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## The Influence of Right-Wing Media on Political Racialization

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## The Influence of Right-Wing Media on Political Racialization

On January 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022, Tucker Carlson of Fox News' "Tucker Carlson Tonight" began his show with a 15-minute rant about the state of many cities in America. The introduction, which was uploaded to YouTube by Fox News, is entitled "Tucker: We're watching civilization collapse in real time." The rant is accompanied by footage of homeless individuals, mostly only showing People of Color. Carlson goes on to associate every homeless person in these videos with drug abuse, and then baselessly claims that they may even hurl insults and vulgarities at your children as they walk past. He then goes on to say that "this is what we imagined India was like. This is not Calcutta," using the incorrect, former colonial name for the Indian city of Kolkata. This is only within the first 36 seconds of Mr. Carlson's opening statement.

On December 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021, Fox News uploaded the opening of another show of theirs: "Justice with Judge Jeanine." The host, Jeanine Pirro, delivers a 6-minute-long rant of her own, which Fox News' YouTube channel has entitled "Judge Jeanine: The country is going to hell in a handbasket." She begins by saying that "this country is going to hell in a handbasket, and you know it," and then follows by saying "America today is a land of total chaos and confusion." After her opening line of attack, she then asserts that "career criminals" are roaming the streets, with video of various alleged crimes taking place in the background. Like Carlson's opening, Pirro's chosen footage primarily showcases People of Color. Later in the opening, Mrs. Pirro makes a reference to a man's car breaking down in the "wrong neighborhood" and finishes her opening by statement by disparaging the Democrats in charge of various cities while also calling for harsher penalties for lawbreakers.

These two opening statements from two of the most prominent prime time Fox News hosts lays out the issue at hand. The messaging of these hosts, supported and sanctioned by the

network itself, is full of racist stereotypes, implicit racism in the form of showing primarily People of Color as impoverished criminals, and explicit racism in the form of referring to cities in India by their colonial names as a way of mocking “political correctness.” Mr. Carlson and Mrs. Pirro’s mentioning of the “fall of society” or the “collapse of civilization” is an oft repeated line of attack from the far right, and it is propagated by Fox News hosts constantly to stir up fear and motivate political activism among their viewers.<sup>0p</sup>

Both hosts, as well as others that are not highlighted here, have an hour-long runtime to repeat the same lines of attacks: that Democrats are “Marxist idiots,” that criminals are coming to overwhelm your cities and hurt your children, that civilization is collapsing around you, that gang members are going to shoot you in your car, etc. Fox News subjects their viewers to this treatment seven days a week, and they have been doing so long before former President Donald Trump announced his campaign.

The question at hand is this: what impact does this have on Fox News’ viewers, on the Republican Party, and on American politics and racial discourse as a whole? Does simply viewing Fox News over time cause a viewer to adopt more racist views? Or does Fox News appeal to viewers who already subscribe to implicit or explicit racial biases? In either case, Fox News certainly does attract an audience that either already holds or begins to hold racial biases, so the next question is: how does this racialized swathe of voters impact American politics? Has this period of racialization of politics meaningfully impacted the politics within the Republican Party?

While a great deal of research on the topic of racial framing already exists, there is little research into whether this is a phenomenon unique to Fox News and the United States. This study will not only analyze the impact that Fox News has on the racialization of American

politics but will also seek to discern whether similar relationships exist in western Europe, which has also experienced a recent tide of right-wing populism. This study seeks to address this gap in research.

This study will be split into several different sections. The first section will be a review of the literature regarding the racialization of American politics, followed by analysis. The second section will discuss Fox News and the role that it has played in racialization. The third section will be a review of the literature regarding the state of racialization in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. The fourth section will discuss the role that these three nations' respective Fox News counterparts have played in racialization. The fifth section will identify answers to the research questions by discussing comparisons between the United States and the three European nations. The sixth and final section will briefly discuss potential solutions for the issue of political racialization in the United States.

The primary hypothesis is that viewing Fox News over an extended period causes viewers to adopt a more racialized view of politics. The secondary hypothesis is that this phenomenon is mostly unique to Fox News and the United States, and that a similar relationship will not exist between right-wing media and the racialization of politics in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. This is probably due to the difference in tactics employed by American and European right-wing media companies, with the American right-wing news companies employing an effective mix of apocalyptic hyperbole, associating People of Color with crime and poverty, and the reinforcement of a warrior mentality among their viewers. These three components, and specifically the warrior mentality, are the causal mechanisms that will be examined in this study.

## **Literature Review**

The primary phenomenon that we seek to analyze is the link between right-wing news media in America and its impact on the racialization of American politics, and specifically on its impact on the racialization of the political discourse within the Republican Party. To achieve this level of analysis, sources related to the many specific aspects of racialization will be reviewed. These axes include American right-wing media and racism, racism and populism in America and its impacts on policy preferences, and the rise of Fox News.

To address the secondary hypothesis, the conclusions drawn from the review of these sources will be compared to conclusions drawn from sources pertaining to the same issue of racialization in three European countries chosen for their relative comparability to contemporary American politics. These countries are the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. In the United Kingdom, Fox News will be compared to its most similar British counterparts, the myriad of British right-wing tabloids, as Britain lacks a prominent right-wing cable news station. Likewise, the Republican Party will be compared to both the prominent Conservative Party as well as the minor Reform UK party. In France, Fox News will be compared to CNews, and the Republican Party will be compared to the increasingly prominent far-right party Rassemblement National (RN). Finally, in Germany, Fox News will be compared to the Axel Springer media publication “Bild”, and the Republican Party will be compared to the somewhat prominent Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party.

## I

The first body of literature to be reviewed will be the sources on American media framing and the racialization of politics.

Before properly beginning, the consensus on news framing and its impact on viewers' attitudes must be established. A 1982 study entitled "Experimental Demonstrations of the 'Not-So-Minimal' Consequences of Television News Programs" conducted by Shanto Iyengar, Mark Peters and Donald Kinder lays out that the initial findings from the WWII era regarding propaganda's persuasion power through the media was insufficient (1982). The authors then go on to say that, while reassuring, the conclusion of the 1940s era research into the topic of minimal effects was not necessarily correct. Eventually, focus shifted to the possibility that the media decides "what the public takes to be important" (Iyengar, et al. 1982, 848).

The conclusions of the study reaffirm the hypothesis of Iyengar, et al. that the media can dramatically influence the conversation in American politics (Iyengar, et al. 1982). Specifically, the authors mark the media's ability to control what "viewers take seriously" through agenda setting and priming (Iyengar, et al. 1982, 855). Before discussing the political implications, Iyengar, et al. assert that "When news presentations develop priorities, even if rather subtle ones as in our experiment, viewers' beliefs are affected" (Iyengar, et al. 1982, 855). The final conclusion states that, while it is likely that these acts of agenda setting and priming are not intentional, they have vast impacts on the state of politics in the United States (Iyengar, et al. 1982).

This piece was written in a period with considerably less political polarization overall, and a mainstream media more concerned with presenting news objectively. If the media during this era possessed the ability to shape discourse through framing, then the explicit, intentional framing in the modern partisan news era might have an even more substantial impact. With the study above, and its conclusions on the impact of priming in mind, a review of the literature can begin.

