Red-Baiting and Misinformation in Digital Congressional Campaigns: A Simmering Red Scare?

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A dissertation accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Communication and Media Studies

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Summer 2025

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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Red-baiting — using terms like "socialist" and "communist" as political attacks, remains a significant phenomenon in American politics dating back to the first Red Scare in the early 20th century. While scholars have studied this practice during historical Red Scare periods, little research has examined its prevalence and impact in contemporary political discourse, particularly on social media. This mixed-methods study analyzed tweets from 488 Congressional candidates during the 2020 U.S. general election campaign to understand how frequently red-baiting rhetoric occurred, which candidates employed it, and its relationship to engagement metrics and electoral outcomes. Using Tweet Flash (a Twitter API), 268,320 tweets were collected and analyzed both quantitatively for frequency and engagement patterns, and qualitatively through inductive thematic analysis to identify key frames and themes.

Using Cultivation Theory and other media effects theories to understand the power of red-baiting terms in campaign rhetoric. These theories combined to create the novel “Cultivation Model of Political Realities.” Results showed that while roughly 1% of tweets contained red-baiting (or adjacent) language, these tweets generated significantly higher engagement than non-red-baiting tweets. Republicans used red-baiting terms substantially more often than Democrats, though the practice was not clearly associated with electoral success for either party. Common

themes included framing perceptually hostile nations as a Communist threat, characterizing social movements as Marxist, and positioning policy debates as battles between American values and leftist ideology. This study argues that rather than being confined to discrete historical periods, Red Scare sentiment remains an undercurrent in American political discourse that can be inflamed by certain conditions and actors.

The findings suggest that while red-baiting may drive social media engagement, it does not necessarily translate to electoral advantages, raising questions about its continued use as a campaign tactic. These insights are particularly relevant given Twitter's rightward shift under Elon Musk's ownership and the platform's potential role in amplifying inflammatory rhetoric during the 2024 election cycle, suggesting a need for both platforms and users to develop better mechanisms for identifying and contextualizing red-baiting claims.

Keywords: Twitter, Red-Baiting, Socialism, Election, Campaign, Cultivation

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is the culmination of roughly 22 years of formal education, on the road to fulfilling my life's primary goal — becoming a college professor so that I can give back to my community, my students, and the overall pantheon of knowledge. No act we undertake in life is truly a solo venture. Accordingly, there are so many I must thank, and I will make it my mission to pay the help, guidance, and support I've received forward. To my incredibly supportive, flexible, insightful and understanding dissertation committee — Dr. Maxwell Foxman, Dr. Julieanne Newton, Dr. Senyo Ofori-Parku, and Dr. Ramon Alvarado — I extend my eternal gratitude. To my advisors at Marquette University, Dr. Erik Ugland and Dr. Pamela Nettleton, thank you for keeping me afloat and encouraging me to push forward to achieve my lofty goals. To my many mentors at St. Norbert College, I express my sincere appreciation for entrenching my love with the academy and opening my eyes to a world of possibilities. In an "industry" (I loathe that term) that does not always love you back, make sure to take a moment and love *the people* wherever you may find yourselves. To all of my wonderful peers at the SOJC, who against incredible odds at times, banded together and built a life-long family, this work is all of ours. In such an uncertain time for academia, our country, and the world, community and love are what will get us all through.

I often reflect on how incredibly lucky I am to have had such an incredible supporting family behind me, without them, none of this would be possible. The biggest thank you to my parents, Julie and Ty, and my brother Adam, who despite all of his teasing, would always relent that I was "the one with the brains." I hope I have and will continue to make you all proud and

that your efforts will manifest ten-fold in the future, as I look to repay you and future generations. To the love of my life, Kali, I could not have finished this endeavor without your unconditional belief in me and our future. I am so excited to see where our next steps take us, to Kansas and beyond!

Ultimately, this work is just a microscopic piece of a grand puzzle that we *all* must solve together, in order to make our world a better place. My two personal mantras that have guided my work and my life are "there may not always be a right or wrong answer, but there should always be a well-reasoned one" and "any man-made problem has a man-made solution." I hope these philosophies inspire others to work together with one another to achieve a better future, built on compassion, curiosity, and understanding.

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Chapter I — Introduction

The United States has been embroiled in an identity crisis nearly since its foundation. Culture wars, coupled with choosing which side one belongs to in those wars, has long been a feature of what it means to be an "American" (Gitlin, 1995). This "us versus them" dichotomy has been engrained in the American psyche through legislation, political discourse in legacy media and social media, and persists in the 2010-2020s (Gitlin, 1995). Rather than providing a remedy to these issues, the American political apparatus, coupled with contemporary social media, has seemingly exacerbated them. For example, the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine, which was a policy designed to ensure representation of multiple sides of an issue over public airwaves, as well as the Telecommunication's Act of 1996, which allowed for more conglomeration and homogenization of news media, have arguably allowed for further deterioration of what researcher Todd Gitlin calls "common dreams," or shared goals and visions with society.

Safeguards designed to preserve healthy debate and fair dissemination of information have generally eroded (Gitlin, 1995). Researchers and pundits alike speak of this new era as a "post-truth" world, which "arguably emerged as a result of societal mega-trends, such as a decline in social capital, growing economic inequality, increased polarization, declining trust in science, and an increasingly fractionated media landscape" (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017, p. 3). A post-truth world may be characterized as when "falsehoods and misinformation inundate the media, public trust in traditional sources of knowledge has declined, public disagreements about established empirical findings are rampant, and opinion often takes precedence over evidence" (Chinn, Barzilai & Duncan, 2021, p.51). Combative, dehumanizing rhetoric has seemingly be-

come a prominent feature of American political discourse, and its leads one to wonder about its level of salience in present day American society.

Even the most mundane instances and verifiable facts are not immune to critique in this post-truth world (Schindler, 2020). For example, Donald Trump and press secretary Kellyanne Conway referred to pushback over their claims that Trump's presidential inauguration was the most well attended in history as "alternative facts." Likewise, a claim by a politician that their opponent's policies are "communist" or "fascist" when the specifications of the policy are demonstrably not shaped by that economic structure, would fall under the same category. Regardless of the exact claim, the spread of alternative facts and fake news has tangible impacts on voting behavior and shaping and limiting popular public political discourse (Monsees, 2023). Unfortunately, social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter)[1] are algorithmically structured to encourage and exacerbate the spread of hyperbolic claims and alternative facts. Since one of the main functions of social media campaigns is to improve name recognition of the candidate (Kobayashi & Ichifuji, 2015), candidates strive to increase the engagement metrics of their posts to expand their reach. Posts with hyperbolic claims and alternative facts tend to facilitate more engagement than posts without (Dujeancourt et al., 2022), and posts with higher engagement metrics have a wider reach on the platform (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2021). Therefore, candidates are incentivized to make hyperbolic and sensationalized claims as a method to increase their name recognition.

The past two presidential elections in 2016 and 2020 were notable for the spread of sensationalized claims on social media (Rossini, Stromer-Galley & Korsunska, 2021). This misinforma-

[1] Just after the data collection portion of this study concluded, Twitter had its official name changed to X. For consistency sake, X will be simply referred to as Twitter in the remainder of this paper, as it is also popularly known as Twitter, as well.

tion was one of the factors that ultimately led to instances of political violence, such as the January 6th storming of the US Capitol (Kovacs, Cotfas & Delcea, 2022). Therefore, further exploration of other sensationalized claims that may elicit violence, or at the very least, sow divide and confusion, is prudent. Some scholars have claimed that we are in an era of a new "Cold War," particularly between the United States and China (Legvold, 2014; Brands & Gaddis, 2021; Schindler, DiCarlo & Paudel, 2022).

In tandem with this conceptualization of the current geopolitical situation, according to search trends from Google and Twitter "communism" and "socialism" spike in interest not only during election years, but peak roughly around the time of the election date. Therefore, interrogating both how often these sorts of terms are used by politicians on Twitter and how they are employing them can provide insights as to their salience among the American public, the sentiment connected to them, and potentially their impacts on election outcomes.

Zooming out, these peaks in interest of terms like "communism" and "socialism" are also associated with "Red Scares." A Red Scare is generally described as a mass hysteria event where a fear of leftist politics, usually simplified to "communism" and "socialism," manifests in persecutions of those sympathetic (either real or imagined) to those political orientations (Gibson, 1988). "Red-baiting" is the term used to describe this process of oversimplification and conflation of leftist politics and terms for the purposes of attacking a political adversary (Collins 2008; Schrecker, 2004). Though not correctly used to describe leftist policy, the term "fascist" is also used to demonize politicians and policies, often interchangeably with terms like "communist" during Red Scares.

Historically, the term “Red Scare” has been reserved for specific time periods in American history, from 1917-1920 and 1947-1957. Red Scares are induced by “status anxiety” of the hegemonic powers that be (Schmidt, 2004, p. 9). Status anxieties are exacerbated by war, economic instability, political shifts, and changes in social and cultural norms. Historically, this leads to suppression and persecution of individuals or groups that are believed to be sympathetic to leftist causes and has substantial policy and social impacts. These fears, whether grounded or not, disproportionately lead to the targeting of racial, ethnic, and religious minorities, women, and labor unions, with an array of consequences, ranging from loss of employment or social status, imprisonment, exile, and overall oppression on rates and scales far greater than non-Red Scare periods.

Red Scares are characterized as populist, hyper-nationalist, and are inherently reactionary in nature, as they aspire to return to a past time where religion, homogeneity, individualism and unfettered capitalism were free to reign. They are generally propagated by influential actors in the political and media arenas that stand to benefit from a non-leftist status quo that capitalizes on existing issues that may be economic, political, or cultural and frames those issues as rooted in leftist politics and their supposed supporters. Accordingly, these imagined threatened entities must be eradicated, or at least significantly subdued, to restore conditions beneficial to the group in power, or for those who wish to seize power.

While Red Scares may be thought of as relics that serve as cautionary tales in history classes, the central argument of this study is that Red Scares never truly go away. They may simmer under the surface of political activity and discourse and indirectly impact both, but under the right conditions, they may inflame based upon a myriad of factors. While there are no clear criteria

defining a Red Scare, comparison of political, economic, and social conditions, as well as the rhetoric surrounding them, can provide clues as to whether an inflammation has taken place. Accordingly, in this work, I thoroughly explore the foundations and evolutions of the Red Scares not only to provide context for the study itself, but also as a warning and reminder to readers that liberal democracies are not to be taken for granted, and the time to act to preserve them are when these warning signs are present.

Therefore, the objectives of this study were to delineate what conditions and rhetorical tactics *are* prominent in Red Scares and to compare them to the contemporary political landscape to see if they persist. Comparing these conditions alone is a necessary, yet insufficient method to ascertain whether there is indeed a new Red Scare, as the rhetoric and prevailing political discourse surrounding these conditions are what leads to the aforementioned large-scale consequences of Red Scares. Since Red Scares are as much of a local event as they are a national one (Schmidt, 2004), one can infer that the Red Scare rhetoric must also be present on a more localized level, too. So, while Red Scares may originate at the top of the political ladder, they rely on others underneath to spread these messages, and make them palatable and relatable for local contexts.

Though Red Scares are inherently reactionary, their proponents may not be explicitly sympathetic to reactionary causes. As Red Scares tend to manifest and proliferate out of a systematic coordination between political apparatuses, the media, capitalist interests, and eventually the public, they rely on the direct and indirect efforts of all of these actors. Historically, those both on the right *and* left (at least nominally) in the United States have been active participants in Red Scare rhetoric and action. Some prominent Democrats, like former president Harry Truman, have explicitly used Red Scare rhetoric to demonize leftist politics and entities, while others have tac-

itly approved of this demonization by voting on resolutions and policy based upon these sentiments. While those on the nominal left are generally the targets of Red Scares, the US, for all intents and purposes, does not have a true “left-wing” in its mainstream contemporary politics, especially compared to the rest of the globe (Hamby, 2004; Grossman & Hopkins, 2016; Alto et al., 2022). Accordingly, even those in the Democratic Party that are most often the current targets of these red-baiting charges may indirectly reinforce Red Scare sentiment by deflecting these claims that they do not identify with, which further ostracizes these terms from acceptable political debate and discourse, and ultimately can further prime their supporters to do the same. This necessitates examining the campaign rhetoric of both Democrats and Republicans to gather a more holistic picture of contemporary Red Scare status.

Salience – defined as something seemingly notable or important (Epstein & Siegel, 2000) — is key to the success and further transmission of Red Scare sentiment. Sentiment — defined as the subjective view or attitude toward an idea or event (Mejova, 2009)— can be understood in Red Scare contexts as feelings that Red Scare messages conjure, such as fear, anger, or apprehension. So long as red-baiting terms are salient and contextualized for the target audience, the solutions presented to them to cure the supposed issues they face, that are caused by the demonized group of “communists” and “socialists,” are more palatable. This study examines rhetoric — in this case, persuasive speech and figures of speech used in campaigns — from Congressional campaigns, which past studies have largely ignored. “Red-baiting rhetoric," for the purposes of this study, refers to actual use of red-baiting terms (eg. communism) and comparable terms that refer to the political right (eg. Fascism), but in a mischaracterized manner, as traditional red-baiting terms typically are.

Significance of This Research

Through comparing the themes, frames, rhetoric, prevalence and salience of Red Scare periods of the past, present, and future, as well as understanding their contexts, I define "Red Scares" in a way that can be used outside of commonly held historical context. I then make a profound case that a Red Scare has been inflamed, through a thorough historicization of the Red Scares and comparing those periods to present day. Most Red Scare histories do not examine time periods past the Second Red Scare in the 1960s, so this narrative is the first of its kind that I am aware of after review of the relevant literature. The goal in this historicization is to extract the foundational elements of the Red Scare periods and showcase how these practices, conditions, and solutions are not time bound. Instead, through the isolation of these particular elements and thoroughly analyzing them in this light, we can see that *any* time these conditions are present, those interested in keeping free democracies should be on high alert. Interestingly, since the beginning of this study and up into its conclusion in 2025, these elements are even *more* pronounced. Thus, understanding the history of the Red Scares and applying them to present contexts, such as Twitter campaigns, serves as a crucial example *and warning sign* that the time to act is now. Much inspiration for this study and the solutions it prescribes are borrowed from Wittgenstein in his assertion that "the limits of my language are the limits of my world." Therefore, expanding and coming to precise definitions of our shared language of democracy will expand the boundaries of what our democracy can accomplish.

Practical contributions

On a practical level, results from this study and their analysis provides a basis to help the public better understand why and how these terms are used in political discourse, especially on social media. Social media, particularly Twitter, depends on an algorithmic formula to present certain topics to each user, based upon engagement metrics such as “favorites” and “reposts.” The more engagement a post has, the more visible it becomes, which creates a snowball effect of further discussion of that topic. Once a sufficient level of search queries and engagement with a topic is reached, determined by the algorithm, that topic is considered “trending.” Trending topics create a shared sense of “social reality” for users, and those topics, either real or theoretical, can shape one’s conception of reality and what is salient (Zhang & Ng, 2023). This study reveals how the visibility of Red Scare and red-baiting rhetoric on social media can create a misleading perception of its prevalence, as the content's reach is amplified more by the influence of who is posting than by organic public engagement. Ultimately, this work will also serve highlight and make recommendations as to what social media users, social media platforms, and politicians can do to foster a better space for political discourse.

From the perspective of social media platforms, both scholars and media practitioners who hold civic responsibility as a core value may look to this study as a catalyst to discourage Red Scare sentiment. Safeguards may be put in place to stop this fear-mongering from spreading further. For example, Twitter has an already existing “community notes” feature that allows for users to contextualize and push back on posts that spread misinformation and disinformation, which Red Scare and red-baiting language both fall under. More severe consequences for spreading misinformation, disinformation, and hate speech is not without precedent, as many platforms, Twitter included, have taken action by banning accounts and filtering language that promotes

hate towards vulnerable groups, which I argue is one of the most important, if not the most important, foundations for Red Scare inflammations. These actions may only be realized in an idealistic world, as removing vast quantities of prominent accounts detract from overall engagement with the platform, which would have a negative impact in terms of profitability, thereby disincentivizing platforms to act.

The results of this study provides an empirical basis that may actually discourage red-baiting and Red Scare sentiments in the context of campaigns. As part of this study analyzed the election outcomes in relation to the usage of these terms, this study can highlight negligible or non-existent benefits that using these terms actually have on winning an election. Therefore, provided that there is not a strong correlation between using red-baiting and Red Scare sentiment and winning elections, political campaigns and consultants may shy away from these tactics in the future, which has positive benefits for political discourse. Conversely, as this is the first known study of red-baiting in Congressional campaigns *and* social media, this also supplements existing literature on potential positive electoral outcomes when utilizing negative political advertising. While generally negative political ads can lead to election wins, the specific practice of red-baiting as a negative tactic has seldom been explored.

Theoretical and conceptual contributions

On a theoretical and conceptual level, this study is one of, if not the first, to operationalize red-baiting, specifically, as a form of misinformation. Extensive reviews of political misinformation tend to focus on specific policy matters and events, and make the distinction that misinformation is different from "rumor" and "conspiracy" (Jerit & Zhao, 2020). In a sense, red-baiting can be thought of as a combination of all three, depending on the specific claim and the context.

For example, if a politician is warning of a "communist plot" in the legislature to "strip away all of our constitutional rights," this would be an example of misinformation, as it may be a confidently held untrue belief, as well as rumor and conspiracy depending on the further context of the claim. Misinformation and disinformation are primarily distinguished by intent to harm, so depending on the politician or group's intent when using red-baiting, the claim may fall under one of the two categories. Further, if a red-baiting claim is deliberately misleading and its message as crafted and disguised as legitimate news, it may be classified as "fake news." Therefore, for the purposes of this study, red-baiting falls under an umbrella of what I call MDFN, or "misinformation, disinformation, and fake news," which is a novel way of conceptualizing red-baiting.

With this conceptualization in mind, this study can fill in literature gaps left by similar research that looks at misinformation and disinformation too narrowly. Weeks and Gil de Zuniga (2021) acknowledge that much of the existing work on political misinformation gets bogged down by what exactly constitutes "misinformation or "disinformation," in an effort to stick to operationalizations and conceptualizations that make for the most easily measured variables. Therefore, by using the flexibility of the conceptual definitions of "misinformation" and "disinformation" and all they encompass, this work also functions as something of a proof of concept that by operationalizing a specific type of rhetoric as MDFN, scholars can uncover new insights relating to the myriad of ways that MDFN can impact the political landscape.

Chapter II — Background

Contemporary Overview

The 2016 presidential campaign of Donald Trump showcased the potential of social media in shaping the minds and attitudes of prospective voters (Francia, 2018). While there are well-documented accounts of blatant "fake news" spreading via Twitter, especially during election season (Grinberg et al., 2019; Bovet & Makse, 2019), there are instances of less insidious, but arguably as damaging, misinformation campaigns. Politicians like Georgia Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene have tweeted such claims as, "The Democrats are launching a communist takeover of our country with their infrastructure plan" (Marjorie Taylor Greene, 2021). Of course, there is nothing communist about the policy in question, yet the term "communist," here, is used in the pejorative, and in a manner that conflates basic infrastructure planning with a stateless, classless, moneyless society.

The misuse of terms like "communism" may not necessarily be the result of ignorance, but rather genuine malice, due to attitudes and precedents set during the Cold War (Schrecker, 2004b). False equivalencies between "communism" and "Nazi-ism" sets a foundation for future political strife and violence not only for the public, but for political actors, as well (Ghodsee, 2014; Wodak, 2015; Nacos, Shapiro & Bloch-Elkon, 2020). For example, conflation of these terms is a marker of what Ghodsee (2014) calls the "double genocide thesis," which is predicated upon the idea that the end nodes of the political spectrum are akin to genocide, and thus, they must be opposed with force. If these sorts of terms are misunderstood, the citizenry, as well as

politicians, may have a more difficult time making well-informed political decisions (Carr, Hoechsmann & Thesee, 2018).

Further, the large scale permissibility of these misuses and conflations allow for Red Scare rhetoric to become a greater part of the political vernacular. Once it has become acceptable to falsely characterize political opposition and policies with these terms, these terms lose their actual meaning, and not only do these political systems further stray from becoming a true alternative to the status quo, they can also become weapons for the prevailing political structure as any person, group, or policy tagged with these labels may be easily dismissed (or worse) by politicians, the media, and the public that are either expressly complicit or none the wiser. This weaponization can lead to further persecution, suppression and violence, all of which are severely detrimental to a functioning civil society and democracy.

While this study examined the 2020 General Elections in the US, its implications stretch far beyond this limited scope. In 2024, Donald Trump was once again elected, bringing with him a new wave of anti-leftist sentiment that has extended into nearly every facet of public and private life, ranging from dismantling cultural institutions that conflict with his ideology to attacks on universities that promote inclusive practices, and even forcibly deporting legal student residents for speaking out against injustice. This re-ignited fervor underscores the importance of this research, where rhetorical tactics, like red-baiting continue to pose a danger to democracies worldwide.

