political reform and protest the far right is a growing tactic, most recently evidenced in the use of federal lawsuits against law enforcement brought by protesters in Seattle (Johnson and Phillips 2020).

CONCLUSION

The gendered dimensions of far-right mobilization in the U.S. are multifaceted. On the one hand, women's support for right-wing political mobilization, populist nationalism, and Christian nationalism played a significant role in the election of Donald Trump to the U.S. Presidency in 2016. A majority of white women voted for Trump in 2016, raising questions among many observers about their motivations and rationalization of a candidate whose sexist and misogynistic behavior, hypermasculine performativity and anti-fem-

²⁵ See election and voter statistics at the Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics: <https://cawp.rutgers.edu/facts/milestones-for-women>

²⁶ As described in the »What We Do« section of the Justice Democrats website, <https://justicedemocrats.com/about/>

²⁷ Read about the landmark case and its milestones at <https://www.integrityfirstforamerica.org/our-work/case/charlottesville-case>.

²⁸ See »Timeline of the Muslim Ban« on the ACLU Washington's website, <https://aclu-wa.org/pages/timeline-muslim-ban>.

inist policy promises were abundantly clear. Women have also taken more of a leadership role in both the mobilization of the extreme far-right and white supremacist fringe, and in progressive efforts to combat the rise of the entire far-right spectrum. This chapter has only begun to scratch the surface of what is a deep and complicated story.

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IN WHOSE INTEREST?

Gender and Far-Right Politics in the United States



This report examines women's and gender politics in the U.S. in the context of rising far-right nationalist populism and extremism. The first part focuses on the gendered dimensions of populist nationalism and Trumpism in the U.S., including the years leading up to and following the 2016 election. It analyzes the role of women and gendered framings in the Tea Party, along with the impact of »family values,« masculinity narratives in evangelical Christianity, and populist frames linking anti-elitism and anti-gender studies and anti-feminism, for the ultimate success of Trump's campaign.



This section argues that white women—a majority of whom voted for Trump—were not only motivated by party loyalty but also by race, especially the protection of their own white privilege and their desire to protect the status quo that benefits them, relative to minority women. This section assesses the impact of the 2016 election on women's reproductive rights and reduced protections for LGBTQ+ people. The second part of the report situates these developments within the context of a gendered and growing extreme right in the U.S. and globally. The »Trad-wife« (traditional wife) and male supremacy movements alongside a violent »incel« (involuntary celibate) and misogynistic fringe show how issues of gender, sexuality, and toxic masculinity are key to the contemporary extreme far right.



Women themselves are playing a leading role in these developments, in part through creating »softer« entry points to far-right ideas and using the language of empowerment and feminism to promote traditional gender roles around motherhood and homemaking, couched within subtle or overt calls to restore and defend white civilization or preserve European heritage. Finally, the report turns to counter movements and strategies to combat rising far-right mobilization, with a particular eye toward gendered aspects. These include traditional Democratic party mobilization, activism from unions, grassroots movements like Black Lives Matter, and legal efforts to combat anti-abortion legislation, challenges to contraceptive care health coverage, immigration bans, and threats to protections for LGBTQ+ people.

Further information on the topic can be found here:

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