The first study was conducted by John Sonnet, Kirk Johnson, and Mark Dolan in 2015, entitled “Priming Implicit Racism in Television News: Visual and Verbal Limitations on Diversity.” Sonnett, et al. examined implicit racial cues across broadcasts from CNN, Fox, and CBS’ coverage of Hurricane Katrina. Sonnett, et al. examining racial cues, stereotypes, and how the race of the reporter influenced the delivery of racial cues. Sonnett, et al. combined the audio/visual cues with their knowledge of interdisciplinary understandings of racism. Sonnett found that extensive racial cue delivery exists in the context of reaffirming negative African American stereotypes, even when the reporter was Black, but that the medium through which these cues are delivered were “color-blind.” The stories themselves had no explicit or intentional racial component, but when the subtext is analyzed, they do indeed have a racialized component (Sonnet et al. 2015).

The first example that Sonnet, et al. provide is the now-well known comparison of coverage directly following Katrina’s devastation. The authors highlight the specific comparisons between captions under pictures of survivors seeking food, with the White survivor’s actions being labeled as “finding” food, and the Black survivor’s actions being labeled as “looting” (Sonnet, et al. 2015, 329). These reports of Black survivors “looting” were later, by-and-large, proven to be false (Sonnet, et al. 2015). Sonnet, et al. posit that these negative stereotypes sometimes seeped into the post-Katrina reporting unintentionally. The authors assert that White people were overrepresented in managerial and reporting roles in the broadcast networks examined and theorized that White reporters may have been uncomfortable with reporting on a disaster in a region they were not familiar with and that impacted people that they were not familiar with (Sonnet, et al. 2015). However, it does not matter if stereotyping is

intentional or unintentional. It still reproduces what Sonnet, et al. call “racial propaganda,” reinforcing racial stereotypes in the viewer (Sonnet, et al. 2015, 330).

Srividya Ramasubramanian and Amanda Martinez’s 2016 study, “News Framing of Obama, Racialized Scrutiny, and Symbolic Racism,” likewise deals with media framing and the racialization that occurs in the process, though it also delves into symbolic racism.

Ramasubramanian and Martinez define symbolic racism as “beliefs that racial minorities have gained undeserved advantage and are no longer discriminated against.” Ramasubramanian’s study primarily focused on how negative versus positive news coverage of President Obama influenced white participants’ symbolically racist beliefs. Using path analysis, the study finds that when primed by specifically selected negative news coverage of President Obama, white participants are likely to react by activating underlying biases towards Black people as a whole (Ramasubramanian and Martinez 2016). This was shown through white people’s shifting answers on a range of issues, some of which were not even related to President Obama, following the priming of the participants with hostile news coverage of President Obama (Ramasubramanian and Martinez 2016).

While the two previous studies focus solely on framing and racial attitudes regardless of partisanship, Marisa Abrajano, Zoltan Hajnal, and Hans Hassel’s 2017 study, “Media Framing and Partisan Identity: The Case of Immigration Coverage and White Macropartisanship,” focuses explicitly on partisanship, using framing on the racialized issue of immigration as the catalyst. Abrajano, et al. assert that little research has been done on real-world framing and its influence on partisanship, while saying that substantial lab research has been done on this same topic. The study by Abrajano, et al. seeks to rectify this and focuses solely on news reports from the New York Times regarding immigration spanning 1980-2011, as opposed to a lab-controlled



experiment. Abrajano, et al. assert that framing surrounding immigration is largely negative, and conclude that these negative articles are associated with a shift towards the Republican Party among white readers. Abrajano, et al. then go on to explain that this can carry significant implications into the balance of power in American electoral politics (Abrajano, et al. 2017).

Abrajano, et al. justify their selection of the New York Times specifically because it is a “liberal” publication. The authors posit that, if even the New York Times has fallen into the cycle of negative framing regarding immigration, then certainly so too have conservative publications (Abrajano, et al. 2017). This means that Fox News’ intentional framing is significantly more likely to have an impact on White attitudes towards immigration. While the New York Times certainly has many negative stories regarding immigration, they also make an effort to balance their reporting—Fox News does not. When taken in conjunction with Iyengar, et al.’s study, Fox News’ explicit framing power becomes apparent.

The difference between Fox News’ reporting on immigration and the New York Times’ is that Fox News tells its viewers what to think about an issue instead of just framing the issue in a negative light. Fox News does this through the fusion of standard framing and apocalyptic framing. To hear Fox’s primetime hosts tell it, every decision is life or death. If the “correct” choice is not made, it will lead to the downfall of western civilization. This use of apocalyptic hyperbole is the difference between the New York Times’ negative racial framing and Fox News’ negative racial framing.

Abrajano, et al. assert that studies have shown framing can influence decision making, but insufficient studies have been conducted to prove if this only impacts the short-term (2017, 6). Abrajano, et al. identify two primary ways in which framing can impact decision making and beliefs. First, Abrajano, et al. explain how framing can “alter the way we see an issue by

privileging one aspect of a problem over another or altering the group imagery associated with an issue” (Abrajano, et al 2017, 7). The second category of framing is through “altering the tone of coverage,” which means that the tone or attitude surrounding coverage of an issue can alter a viewer’s perception of said issue (Abrajano, et al 2017, 7).

After explaining the models of media framing, Abrajano, et al. go on to explain why immigration specifically has proven to be an issue rife with racialized framing. Immigration reporting has been “one-sided and negative,” with references to an “immigrant threat” and general “cultural decline” associated with illegal immigration (Abrajano, et al 2017, 9). Given that this appears to be a mostly uniform phenomenon, the authors assert that it has had a nationwide effect on not only racializing issues, but also on encouraging the support of conservative policy proposals (Abrajano, et al 2017). Abrajano, et al. specifically credit the near-constant negative reporting on immigration as the reason why the issue became so salient in the first place (2017). The authors break down the tone of immigration-related articles as being 48.9% negative, 39% neutral, and only 12.1% positive (Abrajano, et al 2017, 14). As to which immigration groups were being reported on, Abrajano, et al. found that 65.5% of all articles mentioned Latinos as immigrants, while 26.3% reported on immigrants from Asian countries, and the remainder reported on immigrants from Europe and the Middle East (Abrajano, et al 2017, 14).

The conclusion of the study indicates that there is a clear “Latino threat narrative” across three decades of reporting in the New York Times, and that this fuels fears within the White voting population, leading to a push in favor of the Republican Party’s immigration policies as a result (Abrajano, et al 2017).

Jackie Hogan and Kristin Haltinner's 2015 study entitled "Floods, Invaders, and Parasites: Immigration Threat Narratives and Right-Wing Populism in the USA, UK and Australia" provides supplementary information regarding the impact of framing immigration. Hogan and Haltinner's study supplements the Abrajano, et al. study by marking the potential dangers of a weaponized immigration narrative. Hogan and Haltinner conclude that there appears to be a concerted effort on the part of far-right movements in America, such as the TEA Party and the Minutemen Civil Defense Corps, to use right-wing immigration narratives to rally support for their causes (Hogan and Haltinner 2015).

In addition to this, the authors hypothesize that there appears to be an emerging "playbook" among right-wing populist groups and their counterparts in Europe to attract support to their causes by means of latching onto right-wing immigration narratives (Hogan and Haltinner 2015). This development is notable given the disparities between American and European right-wing media power. The emergence of an informal "playbook" implies that the contemporary European far-right seeks to follow more-or-less the same path as the American far-right. It also implies that the European far-right is currently missing a component that the American far-right possesses. This missing component is likely one of the three core ways that Fox News racializes their content. This phenomenon not only links the racialized framing of media to a rise in right-wing populist attitudes, but it also links the occurrence of this in America to these occurrences in other European countries, proving a possible shared independent variable of media framing.