Foundational Concepts for this Study

Red-baiting

The practice of red-baiting — using labels like "communist" or "anarchist" to pejoratively describe political opponents — is typically used to discredit the merits of political opponents by ascribing to them extremist terms and connotations (Nichols, 2015; Hedges, 2011; Edsforth & Bennett, 1999). The "red," here, refers to the classic colors used to represent communism and other leftist politics (though, in this case, I will explore the use of other right-wing terms, like "fascism" under a sort of red-baiting umbrella, while acknowledging there is **no** equivalence between fascism and leftist politics).While originating during the first Red Scare following World War I (Levin, 1971), the practice has undergone a revitalization in the 21st century in America, where the Republican Party has leveraged these claims in increasing numbers (Nichols, 2015). This practice is not limited to members of the Republican Party, however. For example, while on the campaign trail, then presidential candidate Joe Biden (2020) tweeted "I ain't a socialist. I ain't a plutocrat. I'm a Democrat — and I'm proud of it." In this case, Biden was separating himself from, and implicitly marginalizing socialists by comparing them to plutocrats, while further legitimizing the Democratic Party as the most viable option. As this example highlights, red-baiting may simply not only consist of calling an opponent a "socialist" or a "communist," but also encompasses conflating these political positions with inherently contradictory terms, (Ghodsee, 2014).

Other forms of political mischaracterization

The conflation of contradictory political positions, such as fascism and communism, has been prevalent in America since at least the 1930s (Adler & Patterson, 1970). During that time, US presidents on relatively opposite sides of the ideological spectrum, such as Herbert Hoover and Harry Truman, drew parallels between the two opposite forms of governance, and placed them under the umbrella of "totalitarianism," as antithetical to democratic practices (Adler & Patterson, 1970, p.1048). A recent example of this practice was a 2021 tweet from House Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA) equating COVID-19 vaccination measures to both communism and Nazi-ism.

According to Rozado and Kaufman (2022), "the prevalence of terms denoting political extremism in U.S. and U.K. news media has been increasing dramatically since at least 2008 and that this trend is particularly acute for terms denoting far-right extremism" (p.13). That is to say, this phenomenon works both ways. The term "fascist" has been used to pejoratively describe political opponents and policy since the 1920s (Haro, 2011), and has been used by members on all sides of the political spectrum (Granieri, 2020).

Noted writer and leftist George Orwell lamented the over-use of the term "fascist" by other leftists to describe opposition as early as the 1940s, and its subsequent impact on correctly identifying fascism in practice. Orwell (1944) opined:

> [T]he people who recklessly fling the word 'Fascist' in every direction attach at any rate an emotional significance to it. By 'Fascism' they mean, roughly speaking, something cruel, unscrupulous, arrogant, obscurantist, anti-liberal and anti-working-class. Except for the relatively small number of Fascist sympathizers, almost any English person would accept 'bully' as a synonym for 'Fascist'. That is about as near to a definition as this much-abused word has come."

Harkening back to Shapiro and Brown (2018), these practices may be effective due to a lack of political literacy, as a more educated public may not be as susceptible to these sorts of mis-characterizations.

Significance of terms

While there are a plethora of terms that are used to describe and denounce so-called political extremism, this study focuses on terms that are more appropriately used to describe a type of government or economic system. Especially in America, economic and governmental systems have a history of being described in simplistic, generalized terms (Ostrom, 2010). The multi-faceted issues a society faces cannot always be remedied by one-size-fits-all approaches, therefore, better understandings of how political, economic, and ecological systems and their integrations are needed in order to solve those issues (Costanza, et al., 1993). Thus, understanding how widespread the practice of utilizing terms typically reserved for economic and governmental systems for the purpose of political gain may be important to understanding how far or near American society is from being able to understand, debate, and solve complex problems that may not have an easy solution, let alone developing a type of institution or government suited to solve those problems.

While terms like "authoritarian" may be used to describe real or imagined governmental practices, there is neither a left nor right directionality in that term, and it is subjective enough to be applied in many scenarios. Therefore, focusing on the use and misuse of technical and specific terms to refer to governments and governmental processes used to describe opponents and opposing policy matters can highlight a root of an issue that may cause divide along real or imagined political lines, hindering the ability to work to solve complex societal issues. For example,

voters in Maine introduced a ballot initiative to make their power production and services publicly owned. While poll numbers and the addition of the question to the ballot indicate there is a relatively high level of interest in practices like this (Kobin, 2023), one can understand how casting socializing publicly used utilities in the same light as abolishing private ownership of goods, or some other strawman-type argument, would potentially skew attitudes differently. In accord with historical trends, politicians and news outlets opposed to this proposal have tied this event to "Socialist Bernie Sanders," in reference to his support of his neighboring state's initiative (Robinson, 2019). While this is not the campaign-style context this study seeks to examine, this example highlights the notion that these terms referring to economic systems are still used pejoratively and may have real policy implications.

Ascertaining how often terms referring to *specific* of government or economic systems are used during campaigns, and within what context, may underscore an important disconnect when discussing the very fundamentals of policy and societal discussion. Thus, the focus of this study is not on adjectives describing an economic or governmental system, such as "crony" capitalism, "radical" socialism, nor flavors of systems like "neoliberalism" is to capitalism. Rather, this study examines specific government and economic systems and their raw usage in campaign communications on Twitter, then their specific context and sentiment were analyzed in order to understand trends in their usage.

Red Scare History

Extremism and the fear of extremism is not a novel concept in America. The backdrop of both the first World War and The Cold War presented an opportune platform for this type of fear-mongering, in what was known as The Red Scare and the second Red Scare, respectively. A Red

Scare is the result of mass government, public, and media hysteria of the perceived threat of communism. There were two distinct Red Scare periods in United States history, with the first beginning roughly in 1917, following communist uprisings and takeovers in Eastern Europe. During this time, hyper-nationalist sentiments that proliferated during World War I rooted themselves within the borders of America, as well. Due to the success of labor movements in Europe, those with governmental and economic interests became frightened that similar success could be achieved in America (Ness, 2015). Semi-recent American history was weaponized and used as partial justification for suspicions, too. The Haymarket Square Riot in Chicago, which started as a labor strike for more reasonable working hours in 1888, quickly turned violent after a worker was killed and bombs were subsequently thrown at law enforcement, leading to claims of "anarchists" in labor movements (Ness, 2015). This event, coupled with hyper-nationalism and other anti-labor sentiments resulted in raids and suppression of speech amongst alleged communists.

Pretext of the first Red Scare

Led by A. Mitchell Palmer, then US Attorney General and J. Edgar Hoover, then head of the General Intelligence Division in the Bureau of Investigation (BOI), the anti-communist and labor sentiments were operationalized and codified (Ness, 2015). First, in one of the first large scale propaganda efforts on behalf of the United States government, then president Woodrow Wilson established the "Committee on Public Information" (CPI) in 1917, which primarily was used to cultivate feelings of patriotism in the public and bolster support for America's involvement in World War I. The CPI mobilized a vast multi-media propaganda effort, including, but not limited to, posters, film, concise "Four Minute Man" public speeches, as well as newspaper and magazine articles, with the intention of reaching every possible American (Kazin, 1995). One of the

primary reasons for the programs success, at least initially, was the consistency in messaging, regardless of the media source and location (Sweeney, 2001) For example, historians described the CPI's "information management" as such that,

*"*Every item of war news they saw—in the country weekly, in magazines, or in the city daily picked up occasionally in the general store—was not merely officially approved information but precisely the same kind that millions of their fellow citizens were getting at the same moment*."* (Sweeney, 2001, p.16). This sort of deliberate propaganda dissemination ensured that key issues important to the United States government would have a high likelihood of maintaining salience amongst the public.

Though the CPI was primarily focused its efforts within American borders, they also made a concerted effort to spread the same messages abroad, as well. The CPI set up bureaus across the globe, in places including, but not limited to, Peru, China, Russia, Spain, Argentina and Italy, with the intention of not only spreading pro-war, pro-capitalist and pro-democracy messages, but also to sow tension between international political actors (Fischer, 2016). For example, the CPI spread false information regarding the intentions of Bolsheviks in Russia, and claimed the movement was actually a proxy for Germany, which had vastly different goals (Fischer, 2016). Due to the influence of the CPI, many of these claims were accepted uncritically by mainstream news sources, and ultimately had a significant impact on the foreign policy of other stakeholder nations, and planted the seeds for hostility towards Russia from the United States in the subsequent decades (Fischer, 2016).

To strengthen support for the war, CPI activities also involved suppression and persecution of existing organizations that were vocally against the war efforts, such as the Industrial Workers of

the World (IWW) and the Socialist Party of America (Kazin, 1995). Journalists that expressed negative views about the committee and its proponents were also targeted (Fleming, 2008). Censorship powers became a key weapon for the committee as several pieces of legislation, as well as an official declaration of war, allowed the CPI to amass and wield extraordinary power. Noted historian on anti-communism in the United States, Nick Fischer (2016), plainly laid out the chain reaction of events:

> The Espionage Act of June 1917 expanded these controls and gave the government near-total capacity to define and proscribe conduct or opinion that prejudiced the war effort or aided the enemy. The October 1917 Trading with the Enemy Act empowered the president to censor subversive literature and monitor mail, and required editors of foreign language material to file any copy dealing with government policy and the war with official translators (p. 57).

These acts were justified through a formal declaration of war, which was largely accepted by the public. From there extraordinary powers translated to the CPI and allowed the committee to extend beyond soft influence on the public, media, and international stakeholders. For example, the CPI was able to physically edit print news stories, limit the distribution of information, and worked closely with the Censorship Board to censor radio broadcasts and telegraph systems (Fischer, 2016). Ultimately, the CPI's censorship efforts would not have been as successful if not for the cooperation from most media outlets, due to both the soft and strong influence the committee exerted (Fischer, 2016).

McCarthyism and The Red Scare

While the first Red Scare primarily centered around communists within American labor movements, the second Red Scare was more concerned with alleged communist infiltration of the United States' government. Fear of a perceived foreign influence emanating from the East allowed for politicians like Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy to promote a hunt of alleged

communist sympathizers in both the government itself, as well as the entertainment industry. Ordinary citizens, high-profile public figures, and politicians alike were classified as "communists" by their opponents, whether there was any merit to those claims, or not (Renshaw, 1968).

In order to ensure the palatability and relatability of anti-communist rhetoric to the general public, McCarthyism relied on variety of "common themes" that made the threat of communist infiltration to seem more real (Rovere, 1959). These themes are not unlike those that are used in present day argumentations against left-wing policies and had broad appeal to conservatives and moderates (Rovere, 1959). Just as tweets act as snapshots of a perspective in at a given point in time, propaganda fliers and posters from the more clearly defined Red Scare periods are included in the following sections to illustrate the parallels of Red Scare rhetoric in the mass media between then and now. These themes and the history they are rooted in will allow for a clearer picture as to how Red Scare imagery, fear-mongering, and resulting political outcomes are realized today.

McCarthyist Framing

Policy as communism

As part of his initial attacks on the American social and political fabrics, McCarthy claimed that public service style policies, like that of The New Deal, were part of an intrusive communist plot, designed to wipe out capitalism. The New Deal was a milestone for left-wing politics in the United States, and marked a key attitudinal shift not previously seen in the nation's history (Schrecker, 1998). As social and economic successes of The New Deal became apparent, so, too, did the backlash from conservatives, as they believed there was now room for substantial influ-

ence from radical groups, like the Communist Party. Indeed, some historians argue that the Communist Party did actually garner some influence during this time:

"For the first time, the federal government actually condoned labor unions; and Communists, for whom labor organizing was a primary activity, threw themselves into the great surge of unionization that occurred in the mid-1930s. Within a few years, the party's official view of Roosevelt had changed so radically that the CP was acting in many respects as a junior partner within the New Deal coalition." (Schrecker, 1998, p.14). This unprecedented recognition of leftist politics by the federal government eventually led to a greater backlash by the right.

As the embrace of labor unions and their ties to left-wing groups gained prominence, McCarthy and his acolytes homed in on progressive policies as one of the main aggressors of communism, and led to substantial efforts to tie the two together. Given that McCarthyism and conservatism were predicated upon individualism and "personal freedoms," policies that were seen as leveling the playing field were framed as "losses of freedom" for others (Michaels, 2017).This prompted a coordinated, large-scale effort to cast these policies in a negative light, and portray them as precursors to, or even evidence of, communism. "A central theme of the barrage of messages (financed by substantial resources) dedicated to scuttling President Roosevelt's New Deal and later President Truman's Fair Deal was that the programs associated with them were all linked to socialism and through socialism to communism and through communism to the loss of freedom for Americans" (Michaels, 2017, pp. 5-6). These sorts of faulty connections have persisted in political discourse and serve to confuse citizens about the nature of many government program that aim to provide material and fiscal support to the public.

Public Health

Public health efforts like vaccinations were also cast as a method to brainwash the American public to be sympathetic to communism (Rovere, 1959). McCarthy accused officials at the Public Health Service of conspiring to use vaccines and fluoride to "deaden" the minds of the American public and make them susceptible to communist sympathies. Similarly, across-the-board improvements and emphasis on public health matters were strongly opposed by McCarthy and his followers, as they were seen as "egalitarian measures" (Muntaner & Gomez, 2002). These measures were antithetical to the Social Darwinist mindset that was a crucial foundation of anti-communist and pro-capitalist mindsets (Michaels, 2017). McCarthy adherent Robert Taft described New Deal amendments to healthcare to be "the most socialistic measure this Congress has ever had." The concepts of "personal freedom" and "personal choice" were mobilized to contrast the status quo healthcare policy with one characterized by government "interference" Michaels (2017).

Not only were public healthcare measures cast as an affront to "personal freedoms," they were also portrayed as an effort to stymie private enterprises. In turn, corporate entities, anti-communists and other stakeholders that would be adversely impacted by public healthcare policy banded together, utilizing red-baiting tactics as their primary weaponry (Michaels, 2017). To further this example, the board of the American Medical Association (AMA) included a minority of conservative members that sought to advance their agenda, which was primarily to profit from pharmaceutical drugs. The AMA and the vocal minority of the board emphasized a potential slippery-slope where the "socialization" of the healthcare industry could cascade into the realms of every other profession, too (Michaels, 2017). By strategically and successfully establishing

themselves on the boards of democratically organized professional associations, like the AMA, those with views similar to McCarthy were able to have an outsized impact on both the framing of public health policy, and the editorialization of policy, itself (Michaels, 2017). These efforts proved successful, as large-scale public healthcare policy implementations would not come to fruition again until the Obama presidency some 60 years later.

This practice of systematically infiltrating the boards of prominent policy-shaping organizations, like conservatives did with the AMA, is not unlike what McCarthy had accused other groups of doing to elicit communist sympathies and action. In fact, this practice of projection became a common theme for conservative groups during this Red Scare period and extended to virtually every type of political body (Michaels, 2017).

Education

Academics and the education system were also said to be agents of communism, and officials in the field were said to all share the goal of further brainwashing American children. In discussing UNESCO (the UN's education and children's focused branch), McCarthy adherent Joe Wood, representative from Idaho, exclaimed

"Communism is merely one of the instruments used by the real conspirators to frighten us into surrendering our national sovereignty to a world government in which we will be hopelessly out numbered and outvoted, just as we are now in the United Nations" (Michaels, 2017, p.186).

Extensive propaganda campaigns were made to connect public education to communism, and many of the previously mentioned frames, like "communism as public health threat were recycled, as Figure 1 illustrates.

Figure 1. Red Scare education propaganda

These propaganda pieces showcased a tangible threat representing communism, as in the work above, as well as sensationally describing the exact threat, as in the piece, too.

Just as McCarthyist politicians had coalesced on the boards of organizations dealing with public health, so, too, did they on education commissions, as well. Organizations like the Indiana Textbook Commission (a board tasked with approving books and other curriculum in public schools) became battlegrounds in the fight against the supposed threat of communism. In 1953, McCarthyist board member Ida White singled out the book *Robin Hood* as one that promoted communist ideals, and sought to have it banned from public school curricula (Michaels, 2017). In an effort to ban the book, White claimed to the rest of the commission,

"There is now a Communist directive in education now to stress the story of Robin Hood. They want to stress it because he robbed the rich and gave it to the poor. That's the Communist line. It's just a smearing of law and order and anything that disrupts law and order is their meat" (Michaels, 2017, p. 186).

This claim and this line of reasoning was not unlike red-baiting claims that became pervasive in other areas, like public health. This provided a consistency in messaging against perceived communist plots. While this specific effort did not ultimately come to fruition, these sorts of claims gained at least a measure of legitimacy, as prominent politicians, like then Indiana Governor George Craig, echoed White's claims, saying, "Communists *have* gone to work to twist the meaning of the Robin Hood legend" (Eschner, 2017).

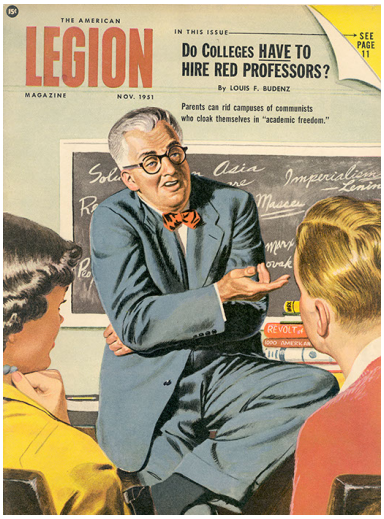
Just as there had been solidarity on the right regarding issues like censorship and book banning in public schools, this incident helped galvanize those on the left to push back. In solidarity with protestors, reporters like Elmer Davis, who was the former head of The Office of War Information for the US government during World War II, claimed this type of censorship represented a "general attack not only on schools and colleges and libraries, on teachers and textbooks, but on all people who think and write ... in short, on the freedom of the mind*"* (Fried, 1991, p. 29). Specifically resulting from the push to ban *Robin Hood*, "The Green Feather Movement" arose in response to demands for censorship, as college students, primarily in Indiana, wore dyed green feathers and buttons in support of both the literature and academic freedom (Eschner, 2017). While the movement made a modest impact on the issues of book banning in public schools, academic freedom hung in the balance.

Much like public K-12 schools were seen as battlegrounds against the supposed threat of communism, so, too, were public universities during the era of McCarthyism. While *Robin Hood* was one of the primary targets for censorship in public schools, works that emphasized social and political issues like *Civil Disobedience* by Thoreau and the *Invisible Man* by Ellison also came into the crosshairs (Eschner, 2017). However, books were not the only allegedly dangerous

artifacts on campus. College professors were targeted as communists and were accused of using their positions to spread communist ideology.

While anti-communist tendencies had existed in academia during the late 1930s (Schrecker, 1986), the era of McCarthyism saw a renewed interest by conservatives to quell any communist activities on campuses from professors and students alike. As Schrecker (1986) points out, left-wing activity on college campuses, overall, did not boast the same numbers of supporters as right-wing groups during this time. For example, while leftist student groups at Harvard were comprised of roughly 100 members, opposition right-wing groups boasted nearly 400 members. Initially, student groups and their activities were the targets of anti-communist scrutiny, rather than individuals (Schrecker, 1986), and these efforts proved effective. Administrators at colleges and universities felt pressure from government officials, especially those who worked at publicly funded institutions, and took it upon themselves to bar leftist student groups from activity on campus, like the American Youth for Democracy (Schrecker, 1986), which fervent anti-communist J.Edgar Hoover had personally singled out. One such strategy was for institutions to keep an up-to-date list of members belonging to these sorts of organizations, and it had a significant deterring effect (Schrecker, 1986). Students in these groups pointed out the nature of the lists as being soft threats and as jeopardizing the personal security of its members, but many acquiesced under the pressure.

Figure 2. Anti-academic Red Scare propaganda



The concept of free speech did not always apply to alleged communists on campus during this time. Speakers invited to campuses faced intense scrutiny, and some were barred altogether. Publicly funded institutions tended to be the most restrictive for outside speakers. Generally, smaller institutions, heavily dependent upon public funding, compared to larger schools with a more substantial donor base, were even more restrictive, disallowing anyone that could be remotely construed as a communist or communist sympathizer from speaking on campus (Schrecker, 1986). For example, the American Legion had pressured Ohio State University into disinviting speaker Dr. Harold Rugg from campus, as the Legion disagreed with portions of an economics textbook he wrote an edited (Schrecker, 1986).

Just as with other sectors of work and life, the right often recycled frames in an effort to make tangible the struggle between the "American way of life" and alternatives proposed by the left. For example, one right-wing politician, speaking to the board of Queen's College evoked a religious frame to contrast the ideology of the "communist" professors and the campus' status quo:

“Un-American groups and the professors who tolerate them must go. Queens is a god-fearing community and those that don't see eye to eye with us have no place in our midst. We want our students taught "Queens style" or not at all” (Schrecker, 1986, p.86). This rhetoric has not vanished from political discourse, with many of these same attacks levied at academia by the Trump administration in 2025.