A review of the literature pertaining to media framing and racialization has proven a reasonably strong connection between the framing of news stories and the increasingly racialized political scene in the United States of America. Every study above concluded, to varying

degrees, that the media exacerbates the racialization of politics using framing and symbolic cues. There was a lack of focus on explicitly right-wing media sources, with even Abrajano, et al.'s study focusing on the New York Times, a relatively liberal publication, which poses a potential gap in our understanding of the issue of right-wing media's impact on racialization, but it proves a general trend, nonetheless.

While the literature review has concluded that framing *in general* influences racialization, there has yet to be a clear answer to the question of Fox News' role in the phenomenon specifically. To answer these questions, a closer look must be taken into the role of right-wing media in western European nations. There is a clear disparity of formal power between the American and European far right. Even when differences in political culture and institutions are considered, the consolidation of the far-right in America within the Republican Party is notable. The hypothesized reason for this is the extent to which far-right media companies influence political discourse. This comparison has not been done before on a notable scale and could provide necessary context into the influence of right-wing media on the racialization of political discourse.

## II

The next body of literature to be reviewed will be the sources pertaining to racism and populism's impact on public policy preferences in the United States.

A study carried out by Jack Glaser, Katherine Spencer, and Amanda Charbonneau in 2014 entitled "Racial Bias and Public Policy" deals with the impact of racial biases on public policy attitudes. The study combines the tendencies of psychology, political science, and sociology to analyze the question. Glaser, et al. use education policy, employment policy,

immigration policy, healthcare policy, political representation, and criminal justice policy as “sample policy domains” where race and public opinion intersect (Glaser, et al. 2014, 89). Throughout the study, the psychological roots of racism and racial attitudes in general are explained. This is combined with what is known about public policy to conduct this study.

Glaser, et al. note that in several policy domains, race matters, and concludes that racial disparities exist in all these domains (Glaser, et al. 2014). The study also concludes that race impacts “policing decisions” (Glaser, et al. 2014, 91). These conclusions reinforce the concept of institutionalized racism and provide psychological and sociological phenomena as potential reinforcers of the system.

The Glaser, et al. study ultimately concludes that, while American history consists of steps forward with regards to racial policy, that complacency is ill-advised (Glaser, et al 2014). The conclusion notes that racial attitudes have a deep, significant, and long-lasting impact on public opinion. It is even stated that simply knowing about a stereotype is enough to lead to discrimination towards a minority group. The study concludes with an appeal to all Americans: “merely not intending to discriminate is insufficient” (Glaser, et al 2014, 92).

While Glaser’s study focuses on race and public policy in general, Michael Tesler’s 2012 study, “The Spillover of Racialization into Health Care: How President Obama Polarized Public Opinion by Racial Attitudes and Race,” seeks to measure the impact that the racialization of healthcare policy under President Obama has had on support for certain healthcare policy proposals. For example, Tesler finds that the racial gap in support of healthcare expansion is far larger when the proposed healthcare plan is attributed to President Obama, as opposed to President Clinton’s plan in the early-to-mid nineties (Tesler 2012).

Tesler's study concludes that the racialization of public opinion surrounding healthcare has sweeping implications, up to and including the potential for the racialization of everything (Tesler 2012). However, Tesler cautions jumping to this conclusion. For one, the circumstances surrounding Obama's influence on the racialization of healthcare policy are difficult to replicate. For another, Obama is no longer an active polarizing force, rendering some of these points moot. A third point is Tesler's noting of instability in American public opinion surrounding healthcare prior to the 2009-era debates (Tesler 2012).

"More Diverse Yet Less Tolerant? How the Increasingly Diverse Racial Landscape Affects White Americans' Racial Attitudes" is a 2014 study conducted by Maureen Craig and Jennifer Richeson. This study seeks to address how exposure to the information that America is quickly diversifying impacts White Americans' racial attitudes. The United States of America is expected to achieve majority-minority status by mid-century (Craig and Richeson 2014). This fact positions itself as a threat to White hegemony over American politics, and as such, it can be theorized that exposure to this information could cause the development of negative racial attitudes by White people towards ethnic minorities, as posited by Craig and Richeson (Craig and Richeson 2014).

To compile data, Craig and Richeson utilized three case studies in which they analyzed White responses to the information that America will become a majority-minority nation in the coming decades (Craig and Richeson 2014, 3, 4, 6). The studies resulted in expected results of intensifying racial biases and an increase in white anxiety (Craig and Richeson 2014, 3, 4, 5, 7).

The results of Craig and Richeson's study are exactly as such: that exposing White people to information regarding the soon-to-be majority-minority status of our nation prompts whites to close ranks and to reaffirm pro-white/anti-minority beliefs and opinions (Craig and

Richeson 2014). Craig and Richeson caution that this could spell potential disaster for America, as the diversifying of America does not seem to imply a richer culture, but instead one marred by intergroup rivalries as White people desperately attempt to retain political control (Craig and Richeson 2014).

The final study to be noted in regards to general racism and populism in the United States is the one conducted by William Cornell in 2018 entitled “If It Is Not for All, It Is Not for Us: Reflections on Racism, Nationalism, and Populism in the United States.” Cornell’s study focuses on the rise of populism and nationalism in America and its connections to racial attitudes.

Cornell acknowledges that the roots of racism and ethnic fears run deep and are immensely complicated (Cornell 2018). Cornell goes on to explain the intricate web of sociological, psychological, and group psychological processes that feed into the rise of racism, nationalism, and populism. Cornell also includes pieces of his own record of attempts to reconcile and work through these differences within his own community. The overall theme of the study is to pay attention to the multiple perspectives that feed into the overarching structure of racism, and its influence on the rise of populism and nationalism in the United States.

Cornell notes that the perceived loss of advantage or privilege felt by working-class White people in America mobilizes “rage” (Cornell 2018, 6). He goes on to connect these feelings to support for former President Donald Trump and his brand of right-wing populism, and even connects similar sentiments to the far-right populist movements in Europe (Cornell 2018). These conclusions lend support to the overarching theory that racialized attitudes produce an increasingly powerful right-wing populist movement in America.

When taken in full, the literature review sections produce a clearer picture of the impact of media reporting on racial attitudes. In addition, this newly racialized point of view in turn empowers right-wing nationalist-populist movements in the United States of America. The body of literature above shows gaps in its linkage between these two phenomena, but they lay out the tools that can be used to identify a connection.

### III

The next body of literature to be reviewed will be the sources on the rise of Fox News, the most prominent right-wing news source in America.

The first source to be analyzed is Jeffrey P. Jones' 2012 piece entitled "Fox News and the Performance of Ideology." Jones begins by recounting the several failures of Roger Ailes before founding Fox News (Jones 2012). Jones explains Ailes' desire to "feature overtly ideological programing" on his many ventures, failing in every instance except for the creation of Fox News in 1996 (Jones 2012, 178). He stocked this newly created media channel with what Jones describes as "star power," "ideology," and "the right format" to finally achieve his goal of creating a successful, conservative media conglomerate (Jones 2012, 178). Jones identifies Fox's meteoric rise as being caused by its presentation of news through an overtly conservative lens while maintaining slogans that made it appear unbiased (Jones 2012).