Ultimately, while there were small contingents of self-proclaimed communist student groups on college campuses, professors and other faculty members with communist sympathies faced more extreme scrutiny and were forced to shield their beliefs and disengage from political activity altogether (Schrecker, 1986, p.85). Due to this pressure, faculty members at institutions often assumed an outsized role in quelling supposed communist activity, taking it upon themselves to remove charters for student groups to appease administrators who felt pressure from politicians (Schrecker, 1986). The HUAC grilled accused professors for their alleged involvements with communist groups and sympathies. Faculty members who did not engage with the investigations by evoking their 5th Amendment rights were generally let go by their respective institutions (Schrecker, 1986). While roughly 100 professors were cut loose across the nation, hundreds, if not thousands, more saw their academic careers stymied or ruined by being placed on blacklists (Aby, 2009).

The very threat of being blacklisted had a chilling effect amongst professors and students alike. Both routinely engaged in censoring or “sanitizing” their own work, in an effort to not make themselves a target due to the topics they researched (Aby, 2009). Work that could be construed as critical of capitalism or the practice of McCarthyism itself was suppressed (Aby, 2009). A considerable lack of support was exhibited towards professors and academic freedom by ad-

ministrators, as well as the American Association of University Professors (AAUP). Instead, to "protect the reputation" of the institutions and their respective departments, as well as redirect attention elsewhere, administrators capitulated to investigators and self-policed and censored faculty from a variety of ranks, often prior to a formal investigation (Aby, 2009). Similarly, the AAUP, which had promised to work on behalf of faculty to report incidents of censorship and violations of academic freedom, had taken a backseat and allowed censorship, as well as purging of potentially "dangerous" faculty (Aby, 2009). Applicable to virtually every industry and institution charged with harboring communists, the Panopticon nature of the academy had a significant negative impact on both the practices and morale of faculty members. According to Columbia professor Dr. C. Wright Mills, a priori self-censorship became more prevalent in the academy, as he explained, "The real restraints are not so much the external prohibitions as control of the insurgent by the agreements of the academic gentleman*"* (Aby, 2009, p.122).

Entertainment and the arts as communism

McCarthyism had a particular stranglehold on the entertainment industry during the second Red Scare, as well. Just as blacklisting was a prevalent tool of deterrence and censorship in academia, the Hollywood blacklist worked to pressure entertainers and producers from using talent with suspected communist ties, and as means of self-censorship so that "controversial" material was not released (Gordon, 1999). The HUAC had already been investigating alleged communists within the entertainment industry for several years, until 1950, when more public claims were made against entertainers. Frightened by both the prospect of communist ideology seeping onto the airwaves *and* the potential loss of revenue, studio heads, like Walt Disney, framed producers as communist, as the threat of a strike was immanent in 1941 (Ceplair & Englund, 2003). Disney

believed “communist agitation” was the primary factor in the discontent of the striking workers, which prompted local politicians to open their own probes into this alleged communist influence (Ceplair, & Englund, 2003).

The conflation of communism and other entities in Hollywood did not stop at striking labor unions. Attention from anti-communists also turned toward Jewish entertainers and producers, as well (Horne, 2006). Soon, communism and the connection to Judaism became increasingly prevalent in the communist witch hunt, as far-right Los Angeles based politician George Smith remarked, “alien-minded Russian Jews” were said to have infiltrated the industry (Horne, 2006). While those enmeshed with Hollywood had been staunchly and publicly anti-fascist in the decades prior, especially during Hitler’s rise to prominence (Ross, 2007), these proclamations would eventually lead to suspicions levied against the most politically active in the industry. When Hitler and Soviet leader Joseph Stalin signed a non-aggression pact in 1939, the line separating communism and anti-Nazi-ism faded in the imaginations of those who feared that the communist momentum building in Eastern Europe would spread overseas via the silver screen (Ross, 2007). Commissions and groups influenced by anti-Semitic individuals, such as Joseph Breen, head of the Production Code Administration (PCA) and later involved with the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America (most commonly recognized as the MPAA) gained considerable influence (Ross, 2007). The PCA was a method of self-censorship itself, as it was comprised of studio heads and other producers that sought to regulate the content of motion pictures. The PCA’s stated purpose was that “Theatrical motion pictures . . . are primarily to be regarded as Entertainment," and that “history, institutions, prominent people and citizenry of other nations shall be represented fairly” (Doherty, 1999). That said, the PCA, under the influ-

ence of Breen, shifted its focus towards Jewish studio owners and producers. In his mind, activism, had no place on the screen, and sought to scuttle the production and distribution of any film that could be construed as "sympathetic to Jews" (Ross, 2007, p. 13). Jewish individuals in Hollywood, as Breen claimed were "simply a rotten bunch of vile people with no respect for anything beyond the making of money" and were trying "to capture the screen of the United States for Communistic propaganda purposes" (Vaughn, 1994). Breen's efforts at the PCA were successful, as anti-Nazi films that were not considered biographical in nature were shut down for several years, at least into the 1940s (Ross, 2007). Thus, the connection between Jews and communism in Hollywood, while dubious, gained significant political traction, and persists to this day.

Claims such as Disney's only further fueled the fire of anti-communists in their pursuit of supposed subversives in the industry. In 1946, *The Hollywood Reporter* published a list of supposed communists in Hollywood, which attracted the attention of federal anti-communist investigators into the named individuals. Spearheaded by future US president Richard Nixon, the HUAC conducted hearings featuring Disney and future US president Ronald Reagan (then an actor and president of the Screen Actor's Guild) to testify that both actors and unionized members of production teams were using their posts to spread communism. Not long thereafter, in 1950, publications like *Red Channels*, produced by staunch anti-communist group "Counterattack," and backed by prominent politicians and think-tanks like the John Birch Society sought to highlight the potential risk of Communists in the entertainment industry using their mediums as propaganda to promote communist ideals.

Virtually no topic was off limits for *Red Channels* in their supposed links to the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, as evidenced by this excerpt from the publication "With radios in most American homes and with approximately 5 million TV sets in use, the Communist Party USA now rely more on radio and TV than on the press and motion pictures as "belts" to transmit pro-Sovietism to the American public" (Red Channels, 1950, p.2). Though dubious in its claims, Red Channels had a substantial impact on proceedings against supposed communists.

The publication went on to claim that these individuals and studios on their subsequent list were either arms of Communist parties themselves or were financially supported by them. Interestingly, in the publication, the term "Communist" was frequently substituted with "Red Fascists." In fact, the publication's self-stated purpose was to "articulate anti-Communists are blacklisted and smeared with that venomous intensity which is characteristic of Red Fascists alone" (Red Channels, 1950, p.6). These incorrectly named "Red Fascists" were published in the pamphlet, totaling more than 150 accused, drawing from dubious sources (Gordon, 1999). Just as with other professions, *Red Channel's* blacklist had a profound impact in terms of destroying the careers of those listed. Those who refused to testify before the HUAC's inquiry were charged with contempt of Congress and faced prison time. Beyond the legal ramifications, those who were on the unofficial blacklists struggled to find work thereafter and were discredited in many of their current and previous productions. Studios would continue to engage in their own self-censorship and shifted focus towards producing more "patriotic" and pro-American films. Ultimately, both the soft and hard power wielded by the right and their related commissions were able to, at least for a time, transform the entertainment industry and shape it to their own liking in the name of anti-communism.

Decline of the Second Red Scare

Eventually, McCarthyism fell out of favor with both his own peers and the public. A few key events and institutional shifts in the mid 1950s turned the tide against McCarthy and his Communist witch hunt. For example, some of the entertainers blacklisted from Hollywood fought back, and in court, won the right to sue those who falsely accused them for personal and professional damage caused by their accusations (Faulk, 1963). Other significant decisions from the Supreme Court in the mid and late 1950s also spelled the end for McCarthy. One professor purged from their institution during McCarthy's anti-Communist witch hunt brought their case to the Supreme Court to argue that they could not be fired for evoking their 5th Amendment right to both remain silent and not incriminate themselves. The Supreme Court agreed that exercising the right to free oneself from self-incrimination was not the same as a tacit admission of guilt, and reaffirmed 5th Amendment rights in these circumstances (Fried, 1991). Similarly, the Supreme Court sided with plaintiffs that argued that the 1st Amendment should protect passive political activity, and that freedom of association is a protected practice under the amendment (Fried, 1991).

This decision reaffirming the right to free association harkens back to the roots of McCarthyism success. One of the hallmarks of McCarthyism, the Red Scares, and "wars" on virtually any subject is the concept of guilt by association. In the years leading up to full-fledged McCarthyism, guilt by association was essentially codified, as then president Harry Truman decreed Executive Order 9835, known as the Loyalty Order, to ensure the trustworthiness of government employees and officials. The order declared that "disloyalty" was constituted by "Membership in,

affiliation with or sympathetic association with any organization determined by the attorney general to be totalitarian, fascist, communist or subversive, or advocating or approving the forceful denial of constitutional rights to other persons or seeking to alter the form of Government of the United States by unconstitutional means" (Executive Order 9835, Part III, Item 3).

As seen in purges of academic faculty and entertainers, among others, the very act of associating with a perceptually dangerous party or idea was often enough to cause significant harm to the accused. Individuals were asked, under oath, as to whether they were either members of the Communist Party or if they were affiliated with members, which carried the same weight as belonging to the Party. Ceplair (2008) explains that while many of the hallmarks of what we think of as McCarthyism — guilt-by-association, indiscriminate collecting of names, irresponsible accusations, and badgering of witnesses (p.216) — are not unique to McCarthyism, and instead had been practiced routinely in prior Red Scare periods. Therefore, as these features *are* common practices, they could be indicative another Red Scares.

Synthesis of frames

In the years leading up to McCarthyism and Red Scare inflammation, familiar conditions precluded the extraordinary rise and mainstreaming of anti-communist sentiment. First, a coalescence of media, business, and political elites, at least nominally from both major political parties, rallied against changing geopolitical conditions and/or comprehensive legislation packages helped facilitate this coordinated effort (Michaels, 2017). For example, precipitating McCarthyism and the Second Red Scare, the New Deal became a rallying point for corporate and conservative interests. Michaels (2017) details how influentials, such as the DuPont family, began heavi-

ly subsidizing conservative interest groups opposed to the New Deal like the American Liberty League. This practice led to a snowball effect, as an "educational crusade" was waged by conservative groups like the National Association for the Preservation of Free Enterprise and the Foundation for Economic Education to push back on policies that worked to help lower classes, like subsidized housing, unemployment benefits, civil rights fortifications, and increased federal spending on healthcare. According to Michaels (2017), the central theme in messaging across groups with similar aims, was to link these policies with socialism. Socialism was said to inevitably lead to communism, and ultimately, the loss of freedoms for Americans (p.6). The logic, here, is rooted in the then decades old worldview from Yale professor William Sumner that individual liberty and civil institutions are incompatible (Michaels, 2017). In this zero-sum conception, institutions only exist to stifle an individual from prosperity and potential, as when an institution mandates that others are allocated more resources, they must be taken from another. Therefore, with business institutions standing to lose the most via taxation to pay for these broad programs, they "sold the idea of free enterprise as the 'American Way of Life'" to the American public, through an extensive propaganda network campaign (Michaels, 2017, p.5).

This American way of life was juxtaposed to a communist way of life, which was characterized by conservative groups as controlling and with substantial restrictions on freedom. The theme of freedom versus control became central in every policy argument, whether it was applicable or not. This shaky logic led these groups to double-down and concoct linkages between policy for the public good, communism, and the loss of freedom. For example, socialized medicine was characterized by not only control over one's body by the state, but as a means of revolution itself. Michaels (2017) points to the New York State Bar, working in conjunction with the Amer-

ican Medical Association, to publish false statements, purportedly by Vladimir Lenin (who they called the "God of Communists"), proclaiming that socialized medicine was the keystone to a socialist state. These blatantly false claims and messaging style, nonetheless, were extremely effective in curtailing the public's support of New Deal-style policies, particularly healthcare, from 58% to just 36% over three years (Michaels, 2017). The common themes and framing of "control versus freedom" and an "American Way of Life" proved to be extraordinarily salient and relatable to the American public, which persists to this day.

Of course, there cannot be an "American Way of Life" without other ways of life. Another common theme in Red Scare messaging is a fear of others that will disrupt this way of life. Just as the KKK's concept of "racial Capitalism" was central to the First Red Scare, racial and ethnic tensions were exploited during the Second Red Scare, especially during and in the wake of World War II (Michaels, 2017). In this case, the central theme of "Nativism" focused on the idea that certain ethnicities had natural hierarchical positions than others, and that those native to a land would know how to use that hierarchy best to uphold the values of that society. Cultural values are given primacy, in this conception, and intermingling of varying cultural values posed a threat to the predominant national cultural landscape (Bergquist, 1986). Therefore, this line of thinking necessitated the idea that ethnic tensions were the bedrock of social issues in a society where resources were scarce (Bergquist, 1986). If there was no scarcity in a society, ethnic conflicts presumably would not exist, and a peaceful coexistence of ideas and lifestyles would be more possible. Thus, scarcity and ethnic tensions were necessary conditions to maintaining the status quo. Exacerbating these tensions became a pressing issue for anti-communists, as they could then appeal to the public that they were the only ones that could keep them safe from po-

tential turmoil (Michaels, 2017). Immigrants and minority groups in America have often been scapegoats for issues over the course of its history, specifically, in times of supposed peril (Rothschild, 2009).

The language used to describe leftists and immigrants share many parallels, and tend to use dehumanizing terms (Schrecker, 1998). For example, both communists and immigrants have been called "rats," "termites," and "scum" (Schrecker, 1998, pp.47-48) by state officials and the media. A prevailing belief, especially during the clearly defined Red Scare periods, was that immigrants were the harbingers of communism, itself, making immigrants and communism almost interchangeable. Then president Woodrow Wilson further stoked the flames of civil unrest, claiming that "hyphenated Americans" posed a significant threat as they had "Poured the poison of disloyalty into the very arteries of our national life" and were "such creatures of passion, disloyalty and anarchy" that they must be "crushed out" (Kennedy, 2004). Taking direction from statements like these, then Attorney General A. Mitchell Palmer echoed these sentiments and noted that the Department of Justice's inquiry "into the ultraradical movement during the course of the last year has clearly indicated that fully 90 per cent of the communist and anarchist agitation is traceable to aliens." Of course, these claims were largely unfounded (Schrecker, 1998). Nonetheless, this sentiment led to what are known as the "Palmer Raids," whereby thousands of immigrants were arrested, nationwide, under the suspicion of communist activity, and hundreds were deported.

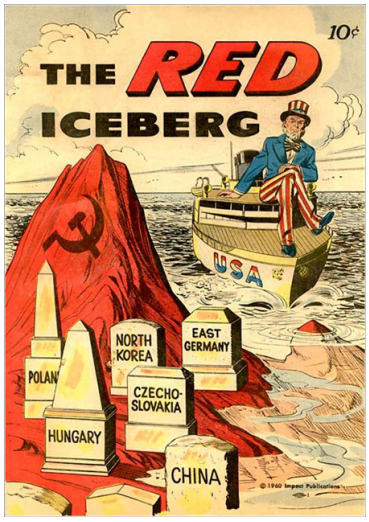
Another common theme uniting leftists and immigrants are that they "pose a threat to national security." As alluded to before, an "American way of life" necessitates other ways of life, and any affront to the American way has historically been framed as a threat to "national security"

(Schrecker, 1998). National security threats can include individuals and groups both foreign and domestic, and ties back to the idea that alternative ways of life are "un-American." Under the guise of national security protections, loyalty oaths, as referenced prior in Truman's Executive Order, were weaponized even further during the McCarthyism era. These oaths, administered to those in civil service positions, even considered non-work activities deemed "un-American" to be "not consistent with the interests of national security" (Schrecker, 1998, p.296). Therefore, merely existing in the United States as an immigrant or minority group member became a dangerous affair, and the hysteria surrounding immigrants could inflame at any time at the whims of government officials and the media.

One of the primary methods of stoking these tensions was to tie immigrants to labor movements that threatened corporate and business interests, which conservatives argued constituted this "American way of life." While American industry in the late 19th and early 20th centuries was dominated by those who had been in the country for several generations, looking to cut costs, business owners initially encouraged the arrival of European immigrants to increase the labor force and drive the overall cost of production down (Michaels, 2017). Immigrants tended to assume these low-paying and dangerous occupations, such as in the rail and steel industries, as they had few other prospects. As a result, the existing labor force lamented their loss of wages or jobs, altogether. Primed by politicians and the media to focus their scorn away from factory owners and industry barons for this economic strife, anti-immigrant sentiment had now shifted to labor, pitting the working classes against one another. Given that there was already pre-existing sentiments tying immigrants and labor movements to communism, dating back at least to the Haymarket Affair, these themes were already familiar in the public consciousness and persisted

(Michaels, 2017)**.** As labor unions grew out of this unrest, business owners argued that this collectivist mindset was both "un-American" and a dangerous portal into communism (Michaels, 2017). Dichotomous logic was applied in these instances, and the message against dissent towards the status quo was simple; *"*The underlying message was that to be pro-employer was American; to be pro-employee was un-American*"* (Michaels, 2017, p.21)

Figure 3. Anti-immigrant Red Scare propaganda



This theme is malleable, as it applied to nationals from virtually any country other than America (Figure 3 above). Accordingly, perceptually dangerous ideas from any foreign national could be tied back to communism, in an effort to discredit them.

Foreigners and domestic minority groups were both almost equally treated with contempt during these periods. African-Americans, who began to more fervently protest against their discrimination after their returns from World War II, shifted into focus as a potential domestic threat (Michaels, 2017). As social norms and mores progressed through the early and mid 20th centuries, clear instances of racism became less publicly acceptable, but the sentiment still remained and was repackaged under different guises. For racists and anti-Semites, the second Red Scare

presented a valuable opportunity to express their hatred without as much public scorn, as Matsuda (1998) notes, “Just at the moment when overt racism-and anti-Semitism-was becoming publicly illegitimate, anti-communism was becoming patriotic” (p.22). Anti-communist groups tied African-Americans to communism, with the idea that they were more susceptible to anti-American influence as they became more discontent with their treatment. Rather than acknowledging the material conditions for this discontent of the African-American public, anti-communists ran news headlines that alleged that communists were using African-Americans as pawns to foment revolution in the US by intentionally stoking these inflammations (Michaels, 2017). By tying African-Americans and their struggles with communism, anti-communists were successfully able to couch debates around civil rights (which would threaten the status quo) into debates over communism and the potential destruction of the American social fabric (Schrecker, 1998). These sorts of connections led to more crackdowns on any perceived dissent amongst minority groups. For example, African-Americans routinely faced dismissal, at far greater rates than their white counterparts, from civil service jobs as the result of the HUAC’s loyalty investigations (Schrecker, 2004).

Not only were African-Americans firmly in the crosshairs of anti-communists during this time, so, too, were Asian-Americans. World War II had shown a existing hostility from the US government towards Japanese-Americans, as thousands were sent to internment camps or deported, with the rationale being that they could pose a national security risk due to potential loyalty to Imperial Japan. Similar sentiments would soon be transferred to Chinese-Americans, as well. Beginning in 1949 and continuing through the McCarthyist era, China was in the midst of a communist revolution and American intelligence agencies were concerned about its supporters

embracing similar elements in enclaves across the country (Schrecker, 1998). The revolution in China, spearheaded by Mao Zedong, led to the ousting of non-communists, which included the some of the most wealthy Chinese citizens moving to Taiwan, and some to the United States. Taiwan then considered itself its own separate entity from China, and attempted to maintain positive relations with the United States. Thus, Taiwan was viewed by the US government as a buffer to China, who they felt they had to appease to an extent so that they did not fall under more Soviet influence. In this case, Taiwan represented "freedom" and China "communism."

Since most "Chinatowns" and enclaves in America were primarily under the sphere of influence of the exiled former leader Chang Kai-Shek, at this point, intelligence officials used these connections to their advantage in the anti-communist hunt (Schrecker, 1998). Not only did they coordinate with pro-Taiwan Chinese language newspapers to produce more anti-communist articles and propaganda, they also cracked down on newspapers that were viewed as pro-communist. Schrecker (1998) notes that the federal government's position was that these newspapers were "nothing more than a mouthpiece for Communist China in this country" (p.377), not unlike rhetoric used in contemporary times. Using a new but seldomly enforced law against any business dealings or transactions with mainland China, the US federal government attempted to prosecute newspapers that they claimed facilitated these dealings, by advertising for banks in a thinly-veiled effort to suppress the press from promoting pro-communist material (Schrecker, 1998). Just as the Palmer Raids did, the crusade against supposed Chinese Communist sympathizers involved deportations, as well. These crackdowns on dissenting opinions in both the Chinese-American public and press once again proved effective, and the US government's rule with an

iron fist became standard towards critique, and "even peace became a dangerous issue" (Schrecker, 1998, p.377).