Jones highlights that "Fox's performance of ideology cannot be separated from their occurrence of news" as "both ... are crucial in attracting and retaining audiences." Jones also asserts that Fox uses the genre of "news" as cover from accusations of propaganda (Jones 2012). Fox News arose in an era when cable companies were competing with one another, as opposed to the bygone network era that featured a more unified message than the modern era when it



came to news reporting. This change in market dynamics prompted cable news networks to craft their own aesthetics and communities to retain audiences (Jones 2012). According to Jones, Fox's method of aesthetic-crafting and community building was rooted not in the audience-speaker interaction of the talk show format, but in ideological coherence and communication (180). Jones also places an emphasis on the creation and display of symbols to their audience and asserts that Fox does this to such a degree that it not only retains their audience but isolates them and protects them from counter persuasion (Jones 2012). For example, the message conveyed to Fox's viewership is that they are "warriors" fighting for a noble cause and against injustice. This portrayal of liberal politicians, anti-racist views, and anyone opposed to the Fox narrative cements in the viewers' mind that these politicians and ideologies are enemies. The symbolic role of Fox's ideology as "noble" and their opponent's ideology as "enemy" discourages the viewer from seeking contradictory information and viewpoints.

Jones' main point is that this aesthetic performance of patriotic imagery, tying the viewer to a fight for a "noble cause," etc., links viewers to the network, reinforcing both the viewers ideological beliefs as well as Fox News' ideological performance. Jones mentions that Fox achieves this by linking the viewership to an "ongoing struggle" between Fox and the conservative movement's chosen enemies (Jones 2012, 183). Jones closes with a statement proclaiming that "Fox has demonstrated that news production is aimed not at representing truth but at representing audiences it can assemble around its ideological renderings of 'truth'" (Jones 2012, 184).

At its core, Fox News is an inherently ideological, right-wing news source. While Jones focuses less on the racialization impact Fox News can have, Fox News uses the same methods to promote polarization around race to promote the rise of nationalist-populist policy positions

within the Republican Party. The network achieves this through three primary avenues: the explicit racialization of crime and poverty, apocalyptic hyperbole, and linking the viewer to a broader “noble” cause, i.e., the creation of a “warrior mentality.”

The explicit racialization of crime and poverty relates to the explicit and symbolic association between People of Color and various situations commonly associated with poverty and criminality. Fox News is infamous for showing footage of Black people while speaking about crime to signal to the viewer that the two variables are related.<sup>1 2</sup> Hyperbole is a broad criterion, but for the purpose of analysis it is to mean the exaggeration of events that benefit Fox’s narrative. In America, these are the claims of the imminent downfall of society at the hands of Fox News’ political enemies, while in Europe this would be the claim that all Muslim immigrants seek to sexually assault women. The warrior mentality tactic is the explicit effort to link the viewer to a broader cause—it is the creation of an intensely powerful call to action that inflates the viewer’s status as a hero against the political enemies of the right.

When taken in full, the above bodies of literature provide insight into the questions that were asked at the start of the paper: what impact does American news media have on the racialization of politics?

All the available evidence suggests that the media has a significant impact on the racialization of American politics. Drawing on Jones’ piece regarding the rise of Fox news in

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<sup>1</sup> Elliott Ash and Michael Poyker found that regularly viewing Fox News had an impact on the length of criminal sentences from 2005-2017. The authors sought to discover the impact that viewing partisan news can have on supposedly apolitical judges. Ash and Poyker concluded that Fox News viewership accompanies harsher sentences for drug related crimes in general, and even more so when the defendant is Black. The authors also conclude that this effect only impacts elected judges, not appointed judges. This phenomenon provides support for the hypothesis that the association of People of Color with criminality can impact a viewer’s (and voters’) policy preferences.

<sup>2</sup> Tucker Carlson’s January 18, 2022 opening statement shows footage of homeless People of Color when discussing crime, as does Jeanine Pirro’s December 12, 2021 opening statement.

conjunction with the examples provided at the beginning of this essay, it becomes clear the power that Fox News wields. Our current understanding is that the media influences discourse through agenda setting. This is not only proven by Iyengar, et al.'s study, but by nearly every study analyzed in the first portion of the literature review. The second body of literature analyzed how both implicit and explicit racial biases not only impact policy preferences but that they can do so dramatically. Many studies reviewed in this section also include a component of media influence, furthering the connection between the two variables.

The synthesis of these three bodies of literature suggests that long-term viewing of Fox News can not only impact the racialization of political discourse, but that it can do so dramatically. Fox News achieves this not only through agenda setting and framing, but also through symbolism that links the viewer to the host and network. The language Fox News hosts use serves to make the viewer feel scared or threatened by the chosen enemies of Fox News, but it also has the effect of activating racial biases within the viewer. When Jeanine Pirro says that American civilization is "collapsing," not only does it signal to the viewer that the demise of the world that they know is imminent, but it does so in a way that encourages the viewer to associate this collapse with a variety of non-white racial groups. And when Tucker Carlson refers to Kolkata as Calcutta, he signals to the viewer that the olden days are desirable when compared to the modern situation. Through symbolic racism, Fox News sets the agenda and frames stories through a racial lens, and in turn, this racializes American politics.

While the literature review above indicates that agenda setting and framing influences racialization, there has yet to be a clear answer to the question of Fox News' role in the phenomenon specifically. Is Fox News *the* racializing factor? Is Fox News producing a greater or more significant effect than right-wing media organizations in other countries? To answer these

questions, the causal mechanism behind Fox News' impact must be identified through comparison with other countries' right-wing media environments. This comparison has not been done before on a notable scale and could provide necessary context into the influence of right-wing media on the racialization of political discourse in the United States, and what the future of politics in peer western European countries might look like.

### **International Comparisons**

This paper will focus on counterparts to the American right-wing news media in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany.

First, why the United Kingdom, France, and Germany? The United States, Britain, France, and Germany are all highly influential nations, are predominately white, and are all members of the G7, NATO, and other important international institutions. The United States, Britain, and France are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council as well. These important factors mean that these four nations are bound together and have been since at least the end of World War II. The primary reason for case selection is that all four nations have also experienced a surge in far-right populism over the last twelve years.

Despite their significant similarities, these nations are, of course, not the same. In America, most racial animosity is directed towards Black people, even though the White majority directs considerable animosity towards other marginalized groups including Latinx people and Muslims.<sup>3</sup> In the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, the primary target of racial animosity are Muslim immigrants and refugees from the Middle East, as well as a myriad of

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<sup>3</sup> A 2019 study conducted by Pew Research found, among other things, that Black people in America experienced several different types of racism or discrimination at rates higher than other minorities. Examples of these types of discrimination are people acting suspicious of them, unfair police encounters, being treated as though they were less smart than other races, etc.

European ethnic minorities such as the Romani people and Jewish people. Prejudice and racism in every instance are deplorable, and highlighting these differences is not an attempt to weigh any sole group's experiences against another. Instead, the highlighting of these differences serves to make the point that the nature and methods of political racialization will be different depending on the nation in which it occurs.