A final prominent theme across Red Scare rhetoric centered on religion. As nations trying to implement communism tended to adopt an atheistic position as part of a necessary condition for its system, the United States officials sought to contrast "godless" communists against the Christian and god-fearing American society. This dichotomy entrenched itself in every discussion about communism . In the lead up to the passage of the New Deal, conservative religious leaders connected themselves to the business world, and insisted that an overarching welfare state would be encroaching on God's territory (Michaels, 2017). Specifically, these influential religious figures argued that a system in which the government took on more of a caretaker role to its populace was, in effect, "playing God," and that those who supported a welfare state were really supporting a "false idol" (Michaels, 2017). In this case, the "false idol" was any program of the New Deal that leaned towards collectivism and social good, as individualism was said to mirror one's relationship with God (Michaels, 2017)

Just as conservative Christians claimed that social programs were an affront to God and Christianity, to McCarthy and those with similar views, any critique of the American system, government, way of life, or even themselves as attacks on the Christian faith (Roberts-Miller, 2020). While some McCarthyist tactics drew the ire of religious individuals during the 1950s, many Christians in the United States felt compelled to back the anti-communist sentiment, as the presented alternative was atheism (Ericksen, 1990). McCarthy's background as a practicing Catholic generated some debate in the larger Christian community as to whether he spoke on their behalf, but his stated goals were enough to generally unify both Protestants and Catholics in

their support (Ericksen, 1990). Similarly, McCarthy was successfully able to connect his concept of patriotism as "consistent with God's will" (Ericksen, 1990, p.46), and that the United States represented a model for "God's Kingdom," an idea that had existed since Puritans first set foot on the continent. In accord, America and its institutions were framed as "good" — as they were the will of God — and communism, its nations and apparatuses that were diametrically opposed to God's will, were framed as "evil" (Ericksen, 1990).

Religion, specifically Christianity, was all the rage in 1950s America, with surveys suggesting 99% of the public expressing a belief in god, and 83% believing that the Bible was the explicit "word of God" (Michaels, 2017, p.187). In accord, atheism was particularly frowned upon, as a similar study revealed that atheists were the third most hated group in the nation, only behind the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis — and neck and neck with communists (Gibson, 2008). This virtually equal disdain for both atheists and communists underlines the point that the two groups were intrinsically linked during this time. This rhetorical tactic proved effective, as it was salient to virtually every American, and little argument needed to be presented to get the public on the side of anti-communists.

Rhetorical Tactics

McCarthy and his ilk were particularly successful during the Second Red Scare due to the contextual reasons listed in the previous section. However, the method in which these themes were presented played a significant role in their successes, as well, as they relied on timeless rhetorical tactics. First, McCarthy would often present these themes as explicitly dichotomous choices without nuance (Roberts-Miller, 2020). As referenced in the previous section, the dichotomy of "good versus evil" was employed in several contexts, and were concepts virtually

anyone would be familiar with. These binary choices allowed McCarthy and his proponents to table debates on the substantive matters, and instead led detractors to have to justify their position as "good," as opposed to "evil," which would be difficult to qualify within the context of debate (Townsend, 1997). While good and evil are wholly subjective terms, other dichotomous pairs with more (relatively) fixed terms were also presented to the public as McCarthy pressed for support, just as America was framed as "Godly" and communism as "Godless."

Just as Godly became a synonym for "good" and "Godless" for "evil," Savage (2012) notes that the socially constructed consciousness and memory of the American public allows for other pairs (whether inherently binary or not) to represent what is American and what is not. This collective memory rooted in the birth of the country anchors the idea that America, at its inception, was a utopia founded upon Godly principles and in God's vision, and outside influence has only served to dismantle this utopia (Savage, 2012). Thus, freedom and liberty have come to represent values that were opposed to the supposed tyrannical rule of the English government when America was its colony, and thus, have become synonymous with America itself. This allowed for, and still allows for, the binary choices like "freedom or control" to be salient for the American public, even when not pertinent in the given context, such as with taxation or healthcare. This populist rhetorical tactic of "looking backward" (Savage, 2012) creates a vision of the future that is both scary and drifting further away, in this case, from this intended utopia, while the past is revered and a place that should be returned to by undoing societal progress.

Following this binary mode of thought, perhaps the most vital strategy McCarthy and other Red Scare proponents utilized is fear of the other. The simple binary choice of "us versus them" entrenched the idea that outsiders were an inherent danger to the in group and to one's self.

"Them," in this case, was and still remains, an amorphous entity that can be molded to fit virtually any context. McCarthyist rhetoric heavily leaned into the idea that "us" were "true" Americans, and "them" was anyone who potentially threatened "us" and their way of life.

Even American citizens could be "them" when it was rhetorically convenient, and pitted citizens against one another for political expedience. During World War II, the Japanese-American internment camps were justified by simply referring to this group as "the Japanese," rather than acknowledging this group's adopted, or even native homeland, and the shared nationality with the rest of its citizens (Coyle & Nagler, 2021). The distancing of "us" from "them" not only served the purpose of legitimizing the perpetration of violence towards "them," it also allowed for "them" to remain mysterious and capable of harming or disrupting "us" at any given point. This rhetorical tactic is easily identifiable in political discourse in the 2020s, as cries of "they are taking our jobs" or "they want to take over our cities" are as frequent (if not more) than substantive policy discussion.

The "them" could also be more insidious than seemingly innocuous. For example, supposed communists and its sympathizers were often labeled simply as "Reds" in reference to the flag of both the Soviet Union and the usage of the color in communist symbology. The euphemism of "Reds" could be anyone from anywhere, in this context, and served to further dehumanize those slapped with this label. Propaganda used during this time (featured in the previous section) warned of "Reds on campus" and "Reds in Hollywood," priming the public to fear their peers, for they could be the enemy McCarthy warned about. After all, these separate time periods in discussion are referred to as "Red Scares," meaning the "Reds" are not bound by a location nor time, and serve as a malleable boogeyman for any given subject.

Dehumanizing accused communists allowed for their objectification and subjection to ostracism and violence to be more palatable to the masses and created a justification for the "us" group to be the purveyors of violence towards "them" (Coyle & Nagel, 2021). Further, dehumanizing language in McCarthyist rhetoric also served to delegitimize the plight that these populations faced, as well as their allies who called attention to their issues (Matsuda, 1998), and legitimized the imagined fears of the "us" group. While the "them" group is dehumanized, a key to McCarthyist and populist rhetoric, is crafting a victimhood complex (Homolar & Lofflmann, 2021), whereby the enemy group are reduced to objects of fear and the "us" group must be protected from them. This peculiar dynamic where the enemy is both dangerous yet subservient and the "us" is both a beacon of perfection *and* simultaneously precarious in status and in need of validation informs each grievance is often a successful rhetorical tactic, and one that is prominent in Red Scare periods.

Consistency in themes and frames

Another reason McCarthyism and Red Scare language resonated with the American public was that no new frames or themes were invented (Roberts-Miller, 2020). Capitalism and communism had already been viewed dichotomously dating back to Marx and Engels. Since this frame and dichotomy was already familiar to the American public, McCarthy, instead, pandered to those with pre-existing fears, rather than working to convert skeptics (Roberts-Miller, 2020, p.462). As Roberts-Miller (2020) further explains, populists and demagogues try to intensify and proliferate these rifts, rather than create new ones. For example, religious sectarianism had already been a hot-button issue in early to mid-20th Century America, with Catholics and Protestants promoting differing values. While proliferating this rift was not necessarily politically ex-

pedient in the context of the Red Scare, contrasting the Christian faith, which was ever-present in America, with the atheism of communist states, allowed for a salient frame to help explain aspects of politics that the general public may not have otherwise understood or sided with.

While not an exhaustive list of the rhetorical devices and tactics McCarthy and his ilk used during the Red Scares, these included themes and devices are imperative to understanding current political discourse surrounding the fear of not only left-wing politics, but fear of the other, as well. The themes in this provided a basis for the qualitative inductive analysis of tweets in this study, and helped to properly contextualize the important language that otherwise may have gone unnoticed.

Nadirs

There have also been periods in American history where Red Scare rhetoric relatively quelled a bit. However, much of the same sentiment remained and transferred over to other scapegoats. For example, after the fall of the Soviet Union and the perceptual collapse of communism, politicians and the press searched for a new foe that served as a proxy for cultural and economic anxieties. Due to is rising economic influence and its status as an "alien other," Japan replaced the Soviet Union as the focal point of fear (Neumann, 2001). Though Japan was a staunchly capitalist economy, their identity as a collective society enabled recollection of a similar lifestyle in the Soviet Union, making these comparisons salient to the American public. Similarly, other Yellow Peril themes were rehashed from earlier Red Scare periods during World War II, easing the cognitive burden shift to viewing Japan as the enemy, once again.

Presently, with right-wing politics prevalent globally and no serious threat of communism is on the horizon, Red Scare framing and rhetoric has not subsided, especially within do-

mestic United States politics. In a committee meeting in March 2025, Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene drew support from fellow Republicans in her assertion that PBS and its most well-known program Sesame Street were "communist" and that it promotes "anti-US" values. This showcases that Red Scare sentiment pervades the political, media and economic ecosystems, even in times when the right is entrenched in power.

Historical parallels to 2016 and beyond

War and Global Strife

While the previous section highlighted features of rhetoric and propaganda during Red Scare periods for the purposes of comparison to present day, this brief overview of the surrounding political events provides more support for the idea that the Red Scares are the product of their context and could be happening in the 2010s and 2020s.

Both clearly defined Red Scare periods occurred within the context of global strife, war, and their aftermath. The first Red Scare came off the heels of World War I, when global hegemonies were threatened and new nations were poised to capitalize. The great political instability seen across Europe, ranging from the Bolshevik uprising in Russia, to the crumbling Ottoman Empire, to massive political shifts in the Balkans all created uncertainty for future political gamesmanship. Political instability generally loans itself to economic instability, and trade union power threatens the powers maintaining the status quo. Due to the proliferation of communist and anarchist activity in Europe, US leaders and its stakeholders feared the same happening on their soil, and looked to quash it before it could begin — fear-mongering, propaganda, and violence were and remain the primary vehicles to do so.

The second Red Scare was born out of the ashes of World War II. After the defeat of prolific fascist forces in Germany and Italy, communism and socialism presented reconstructing societies a diametrically opposed option that did not involve capitalism. Since fascism had at least nominally been defeated, this alternative of socialism and communism presented a great threat, once again, to the powers seeking to uphold the capitalist status quo in both the West and East, and left-wing politics became the primary boogeyman.

Now, political and economic strife across the globe are pervasive and broadcasted at the tap of a thumb. The COVID-19 Pandemic, which became prominent in 2020, the year of analysis in this study, destabilized the global economy and created significant political turmoil along with it. The boogeyman, in this case, was China, as the COVID virus originated in Wuhan, and Western leaders, particularly in the US, emphasized that the Communist Party was deliberately responsible for creating the virus and spreading it. While the imagery and analogical call backs to the other Red Scares where communism itself was the virus that was spreading, this time, a tangible and visible threat provided the ammunition for anti-communist rhetoric and crusades. As a result, anti-Asian sentiment and discrimination proliferated globally, and particularly in America, where Asian-Americans had and have become targets of both racist and anti-communist rhetoric due to media and political framing of the virus itself as "Communist"(Yang, Tsai & Pan, 2020; Croucher, Nguyen & Rahmani, 2020; Ittefaq et al, 2022). In accord, the victimization frame that pervades Red Scare rhetoric was once again recycled as Americans (usually white Americans) were framed as the victims of Chinese Communist aggression and malfeasance (Hill, 2021).

As Red Scares tend to come during or in the wake of war, current global conflicts that started in 2020 or after may provide foundation for new Red Scare sentiment and rhetoric. The war be-

tween ISIS and the Taliban for the control of Afghanistan has its roots in the Cold War, and has remained a symbol in the fight against communism, though the domestic and foreign parties vying for control are anything but. Prolific conflicts after 2020, which many nations of the world have a vested interest in, are also providing fertile ground for anti-communist and Red Scare rhetoric. The conflict between Russia and Ukraine, which has a lengthy history, but saw renewed proliferation in both 2014 and 2022 has also come to represent the struggle between capitalism (Ukraine) and communism (Russia), though any level of communism actually present is nominal, at most (Dzarasov & Gritsenko, 2020). This conflict has provided a familiar frame of reference for Americans who associate communism with aggression, instability, and the East, and perpetuated the idea that communism is a menace that still poses a threat.

With an extremely lengthy history of its own, the war and genocide proliferated in Gaza in 2023 also provides a basis for wartime justifications of leftist persecution. In this case, Israel has created conditions in Gaza not unlike the ghettoization and oppression in Europe in World War II. This war, while not explicitly so, is a proxy between the global capitalistic forces of the West versus the Global South.Western leaders have stood in solidarity with Israel, and nations while the Global South has largely stood in solidarity with Palestine. Similarly, leftists around the world have rallied in support of Palestine, as they lament the settler colonialism propagated by Israel and the West, while those predominantly on the right have applauded Israel's actions against who they deem terrorists."In fact, some politicians and pundits have argued that a new McCarthyism has been born out of this conflict, as pro-Palestinian voices in the West have been met with fierce backlash and have had their reputations tarnished. For example, US congresswoman Rashida Tlaib was censured by her peers in Congress for her pleas for a ceasefire, and

partially as a result, Congress passed a resolution explicitly equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism.

Not unlike the second Red Scare targeting the entertainment industry, some who have publicly professed pro-Palestinian sentiments have lost their jobs and status. Onlookers have called these practices "McCarthyist" (Rottenberg, 2023). Academics and students are also under close scrutiny for their pro-Palestine positions, as wealthy Israel-connected donors to universities, the Israeli government itself, and institution administrators that are sympathetic to the Israeli cause have sought to quell opposition speech. Some observers have drawn comparisons to the academic purges that occurred during the Second Red Scare and the suppression of on-campus speech in 2023 (Hamid, 2023). Retaliation against Palestine-supporting academics may also be an extension of recent movements by those on the right that lament "woke" leftists on campus (Hamid, 2023), which has clear roots in McCarthyist anti-intellectualism. While the context of this retaliation differs from the McCarthy era, many of the practices, sentiment and rhetoric remain the same. Student protest activities are frequently shut down by their institutions, just as leftist student groups were quashed in the 1950s. Similarly, according to prominent lawyer for Palestine Legal Radhika Sainath, a legal defense organization for individuals punished for pro-Palestinian actions and beliefs, reports that "Professors are being questioned, their classes are being canceled, and they are being locked out of their emails over supporting Palestinian rights" and "Some university administrators have reported to us that they feel that they can't even publicly support their Palestinian students right now" (Kane, 2023).

Regrettably, due to the timing of these events in relation to the scope of this study and its writing, closer attention was not paid to the remarks of politicians and their campaign messages

in relation to this conflict. However, due to the parallels between McCarthyist rhetoric and activity then and contemporary events, I argue that they may be viewed as an extension of the tensions, language and action that *are* presented within the scope of this study, and thus merit recognition of evidence that a new Red Scare has proliferated. Therefore, due to the grand stage that this war and the others have previously mentioned occupy, coupled with the clear parallels in war-time rhetoric and behavior, I argue that they play a role in creating favorable conditions for a more inflamed Red Scare period now and after the conclusion of this study.

High Stakes Elections

While virtually any national election can be classified as "high-stakes," conditions like war and global strife can make some elections more high-stakes than others. The second Red Scare was able to take root in part due to the actions of Harry Truman, who, in the wake of World War II and his campaign for re-election in 1948, proliferated anti-communist sentiment with Executive Order 9835. This presented a case where Truman represented the status quo and a protector against communists and those not loyal to the United States. Facing an uphill battle against Republican foe Thomas Dewey, as well as other third parties like the Dixiecrats and The Progressive Party, Truman appealed to those worried about the fallout of World War II who were fearful of Eastern aggression, particularly the Soviet Union. Due to the political landscape and an economy that was only beginning to recover from the Depression that occurred roughly a decade prior, political historians noted that Truman's re-election campaign was arguably the most difficult that the nation had ever seen (Truman Presidential Library, n.d.). Though those in his own party wished for him to ease up on some of his positions, Truman adopted a hardline position against communism and the Soviet Union, both abroad and domestically, in order to differentiate himself

from his opponents as the only candidate that could lead the nation and protect it from falling to communism — even though his Dewey, his main opponent was just as fervent an anti-communist (Fried, 1991). Leaning into this frame, Truman handily won re-election, and his position was legitimized. This sentiment was also able to galvanize the party, as the Democrats, following Truman's lead, regained Congress.

The subsequent election in 1952 was just as high of stakes, and draws significant parallels to the 2020 elections. By this time, Red Scare rhetoric was arguably at its peak, but its popularity began to wane. Truman had reached his term limit, and he and the Democratic Party held very low approval ratings, resulting in control of both Congress and the presidential office flipping to the Republican Party. Despite the waning popularity of McCarthy himself, Republican presidential candidate, Dwight Eisenhower, did not shy away from using some of the same rhetoric and frames in his campaign messaging. Eisenhower's primary campaign issues revolved around "Korea, communism, and Corruption," though attacking and stifling the spread of communism in Europe, Latin America and in the US was his highest priority (Roberts, Hammond & Sulfaro, 2012). Further taking cues from McCarthy, who Eisenhower was at least nominally opposed to publicly, used McCarthy's frames and used similar rhetoric of describing anyone seemingly disloyal as a "traitor" and that communism was a "disease" that had to be eradicated (Gibbs, 2010). In the end, Eisenhower's perceived contrast from the previous Truman regime was enough to win him the presidency, even though his messaging was not all that different.

The 2016 and 2020 national elections bore many of the same similarities to the 1948 and 1952 elections. Though there were some key differences in terms of where the incumbents were into their terms as president, the context of large-scale global war and its aftermath, and most notably,

the advent of social media and its use in campaigns, similar rhetoric and populist appeals against the left were presented, and largely, the Trumpian rhetorical playbook was on par with McCarthy. At the same time, just as McCarthy had essentially split the Republican Party with his divisiveness, Trump did the same, as his extreme rhetoric had essentially created the "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) offshoot of the party that catered to his every proclamation and policy stance. The 2016 election campaign by Donald Trump rested on the idea of "draining the Swamp," a metaphor for eradicating perceived corruption and malfeasance in the political establishment. Racism and fear of the other was on full display, and dominated political discourse in the Trump campaign, as nationalism was prioritized, particularly white nationalism, not unlike Red Scare rhetoric after World War II.

Below the surface of the "Drain the Swamp" messaging, much of Trump's rhetoric, ideals, and target audience matched McCarthy's very closely. First, Trump courted white, working class individuals that imagined they would be economically damaged by outsiders, both domestically and abroad, as well as promoting fears of the "American way of life" being vanquished by the same outsiders. Domestic outsiders, in the context of Trump, were comprised leftists, racial minorities, "elites" in academia, Hollywood and the political establishment, just as with McCarthy (Thompson, 2016). International political bodies also were in the crosshairs of both Trump and McCarthy, as the United Nations (UN) drew the ire of both politicians as the organization was characterized as undermining US interests, and imposing the ideals of a "new order" (Rovere, 1959). Likewise, Trump was a harsh critic of the World Health Organization, as well as the Paris Climate Agreement for the same reasons. Similarly, global issues were reduced to domestic politics (Thompson, 2016). As fears of communism from Europe spreading to America led to a do-

mestic communist witch hunt during the McCarthy era, the collective fear of minority groups abroad championed by Trump led to discrimination of those same groups at home. Muslims, who Trump cast as a national security threat due to past conflicts in the Middle East, and Mexican-Americans, who were characterized as criminals and an economic threat faced significant discrimination (Tesler, 2018). This tactic of oversimplification led to a lack of coherent policy proposals, perhaps by design, as this allowed for both Trump and McCarthy to build an expand a support base that would follow the whims of their political moods without committing to a singular plan or enemy.

As communists are the primary target of any Red Scare, Trump's rhetoric in relation to them was also on par with McCarthy's. Trump has followed the Red Scare playbook of using red-baiting language as catch-all terms to discredit anyone opposing his views. For example, Democratic congresswomen like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar have routinely been characterized as communists and Marxists by Trump. Policy put forth by opponents were characterized the same way. McCarthy framed the New Deal as evidence of creeping communism meant to undermine the American Way of Life, just as Trump framed the Green New Deal, as well as its proponents, as communist and socialist. McCarthy's warning of the "Red Negro" posing a threat to American society is not unlike Trump's characterization of the Black Lives Matter movement as "Marxist." Anarchists and anti-Fascist minded groups have been conflated under the "ANTIFA" umbrella by Trump and his peers, as well, serving as a scapegoat for domestic issues, and even the insurrection of the US Capitol that resulted from the election analyzed in this study.