The four nations also have substantially different forms of government. America's reliance on the first past the post voting method denies the American political system an advantage enjoyed by the United Kingdom, France, and Germany. The lack of a developed multi-party system created by the utilization of first past the post makes it so that the United States does not have permanent minor parties to absorb fringe ideologies, whereas the three western European nations in question all enjoy permanent minor parties to varying extents. Far from the only significant difference in political culture, the lack of a developed multi-party system is the most important to understand.

Another key difference between the United States and their western European counterparts is the state of independent media in Britain, France, and Germany. While all three European examples have a free and fair press, the nature of media in these nations differs from the nature of media in the United States. Fox News completely dominates the right-wing media market in the United States, with the company's only notable competitors being One America News and Newsmax. In fact, Fox News not only dominates the right-wing sphere, but it is a powerful player in the overall media market. In France and Germany, the right-wing cable market is limited in scope, and in the United Kingdom, right-wing media personalities have taken more to acting through the BBC than attempting to go it alone. Even France's CNews, the prominent right-wing cable network that will be discussed next, lacks the sheer control of the

media market that Fox News enjoys in the United States. These differences create a massive issue for European right-wing news sources seeking to racialize political rhetoric.

The influence of Fox News most powerfully explains the rising racialization of American political discourse. This is substantiated by the collection of literature that has already been reviewed and analyzed. Fox News has been proven to amplify the already potent framing power of news media by using a threefold approach of the association of People of Color with crime and poverty, apocalyptic hyperbole in their messaging, and in the creation of a warrior mentality among their viewers. It is possible that America's unique relationship with race is a factor as well. However, this is only part of the hypothesis. The secondary hypothesis seeks to compare Fox News' impact in the United States to other right-wing news outlets in western Europe's impact on their respective countries. To that end, I hypothesize that there will be an effect, albeit a muted one due to the lack of a right-wing media to the scale of Fox News in these nations.

The source for analyzing CNews' impact on the rise of right-wing populism in France comes from Armiyaou Gombo Abdoul-Bagui's 2021 piece entitled "Media and the Rise of Right-Wing Populism: Gauging the Role of CNews in Promoting Far-Right Ideology in France." Abdoul-Bagui begins by hypothesizing that the media plays a crucial role in the rise of right-wing populism (Abdoul-Bagui 2021, 753). Abdoul-Bagui states that the "proliferation of information" on social media has forced media companies to adopt new strategies, including empowering their editorial lines. The author then goes on to assert that CNews' adoption of this new strategy may influence the success of far-right parties such as RN in French elections (Abdoul-Bagui 2021). Abdoul-Bagui identifies CNews as "the primary tool of communication for the far-right ... movements in France" (Abdoul-Bagui 2021, 758) and then proceeds to

hypothesize that CNews' elevation of prominent far-right columnist Eric Zemmour is a "political strategy to increase the far-right vote" in future French elections (Abdoul-Bagui 2021, 759).

Abdoul-Bagui identifies that CNews' editorial lineup has changed significantly in the past decade, replacing columnists with more radicalized members (Abdoul-Bagui 2021). Abdoul-Bagui also identifies that Zemmour produces rhetoric that stigmatizes minority groups and opposing political elites, as well as appealing to conspiracy theories. This trajectory reminds the author of the rise of Fox News in the United States (Abdoul-Bagui 2021). Much like Fox News, Abdoul-Bagui asserts that CNews attempts to bind their audience to themselves by expressing far-right ideological sentiments. Abdoul-Bagui also notes that outgroup exclusion is a crucial component of CNews rhetoric (Abdoul-Bagui 2021). Finally, Abdoul-Bagui concludes that their research has proven "proximity" between the French far-right's rise in prominence and in CNews' lurch to the right, and that in general the news station, through its editorial line, promotes the same racialized right-wing rhetoric promoted by America's right-wing populists (Abdoul-Bagui 2021). However, Abdoul-Bagui notes that it is unclear as to whether CNews and French right-wing media has caused the rise of the far-right, or if the rise of the far-right has caused the rise in prominence of CNews (Abdoul-Bagui 2021).

Abdoul-Bagui's study presents a tentative two-fold conclusion: that the lack of a right-wing news source at the prominence level of Fox News has produced somewhat less racialization in French politics, and the rise of CNews has indicated a *recent* rise of polarization in French politics, made evident by the increased vote share of racialized parties like Rassemblement National. These two conclusions lend credence to the fact that a hegemonic right-wing media company racializes political discourse within a country. Another factor to consider is that while

Fox News was founded by a former Republican operative with the purpose of expanding the party's influence, CNews was not.

An important comparison is the empowerment of the editorial lineup at CNews as an attempt to resemble Fox News. While Fox News has long empowered their primetime editorialists like Tucker Carlson and Jeanine Pirro, CNews has only done so recently. Abdoul-Bagui's assertion that CNews has done this explicitly to increase the vote share of far-right parties is also reminiscent of Fox News' strategy in the United States. This type of behavior was alluded to earlier through Hogan and Haltinner's study identifying an emerging "playbook" of the international far right.

Moving beyond France, the 2018 study entitled "How racism discourse can mobilize right-wing populism: The construction of identity and alliance in reactions to UKIP's Brexit 'Breaking Point' campaign" conducted by Kevin Durrheim, et al. focuses on framing and the rise of the far-right in the United Kingdom. The study explicitly mentions that it studies the "interactional functions of racism discourse" in relation to "mobilizing support for right-wing populism" (Durrheim, et al 2018, 1). Durrheim, et al. refer to Nigel Farage's "Breaking Point" poster, at one point, as "racist propaganda" (Durrheim, et al 2018, 393), going on to list several quotes of critics in the media expressing similar sentiments (Durrheim, et al 2018). Durrheim, et al. conclude that the two "principal metaphors" with which we can describe the effects of racist propaganda are spreading "contagion," and that it operates on the "grounds of irrationality" (Durrheim, et al 2018, 395). Crucially, the authors point out that Farage's defense of these claims of racism was based neither in rejecting or accepting that the poster was racist, instead opting to say that they were an "accurate representation" of immigration and that the creation of the



posters was a “reasonable response” to the state of immigration in the United Kingdom (Durrheim, et al 2018, 396).

Durrheim, et al. provide for us a wonderful conclusion, where they note that “controversially racist statements may be mobilizing,” crediting this fact with the resurgence of right-wing populism in Europe and in America. The authors essentially argue that leaders of these right-populist movements are aware of the viral potential of these statements and make them with the intention of gaining support (Durrheim, et al 2018). With this in mind, Durrheim, et al. end their study with the quote: “The warning from our work is that critical scholars and other elites do well to reflect on how their discourse as well as their investments can both support or undermine the struggles with which they identify” (Durrheim, et al 2018, 403).

The above study does not name an individual British right-wing news company; however, it does discuss the tactics through which right-wing figures racialize politics within the United Kingdom. Through various tabloid media sources in the United Kingdom, right-wing politicians spout *hyperbole* to attract attention. This tactic occurs in the United States as well, namely on Fox News’ primetime shows. The assertion by Nigel Farage that Muslim immigrants in the United Kingdom are bringing crime and hardship, and then the rebuttal to criticism of the comment that it is a fair and “accurate” representation of the situation, is the exact same tactic used by Fox News hosts.