This same rhetoric was present in the MAGA contingent that was vying for Congress in both elections, too. As detailed in the *Analysis* and *Discussion* sections of this study, exact phrases,

themes, and rhetoric were lifted from Trump, who seemed to borrow from McCarthy's Red Scare playbook. For example, Black Lives Matter and their supporters in Congress were repeatedly targeted in 2020 as evidence of a "Communist revolution." Other candidates spoke of the "Communist virus" allegedly intentionally spread by the Chinese Communist Party. Following Trump's lamentation of "the woke mob," numerous other candidates used the same language to explain how personal freedoms were at risk, as well as adopting the exact phrase "Drain the swamp."

Of course, populist rhetoric is largely similar as a whole, regardless of temporal or political context. While similarities in rhetorical style obviously do not provide stand-alone evidence for a new Red Scare period, the societal and political conditions are what makes this rhetoric and sentiment both salient to the public, and expedient to the politician attempting to win election. An important aspect to consider is that while Trump and his contingent largely recycled populist rhetoric that can be molded to virtually any political context, its significant successes point to this language and themes as salient to the public. As Red Scare fears primarily exist in the imagination of its proponents, as opposed to grounded in evidence, one only needs to examine how prominent these fears and rhetoric have become to constitute a Red Scare. The rest of the contextual evidence and parallels provided in this section help to explain *why* the fears and matching rhetoric are salient. For example, Trump and McCarthy were able to proliferate and expand upon already existing fears and frames for those fears. Both men were able to court the capitalist class that stood to lose power from leftist policy, as well as the working class that believed they stood to lose economically from those policies, as well as the demonized other.

While this study examined the 2020 congressional elections, its significance and outcomes cannot be exclusively relegated to the past. Trump is highlighted in this section primarily because of his influence on the political discourse of congressional candidates. Without establishing a cult of personality and molding the political structure to the point of repeating his rhetoric as an almost necessary tactic to win an election as a Republican, both then and now, Red Scare language may have fallen to the wayside, and reserved for fringe candidates, as has traditionally been the case. Even as of this writing, as Trump's 2024 presidential candidacy hangs in legal limbo, this same rhetoric is still propagated. For example, in campaign speeches, Trump has referred to communists and Marxists, who he also conflates with the Democratic Party, as "vermin," that are "more dangerous than China, Russia and North Korea," and are working together to "destroy the American Dream" (Levine, 2023). By delineating the thread of Red Scare history, ideals, and tactics, we can see how the Red Scare may persist beyond the Trump era.

Popular Support

In the early to mid portion of this era of McCarthyism (late 1940s-1952), McCarthy, his sentiments and the tactics he employed were generally met with public support. Roughly 50% of the general population supported McCarthy and his efforts (Griffith, 1987), with 29% having a non-favorable opinion of McCarthy and his efforts. This split was primarily along party lines, as Republicans were more likely to favor the McCarthyism than Democrats, and more conservative Democratic blocs, like Catholics and small business owners tended to side with McCarthy, as well (Griffith, 1987). This sort of widespread support of intolerance led sociologist and professor, Dr. Samuel Stoffer, to conduct surveys regarding the attitudes of the American public towards political opponents. Perhaps illuminating why McCarthyism was successful, at least for a

period of time, Stoffer's research suggested that roughly 2% of the population said they would *not* restrict the rights of someone who admitted to being a communist (Gibson, 2008). This study also suggested that approximately 90% of respondents would condone the removal of faculty at a college or university if that faculty member was a self-identified communist. While perceived elites and their behaviors were more likely to be scrutinized in relation to communism, this study illuminated a phenomenon where ordinary citizens were less likely to not only have their actions and motives questioned, but they were less likely to modify their behavior in interactions with supposed communists or artifacts related to communism. For example, according to Stoffer's survey, only 36% of respondents claimed they would stop using a product endorsed by a self-proclaimed communist. Essentially, citizens were okay with stifling the freedoms and choices of others, but not necessarily themselves. Stoffer's study, along with the synthesis of other theories on the roles of "elites" in democracy, showcased the "anti-democratic tendencies" of the citizenry and the domination of public policy by the elites (Gibson, 2007), which may help explain both the rise of McCarthyism in the past, as well as its potential for persistence in the present and future.

As evidenced in this delineation of the progression of anti-communist sentiment and activity during the Red Scare periods, a very complex web of seemingly unrelated parties entangled to perpetuate anti-communist ideology in virtually every facet of public life. Red Scare eras do not simply materialize in the moment, rather, they were and are rooted in the ideals of prominent factions and institutions in the United States. For example, "many of the generalizations made regarding the Left by the Right are reflective of the rhetoric of the [Ku Klux] Klan, which paints lack of conformation to white, heteronormative, patriarchy as communism" (Schmack, 2022,

p.3). These entrenched and cultivated attitudes are inseparable from the historic and contemporary political landscape. As these are some of the dominant frames presented in political discourse by news media and politicians, they may tacitly garner popular support.

Parallels from second Trump term

Beyond the aforementioned parallels in the geopolitical and domestic landscapes between former Red Scares and today, the second Trump term is a prime example of these conditions becoming more inflamed. Much of Chapter II was dedicated to historicizing the Red Scares so that the reader could easily recognize the warning signs. Accordingly, since taking office in January 2025, it seems this cycle of events is back in full-swing. While these parallels are more fleshed-out in Chapter VI's Discussion, this context is important in understanding the analysis of this study as though there is no direct correlation between Red Scare conditions and the degradation of democracy, I further argue that these conditions are crucial symptoms of this collapse.

Contemporary Issues

New conflations

Equally as notable as the general misuse of these terms is the conflation of them with violence or violent acts. For example, a 2019 Senate resolution authored by Republican Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA) equated "Antifa," or anarchists, more broadly, as inherently violent by nature, and called for the group — of which there is no formal organization — to be designated as "domestic terrorists." Similarly, anarchists were equated and conflated with doing harm in a September 2020 tweet from former President Donald Trump, where he stated,

My administration will do everything in its power to prevent weak mayors and lawless cities from taking Federal dollars while they let anarchists harm people, burn buildings, and ruin lives and businesses…

These resolutions and tweets conflate a left-wing ideology with inherent violence, despite evidence showing that the far-left typically shows more restraint in its usage of violence, compared to the far-right (Copsey & Merrill, 2020).

While political attacks and smear campaigns are nearly ubiquitous in political campaigns, there is a difference between a politician referring to an opponent as "woke," as opposed to a communist, which carries vastly different implications. In any case, assessing the trend established at least since the first Red Scare of using political terms as adjectives to disparage political opponents and ideologies can better help us to understand how widespread the practice is, what its current implications are, and how to combat it.

Political literacy

One could argue that a properly functioning democracy is comprised of citizens that have a requisite level of political literacy (Douglas, 2002). American civic knowledge and participation has steadily decreased over the years (Shapiro & Brown, 2018; Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2022). A lack of political knowledge, as well as not knowing *how* to engage with the political process leads to an apathetic public, which is detrimental to a functioning democracy (Shapiro & Brown, 2018). Not only are features of the American government misunderstood — less than half of Americans can name all three branches of government, for example (Annenberg Public Policy Center, 2022) — basic political systems are also misunderstood. According to a 2019 Pew Research Center Survey, roughly 55% of Americans have a negative view on the term "social-

ism," and of that 55%, majority of respondents held this view because they believe socialism "undermines work ethic, and increases reliance on government." A follow-up to this survey, also conducted by the Pew Research Center (2022), revealed that Americans who negatively viewed the term primarily do so because they believe socialism restricts individual freedoms.

On the opposite side of the political spectrum, scholar Bruce Kuklick (2022) notes the fundamental lack of understanding that Americans have of the term "fascism" due to its relegation to a term of mere spectacle, rather than substantive dialogue. Misunderstandings of these terms, both by the American public, as well as politicians opens the door for them to be misused, and even weaponized.

Media studies scholar Stuart Hall (1973) used his encoding-decoding model to describe how there is a constant struggle and negotiation for meaning of language, particularly within a particular cultural context. Further, Hall notes that power imbalances impact language, as well how language reinforces power structures. Therefore, there is a sense of urgency to reclaim words in a democratic society, so that one group may not monopolize and weaponize language and limit debate on their behalf. One example of this weaponization of language, especially in the context of an under-educated public, is "red-baiting."

Political literacy and social media

In contemporary times, there is also a noted intertwining of political literacy and information literacy (Buschmann, 2019). In this case, "information literacy," especially "critical information literacy," is defined as "a frame of reference for consuming information or a type of critical thinking [that addresses] the underlying power structures that shape information and [a consequent] acquisition of agency" (Cooke, 2017, pg. 219). Thus, an individual may not effectively

fulfill their civic obligations if they lack requisite informational (media) literacy, which is inherently tied to political literacy.

According to a 2020 Pew Research Center poll, approximately one in five Americans primarily gather political news through social media, as opposed to traditional forms of media, like a newspaper or cable news (Nadeem, 2020). Amongst younger demographics, particularly those aged 18-29, roughly half of those individuals gather their political news through social media (Nadeem, 2020). This is representative of an increasing trend, in terms of social media becoming a primary source of news for Americans (Atske, 2021; Nielsen & Ganter, 2022). On the surface, this trend may not be alarming, but according to the same Pew Research Center poll, individuals who rely on social media as their primary source of political news are generally less informed, seek out fewer sources of news and information, and are more likely to be exposed to misinformation and disinformation.

Of the prominent social media sites (i.e. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok), roughly 60% of Twitter users say they use the platform to regularly gather political news, a higher percentage than any other social media platform (Atske, 2022). The platform has a substantial influence on political discourse and participation in America (Kreiss & McGregor, 2018). Though the user-base of the site skews younger, more white, and more left-leaning, these demographics are shifting to encompass a more diverse user-base, in part due to the larger demographic shifts in the US, as well as because of the company's takeover by Elon Musk (Anderson, 2023). Therefore, Twitter must become a particular focus in its relation to political literacy amongst the American public and its impact on the nation's governance.

Role of Twitter

In addition to providing the platform for discussion and information dissemination, social media platforms, like Twitter, either purposefully, or inadvertently dictate how much of the discussion and process plays out. In order to remain competitive, even the most prominent traditional news outlets are forced to adapt to the confines of these "Digital Intermediaries," as Kleis Nielsen and Ganter (2018) call them. For example, news outlets may have to adopt a writing style that comports well with the brevity of messages on social media platforms, as well as create headlines that are more likely to be shared. Given the capitalist economic ecosystem that companies like Twitter exist within, their primary motivation in their side of this relationship is to drive engagement, and increase revenue, rather than to provide an ideal Habermasian Public Sphere (Kleis Nielsen & Ganter, 2022) Ultimately, the very nature of social media platforms, like Twitter, inherently change what messages are sent, how they are received, and how they are engaged with.

At the time of its establishment, Twitter provided users a reverse-chronological feed of tweets from accounts they follow. This meant that users would not be exposed to tweets that they did not intentionally seek out. However, in 2016, Twitter implemented a feed based on what its algorithms deemed to be personally relevant to each user. The exact inner-workings of the algorithm are not transparent. Twitter has made mention of a few of the criteria that is part of its algorithmic formula, but because of the ambiguities in the explanation for exactly how the algorithm works, it serves as a sort of gatekeeper (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2021). This gatekeeping function may actively play a part in agenda-setting, in that content from traditionally non-mainstream sources or ideologies can be frequently thrust into a user's content feed, so long as those tweets

meet the criteria for algorithmic amplification, like generating a high number of likes (Bandy & Diakopoulos, 2021). Now, users are exposed to tweets that may be relatively older, and those tweets may come from accounts they do not follow. Tweets are ranked by the algorithm to how relevant it perceives that message to be to each user, based upon "user activity, social connectivity, and content features" (Huszár et al., 2022). For example, clicking on, or interacting with a tweet by liking or retweeting it will signal to the algorithm that tweets like those, both in terms of content and source, should be deemed more relevant to the user, and thus will show up more often.

Digging into the mechanisms of how Twitter's recommender algorithm functions and generates output may appear, at least on the surface to be value-neutral, in terms of the types of content that are amplified. However, research indicates that while the algorithm itself may be agnostic, the beneficiaries of this agnosticism are clear. Media outlets that are noted as having a "strong-right" bias are shown to benefit from algorithmic curation, compared to those with a "strong-left" bias, potentially due to news media reporting events in non-biased manners (Huszár et al., 2021). Further, niche accounts, compared to mainstream and bipartisan accounts have an amplified reach due to algorithmic curation, especially niche accounts with a right-leaning disposition (Bandy & Diakopolous, 2021).

Due to algorithmic curation relying on a user's search history and interaction with tweets related to a given topic, the user will see more tweets pertaining to that given topic or topics. Here, we notice a clear beneficiary of this curation. Because right-wing populists tend to have a more homogenized agenda, they tend to use similar terms to describe similar topics, compared to their left-wing counterparts (Perez-Curriel, 2020). This homogenization may lead a user who interacts

with a tweet from a far-right populist leader to have a higher likelihood of being exposed to similar messaging from other far-right populist leaders, as the algorithm will notice the similarities between the tweets, and therefore, deem them to be just as relevant to the user.

While, algorithmically, Twitter operates in the aforementioned fashion, those on the right have criticized Twitter, prior to the takeover of Elon Musk, of censoring right-wing voices manually (Grynbaum, 2017). In this case, right-wing politicians, like House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), leveraged these claims to assert "liberal bias" in tech platforms, such as Twitter. In all, 19 installments of the "Twitter Files" outlined various efforts and attempts to curtail, moderate, or censor discussion related to topics such as COVID-19 and the January 6th attack on the Capitol of the United States. However, former Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey combatted those claims, and accused now owner Elon Musk of selective reporting of these findings and internal memos, and highlighted that many left-wing and anti-fascist users had their reach manually limited, as well (Clark, 2022). Journalistic investigations point to evidence that those on both sides of the political spectrum have engaged in asking Twitter to enact more strict moderation on content from the other side of the spectrum (Suebsaeng & Rawnsley, 2023). What these competing and relatively inconclusive claims show is that Twitter is not only a very ripe battleground for contentious political issues, it is also viewed as an extremely powerful and valuable tool on both sides of the political spectrum for disseminating messages — one which red-baiting may be a useful tool to leverage.

Political discourse on Twitter

Negative rhetoric during elections on Twitter constitutes much of the conversation on the platform. Gervais, Evans & Russell (2018) note that those in especially competitive races are more likely to use language evoking anger, sadness, and anxiousness than those in less competitive races. Similarly, Russell (2021) acknowledges that hyper-partisanship may also be causing Senatorial candidates, those of which are historically less ideologically extreme than House candidates, to increase their usage of divisive rhetoric on Twitter.

Cassell's (2021) study of populist rhetoric on Twitter tells us that populist phrases and evocations generate more engagement on Twitter than those tweets without populist under or overtones. Populist rhetoric, especially on Twitter, is more commonly used by right-wing candidates (Lacatus, 2019). Though not intrinsically linked to red-baiting, populist rhetoric is used to evoke negative feelings toward a ruling class, and generate empowerment amongst the rest of society. Therefore, if a candidate talks about "the communists in Washington," in this hypothetical case, they are essentially using populist rhetoric through a lens of red-baiting. This may help explain the rise in populist rhetoric in the last 20 years (Roodijun, 2023) and the red-baiting practices that coincide with it.

Similarly, sentiment analysis of the overall political discourse on Twitter can be predictive of election outcomes. For example, in all but four states in the 2020 election, the general sentiment of tweets from users within a state matched the election outcome in that state (Chaudhry et al., 2021). That is to say, states where users that tweeted more positively about Joe Biden, than his opponent, Donald Trump, had a very strong tendency to elect Joe Biden, to which the inverse

applies, as well. Thus, Twitter can not only be an important barometer for public opinion and attitudes, but it can inform us on the congruence between political discourse and political action.

Sentiments and emotions expressed by politicians on social media can impact sentiments and emotions of their constituents on a given topic or issue and make them more salient to the public (Van Duyn & Collier, 2019, p. 32). Therefore, understanding the sentiments that politicians use to describe "extremist" political ideology may be crucial in forming evaluations of the given ideology in question, especially in a relatively politically illiterate society.

Studies exploring the sentiment of political discourse on Twitter (Chaudhry et al., 2022; Joyce & Deng, 2017) have typically focused on the general user-base of the platform, as opposed to sentiments that exclusively are expressed by politicians. However, ascertaining whether a user is genuine, as opposed to a bot or someone deliberately partaking in astroturfing, can be difficult. Thus, examining tweets from verified politicians may be a more accurate way to measure true sentiment.

Future outlook

The practice of red-baiting has been continues to this day. Given that politics, particularly in the United States have seen dramatically increased polarization amongst both citizens (Druckman et al., 2021) and government officials (Skytte, 2021), one may infer that the problem may only be exacerbated in the future. The increase in political polarization is also tied to the increase of incivility on social media, especially amongst US politicians (Frimer et al, 2022). Whether intentional or not, the "uncritical embrace of this double genocide ideology seems designed to protect the interests of the political and economic elites," and misleads a public that may not have adequate political literacy (Ghodsee, 2014, p.134). Weaponization of these terms via creat-

ing false narratives and dichotomies (Wodak, 2015) can lead to political violence (Ghodsee, 2014). Indeed, political extremism and adjacent attitudes are on the rise in the United States (Bennett, 2022). Therefore, drawing attention to the mainstreaming of red-baiting, and subsequently educating the public in matters of political systems and governance may not only help reduce uncivil behavior and political violence, but help foster a better functioning democracy.

Before we may begin to make these amends, it becomes paramount to understand exactly how prevalent this practice is, what conditions foster this practice, and what the immediate political outcomes of the practice are.

Chapter III - Theory and Literature Review

Theoretical Backing

To understand how and why red-baiting works, contextualizing the practice in the scope of traditional media studies theories, and conceptualizing those theories in the contemporary social media provides a basis for the understanding and justification of this study. Specifically, the interplay between the practices of agenda-setting, priming, framing, cultivation theory, and Francia's Free Media Thesis (2018) combine to explain *why* red-baiting takes place and *what* its impacts are on elections. Ultimately, my argument is that the combination of agenda-setting, priming, framing *cultivates* a political reality, both to politicians and the public, where the threat of communism and other leftist politics is real, and necessitates rhetorical and legislative action. Given this cultivated political reality, fear-mongering through the lens of red-baiting is incentivized to garner attention for campaigns and issues through social media.

Agenda-setting

Concepts such as agenda-setting help explain the foundation of red-baiting on social media. While agenda-setting is primarily used to describe the actions of news media (Oliver, Bryant & Rainey, 2020), the concept may also be used by politicians, directly (Shpaizman, 2021). Agenda-setting is predicated upon the idea that the agenda setter is not reflecting reality -- rather, they filter and shape it (Kosicki, 1993). This phenomenon is identifiable in the way politicians and news incorrectly label an opponent or policy "communist," or any synonymous term. The labeling is not a reflection of an accurate reality, if one grounds reality in commonly agreed upon definitions that can be easily attained by reading a standard dictionary. By shaping the semantics of a term and ideology, the agenda-setter is molding reality to their liking, and broadcasting that

reality to the public. A contemporary example of red-baiting as part of the agenda-setting process, Ghodsee (2014) points to media coverage of Vladimir Putin and references to him as a "communist" as a precursor for "vigorous" political action against him and Russia. By using these terms to describe the opposition, agenda-setting theory holds that future policy decisions will be debated with these labels in mind (Riker, 1986). In practical terms, this means that policy introduced by a politician who has had these kinds attacks and claims levied against them will be taken less seriously by other politicians and the public.

Twitter has been shown to be an effective tool for candidates to set the agenda for issues. As Miles and Haider-Markel (2020) point out, tweets can have a significant impact as to what the public deems to be a salient issue, and if the candidate can frame that issue early on to be a matter of "socialism versus freedom," or something to that effect, that may stick with the public. There is a relatively low threshold of exposure to messages to achieve salience, with some studies indicating that exposure to a message just four to eleven times can make an issue salient to the receiver (Briggs & Stuart, 2006; McDonald, 1997). "Wearout effects" in salience can occur, too, if a message is repeated to the receiver beyond this threshold (Batra & Ray, 1986). In the context of this research, this means too many red-baiting tweets may numb the receiver to its effects. Gilardi et al. (2022) notes that there is not a clear directional level of influence when it comes to agenda-setting on social media between political parties, individual politicians, and traditional media. This means that political actors and news media take cues from one another as to what issues are salient.

Not all political actors set an agenda the same way on social media, either. For example, Republicans are noted as setting a more cohesive agenda with their tweets than Democrats, as their

messaging is more uniform in terms of terminology and topics discussed (Yang et al., 2016). This allows us to understand the results of this study in a generalizable sense. Ordinary Twitter users may also be able to influence the public agenda, as well, given that trending topics on the site often "precede and are predictive" of cultural and political issues that appear on mainstream news sites like CNN (Groshek & Clough Groshek, 2013, p.24).

Legislators have also been found to adopt topics and issues that their supporters deem important on social media, further supporting the notion that social media users can influence the political and public agenda (Barberá et al., 2019). Ultimately, these examples highlight the need to further examine the impact of red-baiting on social media, as misinformation, disinformation, and rhetorical fallacy may have an impact not only on the political literacy of its user-base, but the political and public agendas, as well.

Cultivation Theory

When the agenda is set by way of repeated coverage and mention of an issue, this may lead an individual to perceive their world and its features in a congruent way. Cultivation Theory is rooted in the idea that immersion and interaction with media leads the viewer or recipient to feel as though the reality being broadcast or portrayed is an accurate representation of reality (Gerbner, 1987). Cultivation has long been understood as predominantly pertaining to television consumption. However, as television viewership declines in favor of social media and consumption of content online, many of the same principles may still apply in aiding researchers to understanding their effects (Nevzat, 2018; Morgan & Shanahan, 2010). Morgan and Shanahan (2010) argue that as long as there are popular storytelling systems that provide widely shared messages, the principles of cultivation hold (p.350). Therefore, I argue that Cultivation is applicable in this con-

text as the overarching theoretical driver of continued red-baiting practices. Supporting this adaptation, scholars claim that cultivation is still present in the current social media landscape, and cuts across various issues and topics (Croucher, 2011; Stein, Krause & Ohler, 2021; Atwell Seate & Mastro, 2016).

Further, cultivation effects are noted to be present on Twitter in the form of "emotional culture" as a result of "massive-scale emotional contagion" (Duncombe, 2019, p.416). That is to say, if the sentiment in tweets that a users comes across on a regular basis is negative, they may adopt a more negative emotion or feeling towards the given topic. Tweets and stories that are positive and "socially oriented" are shown to cultivate positive responses and engagement, which may foster empathy and better social connection (Roberts, 2021). The pro-social attitudes that positive tweets may encourage also have an important connection to a functioning democratic society. According to Miklikowska (2012), "Empathy explained a greater proportion of variance in SDV [support for democratic values] than many established variables" (p. 606). Therefore, assessing the sentiment of politician's tweets, especially when using the key terms pertaining to this study, may help gauge the state of political discourse on social media and the attitudes that result from it.

As with agenda-setting, cultivation theory is primarily used to describe how television and news media is able to cultivate an altered sense of reality. In accord with cultivation theory, if an individual is constantly hearing the terms "communist" and "fascist," for example, they may begin to uncritically accept these claims, as they may be considered part of the vernacular. Similarly, if an individual hears the term "socialist" used in a negative tone to describe a certain policy, repeatedly, their perception and policy preference could change (Jamieson & Romer, 2015).

Priming

In relation to agenda-setting, priming is "focus on the consequences of agenda-setting for public opinion" (Weaver, McCombs & Spellman, 1975). Specifically, priming has been referred to as "the short-term impact of exposure to a (mass-mediated) stimulus on subsequent judgments or behaviors" (Roskos-Ewoldsen, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & Carpentier, 2009) — in this case, regarding candidate and policy evaluations. The effects of priming are rooted in the notion that the particular person or policy in question is salient, as well as the term connected to them (Scheufele, 2000; Weaver, 2007). For example, if a politician or policy is repeatedly mentioned in the same breath as "socialist," "communist," "anarchist," or "fascist," the audience is likely to develop a cognitive bias connecting the two.

Priming effects are also shown to impact election outcomes. For example, the attributes of a given candidate and the evaluative tone used to describe those attributes can impact voters' evaluation of that candidate, their "suitability" for office, and subsequent voting outcomes (Balmas & Sheafer, 2010, p. 220-22).

Like the aforementioned frameworks, dissecting priming effects in communications were initially used to describe the activities of *news media,* rather than an individual political actor or party (Domke, Shah & Wackman, 1998). While the presence of strong priming effects are still up for debate, "priming effects are substantially documented and highly plausible when looking at elite communication with the public" (Van Duyn & Collier, 2019, p. 32). For example, when elites frequently refer to news media as "fake news," evaluations of the credibility traditional news media outlets may be skewed negatively (Van Duyn & Collier, 2019). Therefore, when an elite — in this case, a candidate — directly communicates with their prospective voters on social

media, the tone and messaging they use when discussing opposition and their policies can impact voter evaluations, especially when communicating to their ideologically congruent voter-base (Van Duyn & Collier, 2019).

Framing

Once individuals are primed to think a certain way about a person or issue, the way they are framed will also play a role in their assessment of that person or issue. According to Gitlin (1980), framing in this context refers to "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretations, and presentation, of selection [and] emphasis ... [that are] largely unspoken and unacknowledged ... [and] organize the world for both journalists [and] for those of us who read their reports" (p.7). A rhetorical frame must be used, in many cases, to help constituents understand complex policy implications (van der Pas, 2013). Therefore, utilizing red-baiting tactics to oppose a policy may be a popular choice. Examples of political framing, in general, may include using the phrase "taxpayer money," rather than "public funds," when talking about financing a policy. Another example may be "reallocation of resources," rather than "defund the police." In these cases, the same issue is cast in two different lights that may resonate with voters of other parties differently. In terms of red-baiting, a clear example of this can be found in a 1952 speech by Harry Truman, in which he stated "Socialism is their [those on the right] name for almost anything that helps all the people." In that instance, Senator Taft, who Truman was referring to, framed a social safety net as an encroachment of socialism, which implied an encroachment on personal freedoms to those predisposed to view the term negatively. As scholar George Lakoff (2004) points out, framing inherently limits the scope of debate and the other language used around the debate. Therefore, if a policy is framed as socialist or fascist, further discussions of that policy may have to

include elements of why that policy is or is not socialist or fascist, rather than a substantive debate over the actual issue at hand.

As these terms become commonly used, they become useful tools for comparison and recollection through what is called the "availability heuristic." As information is tied to readily available terms and concepts, that information is deemed important, as it is easily recalled (Groome & Eysenck, 2016). In the context of political communications, if a candidate is called a "communist" repeatedly, they become associated with that term. From there, if a constituent hears that politician's name, they may be inclined to quickly associate them with communism, and may perceive that candidate as more threatening. Similarly, the more frequently the term is used, the more a constituent may believe that communists are common throughout the United States government, much the same way that seeing coverage of acts of violence on the news may lead an individual to think violence is a common occurrence (Riddle, 2010). Therefore, red-baiting tactics, especially during election season, may be an effective way to typecast a particular candidate negatively in the eyes of the public and media.

Spiral of Silence, Public Opinion and the Manufacturing of Consent

The cohesion of messaging, even regarding morally questionable or illogical ideas or sentiments may be explained by Noelle-Neumann's (1974) conception of the Spiral of Silence. This theory posits that ideas or concepts perceived as predominant by an individual will be tacitly supported by not expressing a contrary viewpoint or the same viewpoint, even without internal belief or support of that view. In the age of social media, this support may also include liking or retweeting a post since these engagements are publicly viewable by other users, as opposed to restating support for the opinion on one's own. While one may argue that the Spiral of Silence

would actually discourage the sharing of red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric if the written reactions to those kinds of post were contrarian, this piece argues the opposite, given other engagement metrics are vital to the algorithmic curation of Twitter and other social media.

Lippman's (1922) conception of "Public Opinion" and its relation to the media provides the crucial link between the Spiral of Silence and mass media. Lippman argues that because individuals are not adequately prepared to, nor have the skills to properly assess sociopolitical events and contexts, they are forced to rely on mass media to fill the gaps and provide a manufactured image of reality. As reality is constructed by mass media, the prevailing themes, frames, sentiments and opinions resulting from mass media portrayals become the public opinion that society demands conformity to. With this dynamic process, the continued media coverage of a particular point of view becomes the societal status quo, maintained by the political and business interests who stand to benefit from this status quo (Miller, 2003). As Red Scare sentiments are beneficial to maintaining a reactionary capitalist society and political structure, one can see why both traditional media and social media outlets and platforms have incentive to promote these sentiments. Because of this, the emphasis on Twitter for this study is crucial, as it allowed for a real-time gauge as to whether these ideas promoted were and are indeed salient via analysis of engagement metrics.

The Spiral of Silence rests on the idea that social ostracization is a powerful deterrent to dissent, and that conforming to the perceived prevailing attitudes and positions will prevent this ostracization.it was developed in the aftermath of Nazi Germany and the public support of Hitler to explain why more did not speak out against Nazi war crimes. These ideas were then the foundation of a study related to how public opinion polling was able to swing voting margins in West

German elections near election day, simply based upon who the public believed would win the races. For example, when individuals are presented with polling numbers prior to elections, they are likely to at least publicly shift their preferred candidate to match the majority opinion (Farjam & Loxbo, 2023). The related bandwagon effect, where perceived popularity perpetuates itself as low information citizens assume that society at large has the correct opinion, candidates that are the perceptually the most popular, or even simply visible, snowball into greater support (Lammers et al., 2022).

Owing to this foundation, this study uses the Spiral of Silence to explain *why* Red Scare rhetoric and red-baiting often go unchecked, both by politicians and the public. When these practices are heavily engaged with on social media, either positively or negatively, algorithmic curation boosts their visibility and perceived prevalence, leading both ordinary users and other politicians to overestimate their salience, and perpetuate them.

This phenomenon also applies in the context of issue and sentiment support, too. Even in the most polarized political contexts, like the United States, those who claim to be moderate are more likely to support an issue or idea that matches public sentiment (Farjam & Loxbo, 2023). Conversely, ideas and issues that are presented negatively, even if they align with one's values and beliefs, are likely to lead to an abandoning of those principles. The caveat is that individuals who are not concerned with public opinion are unlikely to change their behaviors or preferences. Since Twitter is a polarized platform, the echo chambers that form become the "public space" required for Noelle-Neumann's conception, as opposed to the totality of the platform itself. So, dissent remains discouraged within the echo chambers of hyper partisan rhetoric , even as ideas become more polarized and extreme compared to actual public sentiment.

Agenda-setting, Framing, Priming and Cultivation theories all play a role in developing and perpetuating this spiral. Once an agenda is set through repeated media attention and presented in a particular light, citizens associate attributes with the candidate or policy based upon the frames and cultivate a conception of reality based around those frames. Those with dissenting opinions towards the prevailing ideas and frames then are likely to reserve their ideas through either silence or shifting support, thus perpetuating the spiral. Suppression of dissenting opinions in the offline realm can create a chilling effect in the online realm, where users of social media may be less inclined to express their views for fear of platform censorship and hateful messages from other users that hold the perceived majority viewpoint. This makes social media a fertile ground for the further dissemination of red-baiting and false information, as messages can spread more rapidly and dissent can be quelled with the click of a button.

Free Media Thesis

The combination of agenda-setting, the related concepts of priming and framing, and cultivation are on full display in the Free Media Thesis, coined by Francia (2018). The Free Media Thesis (FMT) is premised on the idea that garnering more attention through free media, such as social media platforms, can be more effective than "paid media," such as purchasing television ads. This process can help explain how candidates on social media are able to employ red-baiting tactics, and in the process, set the agenda, frame issues, prime their audience, cultivate a reality, all while making political expedient claims that help their visibility.

One of the main conditions of the FMT is that the propagator, or candidate, in this case, may utilize language that has a better chance of attracting attention. Therefore, the candidate may use more abrasive or colorful language, in order to capture an audience. Francia (2018) used the

Trump campaign of 2016 as an example of this, where he states, "[Trump's] Twitter posts were often deliberately designed to entice journalists with controversial statements intended to provoke conflict with an opponent—a strategy for generating free media that candidates have used in speeches and press releases well before the dawn of social media" (p. 445). This example Francia lays out may help explain why candidates may use terms like "anarchy, "communist," and "fascist" to describe their opponents and their policies, as it is likely to generate more attention for themselves, as well as serving to damage the reputation of their opponents.

The concept of the Free Media Thesis arguably comports well with an "attention-based economy." Davenport and Beck (2001) argue that because there is such an abundance of information available to the public, that information must essentially compete with other forms of information, like news stories, or in this case, tweets, in a sort of "economy of attention." Franck (2019) supplements this idea by arguing we live in an era of "mental capitalism," whereby concepts and ideas drive not only our attention, but actual economic markets, as well. Thus, because of the types of engagement that drive this immaterial economy, such as likes and retweets, there is an increased incentive to make statements and push rhetoric that achieves notoriety, regardless of intellectual or political merit. The types of posts that tend to gain high levels of engagement, in addition to being emotion-driven, are also generally sensationalist (Poell & van Dijck, 2017). According to Hopster (2021), right-wing sensationalism comports well with social media engagement in that "the algorithmic filters of social media are generally favourable both to spreading the *contents* of populist messages and to the *style* of populist communication" (p.556). Sensationalist claims, in the instance of right-wing social media posts, may come in many different forms, such as conspiracy theories, hoaxes, or simply factually incorrect, yet bold claims. These

sensationalist stories, posts, or claims may raise to mainstream prominence if a notable political figure repeats them or advocates for them, and a larger news outlet reports on that endorsement (Freelon, Marwick & Kreiss, 2020).

Synthesis of related theories

While agenda-setting, framing, priming, cultivation and the Free Media Thesis can apply to virtually any topic, we can clearly trace their interconnected steps through the practice of "red-baiting," which we can see on display in the following hypothetical scenario.

First, a politician, or group of politicians may take to Twitter to capture more attention by making divisive claims, such as calling another politician a "communist." These sorts of controversial claims, in theory, are supposed to help those politicians garner more coverage, whether mainstream news media picks up on their claims, or if they "trend" on Twitter. In the process, repeated focus on "communists in Washington," "socialist policies," or "fascists in your backyard" by influential figures on Twitter sets an agenda to their followers, telling them these are legitimate concerns and issues of importance. Within these tweets, issues, such as infrastructure bills or tax increases proposed by other politicians, may be framed as "socialist spending" or "communist-style class warfare," and may prime the audience to view subsequent political action by the given politician or group as extreme, regardless of context. This framing and priming process also works to limit the scope of political discourse, as ordinary political action may be framed as extreme. These repeated messages are then disseminated from politicians, legacy media, and influencers both to their bases and the public, at large, where those messages are discussed, adapted, and adopted — in a manner consistent with Two-Step Flow. In contemporary cases, the two-step flow process is not necessarily uni-directional, but can rise from the bottom

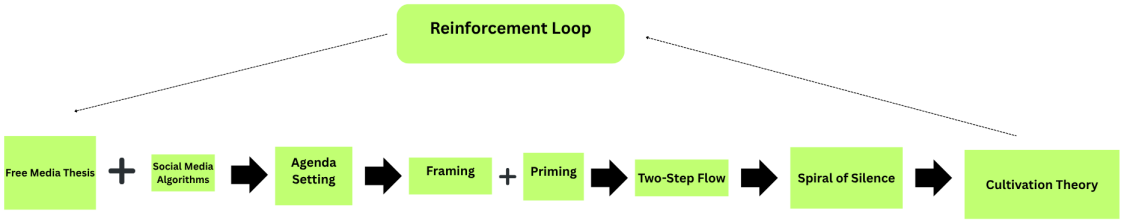
up, or swirl between the most influential voices. Once these messages are adopted and entrenched, dissent is discouraged by both the elites and the public, leading to a spiral of silence which further entrenching those messages and sentiments. The culmination of this practice may result in the cultivation of a manufactured reality for the audience, where they believe they are living in a dangerous society and policies meant to help are nefarious.

To reiterate, *cultivation* is the primary theoretical driver to explain this process. Cultivation of a political reality where communism and other leftist politics pose an imminent threat to American society is created by way of setting an agenda that focuses on existential threats to society, culture and the economy, which are then framed in simplistic binary terms, such as "us versus them," this primes the public to conceive of those ideas as inherently dangerous, which creates a perceived majority opinion that tacitly silences dissent, paving the way for those messages to reinforce themselves on social media, where bolder claims are rewarded with more visibility. Ultimately, using these lenses to examine red-baiting and related practices on social media can help us ascertain the *how* and *why* the practice occurs, as well as its potential effects. Below is a diagram of what I call the "Cultivation Model of Political Realities," which shows how I predicted these theories would interconnect and reinforce one another.

In sum, I argue that Cultivation serves as the overarching theoretical driver of continued red-baiting practices in political campaigns and discourse. The process, depicted above, operates through an interconnected cycle where politicians use controversial red-baiting language on social media to capture attention, outlined in Francia's Free Media Thesis, and are reinforced and given more exposure due to algorithmic curation. Through repeated focus and usage of terms like "communist," "socialist," and "fascist," among others, these agents set an agenda that frames

ordinary policies and politicians as extreme, priming audiences to view subsequent political action as dangerous. These messages are then disseminated through politicians, legacy media, social media, and other influencers to the public, where dissent becomes discouraged. The Eventually, this results in a cultivation of a manufactured reality for the audience, where they believe they are living in a dangerous society where policies meant to aid are seen as dangerous. In this cultivated reality, where supposed communism and other leftist politics pose an imminent threat, reinforces itself through social media platforms where bolder claims are rewarded with more visibility, creating a self-perpetuating cycle that further entrenches this language and its resulting viewpoints.

Figure 4. Cultivation Model of Political Reality



Literature Review

Much of the work tangential to this study has focused on social media's impact on political discourse, ranging from politicians, to media outlets, and finally to ordinary citizens. While studies have explored *what* politicians are generally tweeting about, in what manner, and how frequently, they tend to lack further exploration into the context and more nuanced sentiments of those tweets.

Zooming out from the specific scope of this study, yet still very intimately related, is the spread of misinformation and disinformation on social media within the context of political campaigns. Misinformation and disinformation loan themselves to the creation and proliferation of fake news, which has run rampant in political discourse and news, and has dire consequences for functioning democracies (Grinberg et al., 2019). Fake News has an amorphous definition, with scholars, the general public, and politicians employing various descriptions of the phenomenon. One of the most cited scholarly definitions of fake news is "deliberate presentation of (typically) false or misleading claims as news, where these are misleading by design" (Gelfert, 2018, p.84). Misinformation refers to inaccurate information that is a matter of "getting the facts wrong" (American Psychological Association, 2022). In this case, the misinformation is "held confidently" by the disseminator (Jerit & Zhao, 2020). An example of this would be a politician falsely claiming, perhaps due to their own ignorance, that the Affordable Care Act necessitated "death panels" to dictate who receives medical care (Berinsky, 2017). Much like fake news, disinformation is intentional, as it is "false information deliberately intended to mislead" through their presentation as true information (American Psychological Association, 2022). Regardless if a false

claim is categorized as misinformation, disinformation, or fake news, the claims can still resonate and perpetuate within a relatively politically illiterate public. Indeed, Red Scare language and red-baiting tactics fall under both the umbrellas of misinformation and disinformation, and could even lead to fake news stories, depending on their use in context.

Misinformation, disinformation, and fake news (which I abbreviate as MDFN) are essential to the creation, proliferation, and spread of Red Scare sentiment. MDFN have been thoroughly studied in the past two American election cycles, particularly as they relate to social media platforms. Most of this work in MDFN has explored their relation to Presidential elections, particularly as it relates to Donald Trump, though the phenomenon has been well charted globally (Keller et al., 2020; Kusen & Strembeck, 2018; Soares & Recuero, 2021). First, exposure to MDFN on Twitter and other social media platforms is correlated with extremities in political ideology, though this is amplified considerably when a user has a far-right ideology, as opposed to the left (Mosleh & Rand, 2022). Partisan identity and polarity are noted as the primary motivations for sharing MDFN on social media, though mere ignorance may also play a role (Osmudsen et al., 2021). Political elites and influential Twitter users on the right also have an outsized impact on the spread of MDFN compared to ordinary users (Flamino et al., 2023). Republican candidates have been shown to have the greatest influence on MDFN discourse on social media, compared to other political candidates (Benaissa Pedriza, 2021). This tracks well with the idea that Red Scare sentiment is targeted at, and resonates with a mostly right-leaning audience or at least those with right-leaning tendencies. Exposure to MDFN, especially when they are shared by political elites, is also associated with toxicity and moral outrage (Mosleh & Rand, 2022), the latter of which is closely tied to Red Scares. MDFN has also sprouted and continues to grow a

cottage industry of individuals and groups to create and share these sorts of information as they not only prove to be influential in political discourse, they are also profitable, which will be a further challenge not previously addressed in the political arena (Grohmann & Corpus Ong, 2024).