While not originating from a news media outlet, Farage’s Breaking Point poster prompted a conversation in British politics that, according to a statement made by Farage on a BBC broadcast<sup>4</sup>, “transformed politics” (BBC, 2019). Here, Farage repeated his claim that his

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<sup>4</sup> While generally regarded as either “neutral” or “much more favorable to the left” according to a 2020-2021 YouGov poll, right-wing and far-right politicians still seek to make their case on BBC talk shows.

poster discussed “the truth” and continued to defend his actions as being relevant at the time.

This media dynamic is different than the one here in America, with the BBC committing itself to impartiality, and by-and-large sticking to this principle. However, Farage’s presence on the set of this news broadcast is a way through which racialized politics uses the British media system to disseminate itself. This indicates that a major difference between the ways in which racialized rhetoric spreads in America and in the United Kingdom is that in the United Kingdom there is no independent right-wing cable outlet.

Instead of an independent cable outlet, the British right-wing relies on a network of tabloids and newspapers. Monish Bhatia analyzes the ways in which these tabloids influence racialization in the United Kingdom in the 2018 study “Social death: The (white) racial framing of the Calais ‘jungle’ and ‘illegal’ migrants in the British tabloids and right-wing press.” Bhatia identifies the change in rhetoric surrounding Middle Easterners fleeing conflict and economic hardship in their region from “refugees” to “illegal immigrants” (Bhatia 2018, 194). The Telegraph, a major British tabloid, published a 2016 article titled “7,000 illegal immigrants smuggled into Britain on ferries.” This change in language implies a change in rhetoric surrounding the issue from discussing a humanitarian issue into a threat narrative (Bhatia 2018). Importantly, the Telegraph article cites the “7,000” statistic to build credibility, but then goes on to assume that several “illegal immigrants” slip under the radar (Bhatia 2018). Bhatia describes this “bogeyman” in a similar manner to the apocalyptic hyperbole utilized by Fox News. The bogeyman that Bhatia describes is a “terrifying racialised figure that cannot be controlled, who could be anywhere and everywhere, like a ghostly presence, and induces nightmares, and terror about the future” (Bhatia 2018, 195). This is nearly identical to the apocalyptic hyperbole tactic.

Bhatia goes on to associate the deliberate use of the term “illegal” with racialization in of itself (Bhatia 2018). The author states that, to be “illegal,” migrants must be inherently racialized, and that to mark these migrants as “illegal” is to signal that they are undeserving of sympathy or compassion (Bhatia 2018). Bhatia identifies that “illegal” does not imply statutory illegality, but rather a social illegality propagated by opponents (Bhatia 2018). Bhatia then explicitly links the assignment of the status of “illegal” to the role of “white elites and media” (Bhatia 2018, 196). Bhatia concludes the section by declaring the “illegal” migrants “socially dead” (Bhatia 2018, 199).

Bhatia’s study provides significant insight into the role played by right-wing British newspapers. The similarities in rhetoric between the tabloids like the *Telegraph* and America’s Fox News are mostly concentrated in the creation of bogeyman and the employment of apocalyptic hyperbole. Bhatia’s study’s most significant contribution to our understanding of the role British media plays in racialization is the identification of the tabloids’ bestowing of the status of “illegal” onto migrants. This process racializes this group of people and encourages their consumers to view them in that same light, despite their status not being statutorily illegal. This is similar to Fox News’ association of People of Color with crime and poverty through visual association.

There exists a lack of English sources regarding Bild’s role in Germany’s far right, however, there does exist a handful of sources that highlight Bild’s tactics of racialization. One such source is Aleksandra Lewicki and Yasemin Shooman’s 2019 study entitled “Building a new nation: anti-Muslim racism in post-unification Germany.” The study begins by seeking to answer the broader question of why anti-Muslim racism is so virulent in post-unification Germany

(Lewicki and Shooman 2019). While the overall study is not relevant as a source for comparison between America and Germany's media environment, the inclusion of a Bild piece is.

According to the authors, in 2017, an election year in Germany, then-Minister of the Interior Thomas de Maizière (CDU) penned an opinion piece in Bild am Sonntag. Bild am Sonntag is described by the authors as "the major German tabloid" (Lewicki and Shooman 2019, 32). In the opinion piece, de Maizière professes that "we are not Burqa... we show our face... we stretch out our hand to greet somebody... we do not link ideas of honour to violence" (Lewicki and Shooman 2019, 32). The authors correctly characterize these statements as attempting to cast common Muslim attributes as dishonest and dangerous (Lewicki and Shooman 2019). This tactic is similar to Fox News' association of moral degradation and the collapse of society as we know it with People of Color.

Another source analyzing racial rhetoric in Bild is Sabine Waas' 2021 study "Failure of integration or symbol of racism: The case of soccer star Mesut Özil." Waas notes the controversy surrounding Özil's appearance with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a photograph. The controversy included accusations that Özil was endorsing Erdoğan for reelection as well as Özil himself possessing dual loyalties to Turkey and Germany, a common racist attack. Özil eventually resigned from the soccer team, citing racism that he had experienced.

Waas speaks to Bild's influence on the discussion, noting that Bild is associated with a one-sided, negative view of Islam in Germany, specifically citing "integration problems" (Waas 2021). Through an analysis of compiled media stories, Waas identifies that the tone surrounding Özil's controversy was mostly neutral, but with negative articles being the second most common (Waas 2021). Bild editorialists even allege that Özil's complaints of racism are "absurd" and nonsensical (Waas 2021). It is notable that most articles disregarded Özil's faith, instead

focusing on his Turkish ethnicity as a German citizen (Waas 2021). The author concludes that the overall narrative surrounding Özil was intended to highlight “failures” in “integration” in Germany (Waas 2021).

Our understanding of Bild as English speakers is limited due to the lack of research written in English, however the pieces that do exist paint a picture of yet another western European news company utilizing tactics of hyperbole and othering. The tactics employed by the three highlighted nations’ right-wing news companies vary, but all three utilize hyperbole at the minimum, with the United Kingdom and Germany’s right-wing media companies appearing to utilize some form of the “warrior mentality.”

Before delving too deeply into one-to-one comparisons between Fox News and their western European counterparts, it must be said that any comparison made will be relative as opposed to absolute. The United States of America utilizes a federal Presidential system of government with a bicameral legislature and an electoral college. Almost every office in the United States is elected via first past the post, where the winner takes all. The states that comprise America are relatively independent from the federal government when compared to most other nations in the world. In contrast, the United Kingdom utilizes a government form reliant on an extremely strong parliamentary system where the Prime Minister serves as the Head of Government. The United Kingdom is a unitary state with no permanent political status for their sub-regions and elects their members of parliament via First Past the Post. Germany employs a government system with a weak Presidency and a strong parliament elected via Mixed Member Proportional representation. France utilizes a system with a strong Presidency and elects both their President and their National Assembly via a two-round election.

The difference in electoral systems between the United States and their European counterparts cannot be ignored. In parliamentary systems and multiparty systems, voters with far-right sentiments can vote for minor parties in line with their views, such as Reform UK, AfD, and RN. However, in first past the post and two-party systems, political power is concentrated in the hands of two viable parties. This encourages the creation of “big-tent” parties where fringe ideas can more easily build up institutional momentum. This is what occurred within the Republican Party in 2016 and 2020, when formerly fringe ideas managed to push their way to the forefront of party discourse. These differences in electoral systems are crucial to keep in mind when discussing comparisons between the United States and their western European counterparts.