While Red Scare sentiment relies on these three entities (MDFN), to varying extents, the related work has not detailed red-baiting and Red Scare language in their contexts. Instead, this body of work has been more focused on MDFN topics related to election security, personal attacks on candidates, and other major public events, such as the COVID-19 Pandemic. Similarly, most of the work listed in this section examines presidential candidates and their relation to MDFN, as opposed to congressional or other lower-level candidates.

Some explorations into *what* Congress members tweet about have refuted the idea of the "permanent campaign" induced by a 24-hour media cycle now coupled with social media prevalence, implied by Blumler and Kavanagh (1999). Especially during election years, candidates often seek to attract more media attention compared to non-election years (Van Aelst & De Swert, 2009). The same applies to candidates that are competing for spots in competitive districts, as those candidates have tended to have a more "prolific online presence" than those in non-competitive districts or races (Esterling, Neblo, & Lazer, 2005), though other studies have found that Twitter presence and relative extent of a candidate's social media network is not significantly impacted by district competitiveness (Evans, Cordova & Sipole, 2014), leaving the matter unsettled. In terms of topics and issues emphasized by politicians during campaign periods, Vasko and Trilling (2019) found that congressional candidates largely discuss "soft news," such as scandal and service events, as opposed to "hard news," such as financial and policy mat-

ters, during campaigns in a possible attempt to connect on a more emotional level with their prospective voters.

Examinations of agenda-setting in the context of political communication on Twitter has shown an unclear direction of influence between party members and their leaders as to what topics are pushed. Party leaders tend to post about policy matters where the party is perceptually united, leading to minimal need for more junior members to post more sparingly about those issues (Ebanks, Katz & King, 2023). The same research noted an outsized measure of influence that more junior members have on party leaders when there is less intra-party consensus or direction on a topic or issue. When highly contentious political events occur offline, political rhetoric online tends to follow with higher levels of vitriol, such as the periods right before, during, and after the January 6th Capitol Riot. Research is inconclusive as to whether politicians themselves engage in this behavior, as well as to what extent these types of tweets from ordinary users influence politicians (Kim, 2023).

Vasko and Trilling (2019) also have found that candidates tend to tweet with positive sentiments during campaign seasons, and talked more about national or international matters than their own district or state. Campaigning politicians also tend to post more about themselves and take great care in crafting a persona to generate perceptions of authenticity (Ceccobelli, 2018), which arguably loans itself to a more populist style of campaigning and rhetoric, comporting well with Red Scare cultivation. Gender identity also plays a role in what politicians post about on social media, as women tend to post more frequently than men, and focus more on policy issues than men, though the overall share of posts about policy matters such as healthcare and education make up roughly 4.5 % of their overall body of posts (Butler, Kousser & Oklobdzija,

2023). Women have previously been found to tweet with more negative sentiment than men, which may be due to a combination of factors, including party and the party's current control level of the branches of government (Evans & Clark, 2016), though more recent research has refuted this claim, instead suggesting women are more positive than men when controlling for party affiliation (Butler, Kousser & Oklobdzija, 2023), leaving that matter inconclusive.

There is a large body of work concerned with framing of events and policy on Twitter, focused on both politicians and the media. Framing analyses of political discourse from politicians on Twitter have noted that certain frames are recycled and used in tandem with one another, and that political orientation often dictates which frames are used (Johnson, Lee & Goldwasser, 2017). Boydstun et al., (2013) developed a "Policy Frames Codebook" to assist in these sorts of categorizations, which includes a total of 15 frames, including "morality" and "cultural identity." Similar studies have used pre-existing this framework to identify these frames in tweets, including those from congress members (Johnson, Lee & Goldwasser, 2017). Issues considered to be more controversial or divisive than others tend to lead to more framing efforts from politicians through a variety of means, including hashtags (Hemphill, Culotta & Heston, 2013**).**

Party affiliation and the chamber of Congress one resides in are generally associated with policy-focused tweeting, specifically, Democratic Party affiliation and the House of Representatives positions (Hemphill, Russell & Gonzalez, 2021). Incumbent candidates tend to tweet general information and related news articles about them, their party, and policy (Frechette & Ancu, 2017), whereas challengers tend to be more attack-minded (Sahu & Choi, 2021). While these studies focus on the general content of campaign tweets, they generally do not examine the types of information presented, nor do they parse sentiments any further than "positive" or "negative."

While this study does not explicitly focus on the social media feedback loop of political discourse, several studies have examined sentiment regarding the general public's views of candidates and policy. Wang et al., (2012) employed an automated sentiment analysis system to understand attitudes in real time, as opposed to after the fact. This model was constructed using the help of the Amazon Mechanical Turk system, whereby a group of individuals gave their input on the sentiment of words and tweets to build system that categorized tweets as "positive, negative, neutral, or unsure." Further, Wang et al., (2012) included tangential sentiments to account for humor or sarcasm, providing some nuance to the tweet analysis. Using that data, an automated system was then created to analyze large batches of Presidential campaign tweets from those running for office. Other automated sentiment analyses used in political communication contexts have attempted to account for multiple sentiments present in social media posts, such as the "SentiStrength" algorithm that could identify sentiments at 60% accuracy (cross-referenced with human interpretations of the same sentiments), but were largely concerned with opinion-based posts and informal writing, as opposed to sentiments around current events and policy (Thelwall et al., 2010). Similar processes have been used to look for signs of conflict between congress members, as well as potential controversial issues that may have gone unnoticed in media coverage (Panasyuk, Yu & Mehrota, 2014). Analyzing tweet sentiment by location has also been used as a barometer to predict attitudes towards candidates, possible voting behavior, and polarization by district. Swing states and districts, particularly with low social and economic scores, are noted as cultivating more incivility on social media (Vargo & Hopp, 2017). Similar studies and results have proven inconclusive (Heredia, Prusa & Khoshgoftaar, 2018).

Much of the actual rhetoric analyzed has been from presidential candidates and the subsequent sentiments and interactions with their followers. Yaqub et al., (2017) had a similar goal in mind to this study, as they explored sentiment of posts from Presidential candidates, and the subsequent impact on posts from their followers. In that case, the Two-Step flow process of dissemination is easily recognized, as users are generally inclined to repeat messages and sentiments of prevalent accounts, as opposed to presenting their own ideas or opinions. This study stands in contrast to Yaqub et al's, as this focus is on congressional candidates, as well as its differing assessments of exactly what constitutes positive and negative sentiment. For example, Yaqub et al., (2017) characterized Donald Trump's 2016 overall Twitter sentiment as "positive," despite its morally and ethically questionable content, as the populist rhetoric to rally his followers was deemed "positive," at least to those followers. Conversely, Hillary Clinton's overall sentiment was classified as "negative," as much of the content dealt with negatively framing Trump's words and actions. Characterizing tweets in this manner is in line with other studies (Hageman & Abramova, 2023) that attribute the "We Speak" of populist rhetoric — speaking on behalf of the grievances of the group — as inherently positive, such as the hypothetical "We are going to build the wall!" These sorts of tweets are also positively associated with higher engagement metrics, regardless of perceived sentiment. As this study understands red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric as inherently destructive to liberal democracy, tweets that express attitudes and sentiments counterproductive to an equitable and free democracy, such as racism and fear-mongering, are deemed negative.

In addition to sentiment analysis having been used to explore election outcomes (Chaudhry et al., 2021), this process has also been used to understand public attitudes towards specific policy

and related ideas (Calderon et al., 2015). Other studies have explored the role of tweet sentiment in relation their dissemination with conflicting findings. On one hand, some argue that tweets with positive sentiments are spread more than those with negative sentiments (Ferrara & Yang, 2015), whereas others have found that sentiment and post engagement have an inverse relationship, where more tweets with more charged language, usually negative, leads to higher engagement (Russell, Evans & Gervais, 2023; Ballard et al., 2022). The caveat, in both cases, is that accounts with large followings, such as Presidential candidates, this sentiment relationship is somewhat mitigated, as their posts tend to receive higher levels of engagement, regardless their tone (Hageman & Abramova, 2023). This loans itself back to Francia's (2018) conception of the Free Media Thesis, where free press coverage is generated by tweets that garner attention, both positive and negative, which then perpetuates into salience.

Much of the related red-baiting and Red Scare literature in campaigns focuses on historical case studies and contexts, as opposed to contemporary times. Similarly, many Red Scare and red-baiting work focuses on further refining the definition of the Red Scare and McCarthyism, as opposed to suggesting Red Scares can still occur. Schrecker (2008), closely examines its historical roots and associates it more as originating with J. Edgar Hoover, and sometimes calls the practice commonly referred to as "McCarthyism" as "Hooverism." Goodall (2017) understands red-baiting as a political strategy that emerges in contexts of high turmoil in societies where consensus opinion and unity are aspirationally the ideological goal. While Goodall suggests that these conditions know no temporal bounds, they are not related back to contemporary times in a meaningful way. Interestingly, while scholars have been more reserved in characterizing new Red Scares,

more popularized mass media publications have explored the similarities between the 1950s and now.

Scholarly examinations of red-baiting in campaign contexts are scant, if not non-existent. Instead the practice's effectiveness has generally had the benefit of extreme hindsight, as many of these explorations are case studies dating back to the 1950s. For example, red-baiting as a campaign tactic was opined as not effective in the case of the 1952 Senate election campaign for Harley Kilgore of West Virginia (Smith, 2007). In that case, the intricacies of West Virginia local politics and labor power were examined and used to explain why Kilgore's tactics were not effective. Conversely, red-baiting was deemed to be an effective campaign strategy for Richard Nixon's quest for the Senate in the 1950s, as the practice was closely tied to gendered attacks (Van Ingen, 2012). Red-Baiting has also been explored as a campaign tactic when catered to a niche demographic, like the Cuban diaspora in Miami, Florida, where the practice is useful in gathering support and winning elections in a district that may otherwise be inclined to vote the other way (Mendible, 2010). Like the West Virginia case study suggested, the sociopolitical context of Cubans in Miami and the history of their community likely played a significant role in the tactic's effectiveness. Similarly, Gentry's (2005) examination of red-baiting in 1950s North Carolina Senate races suggests that grassroots red-baiting at high volumes are effective, even if the pre-existing political environment does not favor those sentiments or practices. This conclusion, I argue, suggests that if Twitter engagement and interactions with more local politicians are understood as "grassroots," red-baiting may be an effective strategy to garner support, so long as those sentiments are widely visible across the platform. These studies do not examine red-baiting

in Congressional campaigns at a national level, nor do they examine them within the context of social media, making this research crucial to fill in existing knowledge gaps.

Gaps in Existing Literature

As the previous section highlights, this study is a first of its kind in terms of investigating red-baiting, as well as Red Scare rhetoric on social media. The aforementioned studies in the last section, as well as the larger body of work tangential to red-baiting and campaign rhetoric provide a basis for this study, but do not answer its essential inquiries.

Red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric have been previously connected to right-wing populism, such as comparative case studies into McCarthyism and similar politicians. However, there have not been contemporary inquiries into the possible links between Red Scare rhetoric, right-wing populism and social media.

MDFN in the context of Congressional candidates has been relatively unexplored. Similarly, few existing studies classify red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric as MDFN, though they may fit both definitions, depending on their context. This is perhaps because Red Scare and red-baiting work has largely been relegated as a past occurrence and analyzed in the form of specific case studies, as opposed to understanding the greater scale they can occur at. MDFN studies relating to this work have also primarily examined the sharing of links and supposed news stories by politicians and their followers, as opposed to their espousal directly from the politicians and candidates themselves.

The qualitative analysis crucial to this study has also not thoroughly been explored to the extent necessary in the existing larger body of work in this area. Sentiment analyses of political tweets have largely examined vitriol, toxicity, and incivility, rather than more nuanced under-

standings of the tweets themselves and their contexts. For example, tweets in other studies have been categorized as "positive" or "negative," generally speaking, as opposed to exploring the themes within those tweets that may provide a better understanding of the message conveyed.

Similarly, these sentiment analyses have largely focused on tweet replies and related discourse from the user base, as opposed to the politicians. When politicians have been the focus of sentiment analyses, they are typically presidential candidates, rather than congressional members or candidates. Therefore, questions remain as to how these themes and sentiments are translated to a more localized level, whether it be at the state or district level.

Previous work in framing of tweets has tended to rely on pre-existing schematics for categorizing tweets, such as the Boydstun's "Policy Frame Codebook." In cases like these, not only are policy-related tweets the primary focus of inquiry, but the codes do not account for more nuance in ascribing the frames, instead assigning frames in a gray-area as "other." Boydstun's codebook also specifically describes policy frames, as opposed to frames related to politicians or any other subject matter. Other work that examines framing of political discourse on Twitter primarily looks at framing of newsworthy events, either by news outlets themselves, or by the politicians who use frames as a preface for news articles they share to their followers (Maireder & Ausserhofer, 2014; Wicke & Bolognesi, 2020). These framing analyses provide a basis for understanding how the process occurs on Twitter, but they do not explain how other concepts, like political ideology are framed with any sort of nuance or depth.

How this study fills those gaps

Since this study is relatively novel in its exploration of red-baiting as it pertains to campaigns and social media, no previous work truly acts as a primary foundation. Accordingly, this work largely charts its own path towards answering specific research questions pertaining to red-baiting prevalence and its relation to engagement metrics, and ultimately election outcomes. While these research questions are quite specific on the surface, the process in which they are answered provides a foundation for future similar work that can be followed for other topics, as well.

First, this study revives the concept of the Red Scare and red-baiting in a contemporary context. Rather than treat this rhetoric, sentiment, and related practices wholly under a different umbrella, such as "fear-mongering" or "misinformation," this work accounts for the historical context of these practices, compares how they have evolved over time, and applies them to the realm of social media. This study recognizes that red-baiting and related practices are features of populist rhetoric and uses principles of populism as a frame to understand these practices, but this study is not an examination of populist rhetoric in its entirety. Therefore, this study addresses a specific subset of populist rhetoric that has been neglected for quite some time by thoroughly parsing this subset for its themes, frames, and sentiment.

This study does not fully tackle the issue of MDFN, writ large. Rather than examining MDFN through a rather narrow lens applied to concrete events, such as claims of election fraud or COVID-19 conspiracies that can be easily determined to be true or false, this study treats the repurposing of words, practices, and systems as instances of MDFN while allowing for some of the same analytical and contextual principles to form a basis for this derivation.

This study also answers outstanding questions regarding the shared and differing campaign rhetoric among those seeking Congressional office. First, Congressional campaign rhetoric generally takes a back-seat to Presidential campaign rhetoric in most analyses, so this study provides a relatively up-to-date survey of *how* candidates engage with social media platforms to gain support, as well as provides a foundation to compare rhetoric between parties and districts. Populist rhetoric is generally examined in the scope of executive level office-seekers and ignores the adaptation of populism on a local level. Just as the Second Red Scare was propagated by a Congress member, this study recognizes the influence that they, too, can be the source of MDFN.

Research Questions

RQ1: *Do red-baiting tweets receive more engagement than non red-baiting tweets?*

RQ2: *Is there an association between party affiliation and the frequency of red-baiting style tweets?*

RQ3: *Is race competitiveness associated with using red-baiting tweets more frequently than in relatively non-competitive races?*

RQ4: *Do candidates who use red-baiting tweets more frequently than their opponents tend to win their races more often than candidates that use red-baiting style tweets less often?*

RQ5: *What were the most common frames , themes, and sentiments embedded in tweets with red-baiting language?*

RQ6: *Do red-baiting tweets tend to be more policy-focused or candidate-focused?*

Theoretical linkages and anticipated results

During elections, candidates tend to adopt a "brand identity" (Perez Curiel, 2020). Further, populist candidates are noted as using Twitter as a tool for adversarial purposes, as opposed to substantive policy discussion (Van Kessel & Castelein, 2016), and are more aggressive in their tone of message (Torregrosa et al., 2022). Therefore, one could expect incumbent candidates with more extreme voting records, and challengers with more extreme platforms to not only be more adversarial in their tone, but they are more likely to use red-baiting style tactics in their messaging.

In terms of engagement with the given social media posts, based upon the available literature, one could anticipate tweets that use red-baiting tactics receive higher engagement levels than tweets that do not, and that Republican candidates will employ the tactic more frequently.

Further, the results of the study shed light on whether candidates in competitive races are resorting to these tactics with greater or lesser frequency than those in non-competitive races, as well as if there is a correlation between these tactics and election outcomes.

Chapter IV - Methodology

This work allows for a holistic analysis of themes, frames, and rhetoric, as it does not solely rely on pre-existing codebooks or frameworks to understand this phenomenon. Instead, by using an inductive qualitative analysis, this work fills the gaps in the greater body of work in this area that have been ignored, like red-baiting, as concepts are not forcibly bundled together to fit an existing code. This flexibility allows for more specific details, themes, and motifs to emerge on their own, and differentiates between flavors of populist rhetoric, MDFN, and Red Scare tactics, rather than treating each as their own monolith.

Structure of Study

Definitions and Operationalization

To begin to answer *all* RQs, the terms (and their pluralities) describing following economic and government systems (Nichols, 2015; Lamb, 2024) are theoretically defined in this section, along with a justification for their inclusion. Those terms were then analyzed for their frequency and usage during political campaigns, along with further analysis of the sentiments attached to them (RQs 1-3):

- Socialism
- Communism
- Anarchy
- Marxism
- Fascism
- Capitalism
- Oligarchy

- Monarchy

Political terminologies are often loosely defined, yet have a measure of consensus surrounding their core concepts (Goodin, 2009). Using a synthesis of Dr. John Hoffman's *Glossary of Political Theory* (2007), *The International Encyclopedia of Political Science* (2011), and *The Oxford Handbook of Political Theory* (2009) to fill in gaps and cross-reference with one another, the terms outlined above are defined for the purposes of this study, as well as their accompanying justifications for inclusion in the study. The rationale for their inclusion is derived from literature referenced in the *Literature Review* section of this study:

Socialism - *A social and economic system marked by the communal or social, rather than private, ownership of the means of production, and typically thought of as a process of long-term structural change to society.*

Rationale: Frequently used as pejorative historically, especially during the Red Scare, as well as in contemporary times to describe a variety of topics and individuals (Ghodsee, 2014; Nichols, 2011). The term has been also defined as the antithesis of capitalism, or "anti-capitalism" (Gasper, 2005), which is the prevailing economic system in the West.

Communism - *An economic and social system characterized by voluntary association in governance, absent private ownership of means of production, class, and money, which distributes goods and services on the basis of need, with the end goal of a dissipation of the "state."*

Rationale: Similar to socialism, communism has been viewed as an antithesis of capitalism, and has been used pejoratively nearly since at least the first Red Scare (Kriesberg, 1946), and continues to this day (Nichols, 2011). While communism is can technically be thought of as a branch or derivative of socialism (Ball & Dagger, 2019) and are often conflated with one another, "communism" or "communist" is often used to describe the state, whereas "socialist" or "socialism" is often used to describe policy or individuals (Nichols, 2011). Communist revolutions in Europe were one of the catalysts for the first Red Scare, so the term is particularly relevant during Red Scare periods.

Anarchy - *Free association and self-governance absent a hierarchy and forced institutions, like the state and capitalism.* Also described by Immanuel Kant (Lechner, 2017) as *"Law and freedom without force."*

Rationale: Anarchists were among the first persecuted during Red Scare periods and even prior, such as during the Haymarket Affair, which preceded the first Red Scare. Anarchy is often conflated with "chaos," though the two are technically not interchangeable. Sociologist Francis Dupuis-Déri (2010) contrasts the two as anarchy being "the rule of all," and chaos being "the rule of none" (p.17). Nonetheless, the pejorative usage of the term may be rooted in Hobbesian — often right-wing — thought (Sensen, 2020) and in contemporary times is used in relation to crime and perceptually dangerous social movements.

Marxism - *A socioeconomic lens that is used to understand class relationships and conflicts towards social evolution and transformation.*

Rationale: The one term in this study that is *not* technically a form of economic, social, or political system, it is included due to its frequent conflation with other social and economic systems terms like "socialism" and "communism" (Nichols, 2011). Marxist-Leninism, a conceptual form of communism, is often described merely as "Marxist," and Marxism, like the above terms, is also used as to describe the antithesis of capitalist and republican —the governance system, not the political party — institutions, such as religion (Nichols, 2011). In contemporary times, politicians use the term to describe social movements, as well.

Fascism - *A state of decay of liberal democracy, characterized by enforced capitalism, authoritarian rule of state, where hierarchy is considered "natural" and "inevitable"* (Hoffman, 2007, p. 53)*, hyper-nationalism and the "privilege of a particular ethnic group" and a "critique of liberalism from the right"* (Hoffman, 2007, p. 53).