It is also important to note that the European nations have been around for far longer than the United States, giving these nations more time to develop their political cultures. This leads to a range of differences, such as the subject of racial propaganda in Europe focusing more heavily on Muslim immigrants instead of the primary focus being on Black and Hispanic people. The United States also has a more concentrated history of race-based slavery than their European counterparts. While the British engaged in the slave trade, and indeed brought slaves to the United States in the first place, they did not decide to end their slave trade as the result of a civil war: America did.<sup>5</sup> These differences regarding political culture are important to understand

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<sup>5</sup> As Roger M. Smith puts it in his 2004 essay “The Puzzling Place of Race in American Political Science”, “Precisely because racial identities have been politically constructed in ways that served to legitimate [sic] racial inequalities, by making them seem natural and pre-political, even students of politics long did not treat racial identities as substantially created by formal laws and political institutions”. America’s unique relationship with race predates the modern concept of political science entirely. It also acknowledges the influence of systemic racism on American discussions of race, which goes so deep that it causes individuals to associate racial issues with biological differences/poverty/culture/etc. more often than with institutional racism itself. This deeply rooted and explicit employment of racism as a matter of American policy creates an environment that is fundamentally different from that of western Europe when it comes to the discussion of race.

because it acknowledges that there is no potential for a truly one-to-one comparison between the United States and another nation.

This is all to say that there are several forces at play in each of these nations. As such, the analysis of the comparison between the respective nations' right-wing news media will be focused solely on the existence of a prominent right-wing news source as well as the existence of noticeable racialization within the nations' discourse. The criteria for a valid comparison will be if the United Kingdom, Germany, and France's right-wing news media utilize the same three tools used by Fox. To refresh, these are: the explicit racialization of crime and poverty, apocalyptic hyperbole, and linking the viewer to a broader "noble" cause, otherwise referred to as the creation of a "warrior mentality."

CNews, Bild, and the British tabloids all utilize hyperbole to elicit a reaction from their critics and to demand the attention of potential viewers. CNews' Eric Zemmour, who is running for President himself later this year in France, de Maziere's op-ed in Bild, and Farage's "Breaking Point" campaign all engaged in hyperbole of Muslim immigrant's imminent "threat" to society. The fact that Fox News focuses primarily on Black Americans and European news focuses on Muslim immigrants does not detract from their similarities in tactical application of racism.

These same three examples also serve to satisfy the association of People of Color with crime and poverty criterion. While European right-wing pundits focus more on the alleged association between crime and immigration, they at times also focus on welfare benefits allegedly being exploited by immigrants. This is markedly different behavior than in the United States, where equal screen time is typically given to accusations of People of Color as both criminals and as welfare recipients. It is possible that this difference is due to the European far-

right's focus on the predominant Muslim "invasion" narrative, which relies more heavily on an association with crime than an association with welfare reciprocity. Meanwhile, the far-right in the United States emphasizes both crime and welfare reciprocity when speaking about People of Color. This difference in rhetoric is likely due to the adoption of explicitly fiscally conservative ideas in the Republican Party, a stance that is not generally shared by their European counterparts.

In Germany specifically there is a sort of racialization of sexual assault following the Cologne assaults in 2016, to which there is extensive literature dedicated that will not fit here. The emphasis on crime over poverty exists in the United Kingdom and in France as well, following similar accusations of being rapists. The association of an entire group of people with sexual assault and crime in general occurs in the United States as well. Former President Donald Trump famously claimed that Mexicans were "rapists" and "drug dealers" throughout his 2016 campaign. This line was seized upon by Fox News and repeated until the phrase became a permanent talking point in far-right spheres.

The one criterion that appears to be lacking most significantly in western European right-wing news sources is the formation of a warrior mentality among its viewers to the extent that Fox News does. This is not to say that these news sources do not employ this tactic, but they appear to either not focus as heavily on it or the effort appears to be in its infancy. Regardless, the attempts to forge a warrior mentality in the United Kingdom, Germany, and France appear to be more general, diluted calls to defend their culture from "attackers." In western Europe, the right-wing news sources convey the message that you need to support right-wing, specifically harshly anti-immigrant, policies, whereas in America Fox News will call opponents to right-wing



policies in general “enemies of the people,” dehumanize the opposition, and encourage their viewers to oust them.

The above analysis seems to indicate that the warrior mentality is a dramatically important piece of the puzzle. In America, the warrior mentality tactic is mature, well-developed, and employed constantly, whereas in western Europe it is primarily used as an afterthought. This disparity in the application of the warrior mentality tactic could be explained in part by differences in the role that religion plays in political culture. In the United States, a nation with an extremely politically active evangelical population, policy preferences are often presented as “good” and “evil.” This moralized outlook on politics encourages the use of both apocalyptic overtures and statements of defense. When everything is a moral dilemma, it makes sense to issue a “call to arms” in the form of the warrior mentality tactic. Compare the American situation to that of western Europe, which is less religious than America, and in which religion is less politically polarized into left-and-right camps, and it becomes clear how differing religious sentiments can create the disparity in use of warrior mentality tactics.

This provides context to the differing status of racialized political discourse. In the United States, where the warrior mentality is heavily employed, one can hardly escape the racial axis of nearly any political discussion. In western Europe, however, racialization appears to exist, but to a lesser extent. This is made evident by the prominence of the racialized Republican Party in the United States compared to the weaker prominence of far-right, racialized parties in Germany and France, and the dramatic decline of the racialized Reform UK party in the United Kingdom.

On the general topic of the Republican Party’s counterparts in western Europe, it appears that the Republican Party is at least marginally more racialized in its rhetoric than the prominent

European conservative parties. While the Republican Party has adopted racialized language into its everyday platform, the Conservative Party in the United Kingdom and the Christian Democratic Union in Germany utilize racialized language to a lesser extent. In France, the situation is much different from any of the other three nations due to the current upheaval of the political establishment. This situation has made it difficult to discern which conservative party is the “main” one, and thus makes it harder to analyze for this portion. However, French President Emmanuel Macron’s party La République En Marche! (LREM), a relatively new centrist party, has adopted racialized language over the last five years. This is probably more a reaction to the rise of Rassemblement National than it is to media influence.<sup>6 7</sup>

While some Members of European Parliament from the Conservative Party (UK) are on record supporting Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán by voting against a censure motion in 2018, this does not make their party an inherent utilizer of racial rhetoric as a matter of policy. The same goes for the Christian Democratic Union in Germany. De Maziere’s op-ed in Bild is surely racist and appalling, but his statements do not reflect the party line of the CDU. However, the Republican Party in the United States has made racial rhetoric a key part of their campaigns

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<sup>6</sup> Marion Sollety’s POLITICO article covering the debate between French Interior Minister Gérald Darmanin and Rassemblement National leader Marine Le Pen notes that Darmanin attacked Le Pen for allegedly not supporting certain LREM policies combatting religious extremism. This is but one example of President Macron’s government’s attempts to adopt a hardline stance against extremism, a policy area that is racially charged. As mentioned above, this is likely a result of RN’s increasing prominence and an attempt to shore up LREM’s support among conservatives.

<sup>7</sup> Additionally, the Bridge Initiative Team at Georgetown University has compiled a report on Emmanuel Macron’s rhetoric regarding Islam during his tenure. The factsheet notes that, while Macron initially campaigned on values of religious tolerance and acceptance in 2016, he has since made Islamophobia an integral part of his 2022 reelection campaign.

and fundraisers.<sup>8 9</sup> Their reliance on combating “critical race theory” in primary schools as a campaigning tactic proves this. The same can be said for their stalwart support for pro-police measures such as preserving qualified immunity for officers accused of mistreatment, even in the face of the national protests over the murder of George Floyd in 2020. The prominent conservative parties in western Europe do not engage in this level of racialization.

What, then, of the minor, far-right parties in western Europe such as Reform UK, Ressement National, and Alternative für Deutschland? These parties, in contrast to the mainstream, center-right parties in western Europe, adopt a similar racial rhetoric level to that of the Republican Party. While Reform UK is essentially a dead party, its ideological predecessors, the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) and the Brexit Party, were semi-prominent anti-Muslim Eurosceptic parties in the mid-2010s. Both parties engaged in highly racialized rhetoric. One of the most famous instances of this has already been mentioned in the discussion of the Breaking Point campaign. Ressement National and its predecessor Le Front National are likewise highly racialized parties. Le Front National is perhaps most famous for the 2002 Presidential candidacy of Jean-Marie Le Pen, an infamous anti-Semite. Like UKIP, the Brexit Party, and Reform UK, Ressement National relies on a “Muslim invasion” narrative. Alternative für Deutschland engages in similar tactics to those above, though the rise of AfD is especially worth noting given Germany’s history with far-right populist organizations. A notable point of comparison is that the fringe far-right in Europe appears to be extremely volatile, with

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<sup>8</sup> Supported by Jessica Brown’s 2016 study “Running on Fear”, which emphasizes the usage of race-baiting and dog whistles by Republican candidates in Presidential debates from 2008 onwards. Brown concludes that Republican candidates rely heavily on the association of People of Color with crime and poverty during campaign seasons, a tactic that Fox News also utilizes.

<sup>9</sup> David Siders’ POLITICO article “‘America is not racist’ becomes a GOP 2024 mantra” and Michel Martin’s 2020 interview with a former white nationalist both showcase usage of racial rhetoric in the Trump and post-Trump eras of American politics, highlighting the now-familiar association of People of Color with crime and apocalyptic hyperbole.

the constant renaming of parties and the exit of prominent figures from these movements occurring often. This does not occur in the Republican Party in the United States, likely due to the status of the Republican Party as the conservative hegemon because of America's electoral system.

Despite the prominence of the Republican Party mirroring that of the Conservative Party or the Christian Democratic Union, in rhetoric the Republican Party increasingly acts like the less prominent Reform UK, RN, and AfD parties. The elevation of anti-democratic and at times violent voices within the Republican Party such as Josh Hawley's "raised fist" coffee mug falls more in line with the fringe far-right of western Europe than the established center-right. In essence, despite having the clout and power of a major center-right conservative party, the Republican Party behaves like a minor, far-right party.

### **Conclusion and Solutions**

It is reasonable to conclude that Fox News plays an active role in the racialization of American politics, and that the enthusiastic use of the warrior mentality tactic plays an important role in this process. The disparity in the utilization of the warrior mentality tactic could serve as the missing link as to why this problem appears to be so much worse in the United States than in its European counterparts. This claim is supported by the comparison of Fox News to their counterparts in the United Kingdom, France, and Germany, who all lack utilization of the warrior mentality tactic to the degree of Fox. This disparity in the usage of the warrior mentality tactic is the biggest notable difference in strategy when observed through the lens of relative comparison. The dramatic differences between the United States' government system and the government systems of the United Kingdom, France, and Germany are certain to produce different political cultures. This certainty lends increased confidence to the conclusion that Fox

News does indeed racialize political discourse in America. This is because racialization exists in these nations with a relatively prominent right-wing news media despite differences in government systems and political cultures. It matters not that in western Europe this increased racialization is concentrated primarily in the hands of less prominent far-right parties because racialization is still occurring.

The subject of racism differs between the United States and the other three nations observed in this study, but the results are the same. Employing the tactics of associating crime and poverty with People of Color, apocalyptic hyperbole, and the utilization of the warrior mentality tactic increase the polarization of political discourse. This creates a myriad of problems in the nation in which it occurs, from political gridlock to violence against minority groups. With the conclusion that Fox News does indeed play a role in this process, attempts to mitigate this problem can begin to be discussed.

The United States' dedication to a free and fair press makes any attempt to significantly alter Fox News' rhetoric impossible. However, an often-discussed potential solution is the revival of the Fairness Doctrine adapted to meet the needs of the modern media environment. This would essentially require holders of federal broadcast licenses to dedicate an equal amount of time to both viewpoints on an issue. This potential solution brings with it a myriad of its own problems, however. For starters, it would likely be ruled unconstitutional in the modern environment given the differences between radio broadcasting (which is the era in which the Fairness Doctrine was primarily enforced) and television broadcasting. It is likely that this move would be seen as federal overreach. An easier avenue, though not as broadly effective, would be to update regulations surrounding social media and misinformation. There is active discussion on

this topic occurring in contemporary politics, so it is not as farfetched to envision Congress passing new regulations as it is to envision Congress reinstating the Fairness Doctrine.

Another potential solution to the issue of increasingly racialized rhetoric deals not with Fox News but with the institutions of America's electoral system. While the utilization of the warrior mentality tactic likely plays an outsized role in the formation of far-right biases, it cannot be ignored that in western Europe, these views are concentrated in fringe parties as opposed to the hegemonic conservative party in the nation. This is primarily caused by the lack of two-party systems in these nations, with even the United Kingdom having relatively prominent auxiliary parties such as the Liberal Democrats and the Greens. Thus, a potential solution that circumvents the need to potentially violate the 1<sup>st</sup> amendment is to simply reform our electoral system, though this would be equally difficult to enact as it would likely require a constitutional amendment.

A fourth possibility is that America's political culture simply outgrows this current cycle of racialization and polarization. While this seems impossible to conceptualize now, it isn't inconceivable. Currently, America's politics are dominated by increasingly old ideas (and people). This is not sustainable for a few reasons, primarily being that the four major Congressional leaders of both parties (who have a combined age of 289) will eventually retire or pass away. With this change in leadership comes the possibility for a change in rhetoric, and with the potential change in elite rhetoric could come a change in the rhetoric of Fox News and other conservative media companies. It should be noted that this is veering quickly into the category of wishful thinking, but the collapse of UKIP in the United Kingdom provides us limited insight into a far-right movement collapsing under its own weight as public concerns move beyond its scope.

America has an extremely long, complicated, and ugly relationship with race. The issue of racism in America predates the founding of the United States by decades due to the incorporation of slaves into the colonial economy. This proximity to violent racism has shaped America's political culture in ways that still reverberate today. Fox News' intentional fanning of racial flames has had a profound impact on the rhetoric of the Republican Party, which in turn has had a profound impact on the rhetoric of politics in the United States in general. There is the potential for this issue to perpetually snowball, to get worse as the demographics of this nation continue to change and as new issues arise for opportunistic commentators and talking heads to seize upon. However, this future is not set in stone. There still exists the opportunity for the United States to fundamentally change course, to leave behind racialized rhetoric as something to look back upon and learn from. It remains to be seen whether this future is to be a reality, and changing course will be difficult, but this does not mean that it should not be fought for.

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