Rationale: Fascism is "often used as a word of abuse" (Hoffman, 2007, p. 235). As far back as the 1940s, Orwell (1944) noted that the term was oversaturated in its usage, to the point it had become just another meaningless insult. Presently, some scholars argue that the Trump era has been characterized by fascism (De Genova, 2020; Gökarıksel & Smith, 2016; Robinson, 2019), while others have suggested that while there are similarities between Trumpian body politik and fascism, the two are not necessarily congruent (McGaughey, 2019; Harris et al., 2017). None-

theless, the frequent usage of the term as an insult, coupled with debates as to whether Trumpian politics are indeed fascist, inclusion of this term provides us a point of comparison between usage of the other terms as pejoratives since fascism resides on the right end of the political spectrum and terms like "anarchy" reside on the left. Therefore, one may posit that the term "fascist" would be an insult term of choice from those on the left to those on the right.

Capitalism - *An economic system characterized as featuring labor power as the central commodity. Assumes the "commodifiability" of power, where sovereignty can be bought, sold and transferred* (Dryzek, Honig & Phillips, 2009, p.69). *Means of production are controlled by a hierarchy, and social divisions are divided amongst class lines. Predicated on rewarding individualism* (McClosky & Zaller, 1984).

Rationale: The predominant economic model in the United States, as well as the world. Capitalism, especially without regulation, resides in a farther right position on the political spectrum than its opposites "communism" and "socialism." Many politicians in the United States will laud capitalist features and accomplishments in their campaign, as, at least historically, capitalism and its preservation has garnered broad public support (McClosky & Zaller, 1984, p.4). Some scholars argue that capitalism has replaced democracy in the West (McMillan, 2012), and because of that, the term has a negative connotation to champions of equity and those on the left. Especially as some of its antonyms, like "socialism" and "communism," are used as pejoratives to describe non-capitalist practices and ideals, its inclusion is necessary as a point of contrast to the usage of those sorts of terms.

Oligarchy - *Concentration of power by few in an organization or state. A "deviant form of democracy"* (Hoffman, 2007, p.10)*, this consolidation of power into the hands of a few is the result of organizational structure that results from the marriage of capitalist and democratic practices* (Hoffman, 2007, p. 117)*. The oligarchy is not only made up of "the ruling class," but citizens with more resources and political knowledge, as well* (McCloskey & Zaller, 1984, p.13)*.*

Rationale: The term "oligarch" is generally used pejoratively as a part of "aggressive leftist discourse" directed towards a "ruling class" from "the poor, oppressed, and socially humiliated" (Blinova, 2019, pg. 51). Some scholars believe that "oligarchy" is the best way to characterize the current American political landscape (Winters & Page, 2009; Formisano, 2017), and can be used synonymously with "plutocracy" and "aristocracy." A feature of oligarchy is "nepotism" (Formisano, 2017), which is also used pejoratively and frequently in contemporary discourse. As the term is both used as a descriptor *and* insult in contemporary political discourse, as well as its antipodal position compared to anarchy, socialism and communism, its inclusion is necessary as a means of comparison, as well.

Monarchy - *Rulership by one, derived from familial and class lines, based upon a synthesis of"coercion" and "consent"* (Hoffman, 2007, p. 47)*. The public and civil service undertakings are subject to the ruler. Power, in this case, is determined by rule* (Dryzek, Honig & Phillips, 2008, p.68).

Rationale - Though the term may be perceptually antiquated, especially in American politics, whose origins may be understood as the rejection of monarchy, scholars argue that the political landscape, under Donald Trump, can be characterized as a flavor of monarchy (Gounari, 2018; Kuhner, 2017; Norton, 2017), though, it is missing some key characteristics of traditional conceptions of monarchy, like entrenched nepotism (Kuhner, 2017). Given the historical aversion to this form of governance in the United States, coupled with public comparisons of the Trump presidency and its allies to a monarchy (Norton, 2017), inclusion of this term is necessary as a critique of the right from the left, providing a needed comparison between pejoratives between the opposite sides of the political spectrum.

Omitted Terms

The list of terms in the previous section is obviously not an exhaustive list of *all* political and economic terms and descriptors, however, they are included due to both their public and scholarly salience, their usage as pejoratives, and their positioning as actual models of economic or social governance (with the previously stated exception of "Marxism"). Therefore, political terms that describe *groups,* as opposed to *systems*, were omitted from analysis, as the focus of this study is in regards to the usage of systematic political terms as insults and means of contrast, as opposed to mere "othering."

As such, terms like "Nazi" were omitted as the term technically refers to the particular political organization and apparatus of Germany from 1933-1945, though it is commonly used as a political insult (Horan, 2019). The term "Nazi" is certainly used in present day political discourse, mainly as an ad hominem, but increasingly more as a comparative statement — especially in the second Trump administration. Examining this comparison more closely, the parallels are

evident, to some degree. For example, attacks from the right on academia, diverse cultural norms and institutions are more in line with Nazi-ism than communism or socialism. Since this study examines political *mischaracterization,* rather than mere ad hominem attacks or comparisons, including the term "Nazi" would arguably have necessitated including *any* comparative political statement that could be construed as pejorative. While Nazi-ism is also frequently conflated with "fascism" (Grainieri, 2020), it is also often conflated with "socialism" by those on the right (Granieri, 2020). Therefore, as to not double-count to skew the analysis of the data, either, terms like "Nazi" were omitted.

Similarly, terms to describe other political parties or politicians, like "Democrat" or "Republican" were omitted due to their general non-pejorative usage, as well as the fact that they do not represent a *form* of government or economic system. The labels of Democrat and Republican *were* used to answer RQ1, merely to examine which party members engage in more red-baiting. Potential pejorative usage of the terms was not examined due to their overwhelming frequency of use in the dataset, which would have necessitated manually coding hundreds of thousands of extra tweets.

Terms that are ideologies, flavors, or features of a political system, which are not independent of a given political or economic system, were omitted. For example, the term "neoliberal" is often used pejoratively by the far left, and sometimes the right, to describe both policy and practice within a capitalist system (Plehwe, Walpen & Neunhöffer, 2007). The term is often used to describe privatization and reliance on the free-market capitalist structure to solve societal and economic problems. In the context of American political campaigns, especially those analyzed in this study, the term is used seldomly (one instance in total). Similarly, modifiers to included

terms in this list, like "crony" capitalism, were not counted separately from terms like "capitalism" itself, as "crony" describes a state of capitalism, as opposed to being a standalone political or economic system.

Lastly, certain governance systems like "democracy" were excluded for the purposes of analysis. The term "democracy" is seldom used by mainstream political figures on its own in the pejorative sense. Instead, the term is almost exclusively used as a means of contrast, such the choice between "freedom and democracy versus communism." As this study was focused on attacks, only terms that are commonly used pejoratively were included. Due to its near positive universal usage in mainstream political discourse, coupled with the idea that it is already often used as a means of comparison and contrast with the other included terms in this study, "democracy" was not included.

While terms like those mentioned in this section were not included exclusively for quantitative and qualitative analysis, they were included as codes in the qualitative analysis as a means to understand exactly what systems they were associated with, for the means of analyzing the context of the other included terms.

Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for this mixed methods study were tweets from a individuals running for federal-level public office in the United States government for the year 2020. Specifically, these tweets were pulled from those running for seats from all 50 states in the United States Senate and the United States House of Representatives for the general election, rather than the individual party primaries for those positions. Since political rhetoric is historically more divisive during primaries, the language of those specific tweets during primary season may represent outliers of

the general sample of tweets that these politicians would normally make on the campaign trail (Cowburn, 2022). Presidential candidate accounts were not included within the scope of this study, as this work sought to fill in gaps in research to provide a more holistic look at political campaign rhetoric on social media for other types of candidates. As Presidential candidates have to campaign for a national audience, their tweets were generally not specifically targeted to a singular location or district, and their inclusion would have obfuscated localized results from the data analysis. Excluding Presidential candidates allowed for a better understanding of how frequent and salient the given topics and frames were on a location-by-location basis, as well as providing a new basis for analysis where future studies can use these results as a means for comparison to Presidential races.

Population

The overall population for this study consisted of roughly 250,000 tweets from May 1st, 2020, a time when majority of primary elections have concluded, until the end of the day on November 3rd, 2020, the date of the general election. Tweets from individuals representing the two major parties, Democrat and Republican, and those who caucus with those parties, were included in this population. Third-party candidates were excluded from this population since they are less clearly diametrically opposed to other political parties. Given that a comparative element was necessary to highlight the differences in red-baiting use as it relates to RQ1, third-parties without an obvious ideological counterpart were excluded. Similarly, tweets from candidates in the 11 uncontested election races in the US House of Representatives were excluded from the population, as the research questions in this study specifically pertained to Republicans and Democrats, in addition to the fact that without an opponent, there was no challenger to specifically target

with red-baiting rhetoric. Senate races that did not feature a Republican and Democrat, such as Arkansas, which pitted a Republican against a Libertarian in the General Election, as well as Alaska, which was contested by a Republican and Independent, were excluded from the population as they again lacked a diametric oppositional element, and did not pertain to the RQs. In states where seats were contested by multiple individuals in ranked-choice elections, the top two vote-receiving candidates from both the Republican and Democratic Party were included. Those competing for the six special non-voting House seats were excluded from this population, as well as tweets from resulting run-off elections that had taken place after the November 3rd cut-off date.

Sample

Using Kim (2015) and the G-power sampling method, candidate pairings were selected to represent the larger dataset, as full analysis of every pairing and tweet would not have been feasible time-wise. Since one of the goals of this study was to examine how red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric manifests at the sub-national level (to discern *where* these sentiments were salient), districts were selected as part of the random sampling, as opposed to a larger pool of *all* candidates. Splitting candidates into their district races also allowed for a better comparison and contrasting basis, as this allowed for tests as to whether more red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric, relative to the candidate's opponent, was a part of a winning strategy.

Candidate pairings were categorized as "competitive" or "non-competitive," as per data and information from the non-partisan Cook Political Report. For the 2020 elections, the Cook Political Report identified 89 House races as "competitive," and further sub-categorized them as "Likely Democrat," "Lean Democrat," "Toss-Up," "Lean Republican," and "Likely Republican,"

as of their final assessment dated November 1, 2020. All 35 Senate races were categorized as "competitive," and were categorized similarly. Using random sampling via assigning each race a number, and then using a random number generator tool on Google, from candidate pairings were selected from: 73/89 competitive House races, 179/331 non-competitive House races, and all 33 Senate races. Candidate pairings in the random selection where one candidate did not have an accessible Twitter account were still included in this study as while there was no direct comparative element to analyze, red-baiting tweets still may have been directed at their opponent.

To better answer the RQs, it was more useful for this study to consider each tweet as the unit for analysis, rather than each occurrence of a word. Tweets that contained more than one of these terms were categorized simply as having a "term present," and the qualitative discourse analysis was used to delve into the nuances of the tweet and the uses of the term in context. The terms "communist," "socialist," and "anarchy" and their other variations (e.g. anarchist, socialism) were counted equally as the terms operationalized terms at the beginning of this section (Nichols, 2015).

Research Instruments

This study utilized Twitter/X, Twitter API (an automated Twitter-scraping software), APIFY's Twitter Scraper (third-party supplementary API) and JASP analysis software as its primary tools for quantitative analysis. Qualitative analysis software *Dedoose* was used for the inductive thematic analysis.

Data Collection Process

Much of the front end of this process was conducted manually, which is highly unusual for this type of extensive process. The closest existing databases to the one needed for this study is the New York Times Congress API and the ProPublica API. These APIs catalogued congress members, their districts, vote share in their last election, and voting data. These APIs were either paywalled, not up-to-date, or were no longer in operation as of 2023. Further, these APIs did not include *candidates* running for office, and instead only included those currently serving. Instead, I manually input all of the cataloging information.

In order to scrape the data from Twitter posts, first, I searched for each candidate's official Twitter handle via American political wiki page Ballotpedia, which is a comprehensive source for election and ballot initiative information (Adams, 2020; Lurie, 2021). Currently, there is not a publicly available, frequently updated list of official candidate Twitter handles, so the list created for this study was unique. Ballotpedia tends to provide more robust electoral and policy information than official government sources (Lurie, 2021), making it the primary source, not only for candidate Twitter handles, but for crucial information on election races and candidate biographies. All candidates running for federal-level office were included in the initial Twitter handle list, as the random sampling took place in subsequent steps. Once all candidate Twitter handles were manually collected, they were then entered into Excel spreadsheet (which I will refer to as "Spreadsheet 1" for quick reference). The scraping process yielded all relevant information about each candidate's tweets, including the full text of the tweets, their timestamp, as well as several engagement metrics, including "Likes," "Retweets," "Quote Tweets," and "Replies." These met-

rics were crucial for answering RQ1, and RQs 2-6 were answered via the text of the tweets after qualitative analysis.

With the tweets already scraped in the previous steps, the qualitative data — the text of the tweets — was readily available on Spreadsheet 1. In order to organize the data for further analysis, an additional spreadsheet (which I will refer to as "Spreadsheet 2") was attached that aggregated the rest of the necessary variables, including "number of tweets," "number of red-baiting tweets," "win/loss election," "incumbency," "gender," "chamber of Congress," and "red-baited more/less than opponent."

Figure 5. Data Collection Flow-Chart

Data Coding and Organization

Research question specific variable codes

Additional variable columns were added to include pertinent data for each tweet to answer RQs 2-6., Three columns were added to Spreadsheet 1 to account for these variables, consisting of the presence of a red-baiting term in the tweet, the party affiliation of the candidate, and whether the candidate won or lost their election. If a tweet included one of the relevant terms, I coded the tweet as "1" or "present," and if the tweet did not contain one of the given terms, it was coded as "2" or "not present."

Coding for red-baiting terms

The "Control + F" function was used to locate the red-baiting terms manually, as the Tweet Flash Plus API was prone to exclude tweets that included those terms if automated to search for those terms. If a tweet contained more than one of the terms, or used the same term multiple times, it was still simply coded as "present." Party affiliation was coded as "1" being "Democrat" and "2" being Republican. A victory in the election was coded as "1," while an election loss was coded as "2" (see appendix for sample of Spreadsheet 1).

Candidate specific codes

A separate spreadsheet — Spreadsheet 2 — was created that included information specific to each candidate to answer RQs 2-6, accounting for variables such as the total number of tweets the candidate had, the number of tweets that contained one of the given terms, whether the candidate won or lost, the state they ran in, the chamber of congress, whether the race was considered "competitive" or not, with whether the candidate was the incumbent in the race or not, with. For these variables, they were coded as "1" or "2,"such as "1" for House, and "2" for Senate, "1" for "competitive" and "2" for "non-competitive," and "1" for incumbency and "2" for a non-incumbent. Though not part of any specific research question, a column was added to signify the gender of the candidate, especially given that red-baiting often is an attack associated with gender (Collins, 2008), and was useful to enrich the data set and to ascertain if this trope is still prevalent.

To account for the variable that determined whether each candidate used red-baiting terms more or less frequently than their opponent, the total number of tweets containing the given terms per politician was totaled, using data from the Spreadsheet 1 and was compared that of

their opponent, which were listed in the spreadsheet (see appendix) that contained the Twitter handles of the candidates. If both candidates in the pairing had *zero* tweets containing one of the terms, they were *both* marked as "2" or "less frequently than opponent." If a candidate had zero tweets containing the terms, and their opponent did not have an accessible Twitter account, the candidate was again marked as "2" or "less frequently than opponent," as there was no data to compare to, and their opponent technically did not use any of the terms, either. If candidates had an equal number of terms containing the terms, they were both marked as "2" or "less frequently than opponent," as no candidate used those terms more frequently than the other. This was an extremely rare occurrence, and such an instance occurred in candidate pairings with only one tweet each containing a given term a few times, such as in the case of California House District 50, where candidates Scott Peters and Jim DeBello each had one tweet containing a given term. Therefore, as to not segregate data into categories that were not useful for analysis, a separate category was not created to indicate an equal number of tweets using the terms.

To begin to answer the RQs, the quantitative data generated from the Twitter scrapes, which was imported into Excel files, was imported into free statistical analysis software JASP. JASP is a free, open-source software that was created by academics, and provided a no-cost alternative to programs like SPSS, and less intuitive programs, like R. The spreadsheets containing the full catalog of tweets and the one containing the aggregated metrics were uploaded separately for analysis.

Additional qualitative data organizational process

Dedoose, a qualitative data analysis software, was to organize tweets and code for themes pertaining to RQs 5-6. To aggregate this data, I first sorted Spreadsheet 1 to show only tweets that

contained one of the given terms. As there is no efficient or automated way to import cells with text from Excel files into Dedoose, the text of the cells were copied into a Word document, saved as a plain text file, and then imported into Dedoose. For the sake of speed and efficiency in the Dedoose program itself, several plain text files containing the tweets were uploaded separately, as the software does not process larger files well. Each tweet was not its own file, instead, tweets were simply separated by a paragraph break within the file. The files contained full sets of tweets from politicians, determined by the alphabetically ordered Twitter handles as they appeared in the master document. See Appendix for a sample of these Dedoose files.

Qualitative Coding Process

For RQs 4-6, using the example provided by Byrne (2022) as a guide, an inductive qualitative thematic analysis was used to analyze sentiments and themes, such as tones and narratives, within tweets that use the key terms. There are six key phases in the qualitative thematic analysis process (Braun & Clarke, 2012) that were followed: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes, and producing a report. Thematic analysis allows for flexibility in the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2012), a necessary component in this study, as the terms analyzed can be used in a wide array of contexts, with varying implications. In this case, codes may be terms in tweets like "radical" or "dangerous," which was helpful for contextualizing the usage of the terms like "communist" or "fascist." The political context of each candidate and race was considered in this analysis, such the competitiveness of the given race, as well as features of a given candidate's public platform.

Following a similar process as Foxman et al. (2023), a codebook was manually generated in Dedoose to thematically assess the contents of each tweet, and to contextualize the usage of the given terms. The resulting codebook was generated concurrently with the analysis process, rather than before or after, to avoid ascribing rigid sets of themes to the tweets and consolidation of related, yet different themes.

Other Considerations

Bots

One important consideration that this study and others like it struggle to address when examining raw engagement metrics is the presence of bots that mimic real users and their interactions with posts on the platform. Estimates of bot accounts on Twitter have ranged from 5-30% of the user-base, though these estimates are difficult to establish and are theoretically constantly in flux (Ford & Hutchinson, 2021). Identifying bots in a systematic manner is difficult, the problem of bots on the platform has proliferated as state-backed actors have employed extensive bot campaigns for the purposes of propaganda and political agenda-setting, among others (Mazza et al., 2022). Certain automated processes have been developed to detect bot accounts and have found that many bot accounts are mostly inactive and have little to no "network," that is, followers or accounts they follow (Rossi, 2019). Accordingly, Rossi (2019) suggests that in the context of political campaigning or rhetoric on the platform, while visibility of politicians or issues *may* be boosted artificially by bot activity, bots, overall, have a negligible effect on skewing political discourse on their own. Users that are already pre-disposed to engaging with "untrustworthy" news sources on the platform are also more likely to engage with, and be influenced by bot account activity (Vilella et al., 2022). However, little has been done to examine to what extent bots inter-

act with politicians themselves on Twitter, rendering it difficult to assess exactly to what extent the levels of engagement with their tweets are organic, or are inflated by non-humans.

Many of the studies on bot activity within the context of political communication on Twitter have centered on the sharing of news stories, as opposed to their role in inflating engagement metrics (Luceri, Cardoso & Giordano, 2021). Research suggests mitigating the presence and interactions of bots with tweets by examining more engagement metrics like quote tweets and replies, as opposed to mere views and likes (Haustein et al., 2016). This study does just that, as it examines each engagement metric separately, as opposed to creating a monolithic engagement score.

Data Outliers

Engagement scores are also impacted by followership and reach on the platform. As some candidates in this dataset have a substantially higher follower count and visibility on Twitter compared to others, the data could potentially have been skewed. While the issue of outliers in the dataset was considered, for the purposes of this study, outliers are useful in that they provide a better understanding of the overall prevalence of red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric by Congress-seeking candidates, as some users have an outsized influence on the platform's popular discourse. According to the Pew Research Center (2020), the top ten percentage of Congress members, in terms of followership, account for nearly 75% of all engagement (likes, replies, reposts, etc.) that Congress members receive on both Twitter and Facebook. That means, because Marjorie Taylor Greene and other prolific Twitter users command the most visibility, drive the most engagement, and generate more conversation than most of her peers, her tweets are more impactful than her peers with substantially smaller social networks. Since this study sought to

understand if these red-baiting and Red Scare topics were salient based upon their engagement metrics, and because ordinary Twitter users would be far more likely to encounter a post from a Congress member like Taylor Greene, the research questions and results are able to remain in tact, even with perceptual outliers.

In 2020, Congress members collectively posted, on average, roughly 70,000 tweets per month, with each tweet averaging roughly 100 total engagements per post, while the overall visibility of each tweet varied based on several factors (Pew Research Center, 2020). Democrats tended to post (~150) at a rate double than that of their Republican counterparts (~80) per month (Pew Research Center, 2020). Similarly, Democrats have roughly 50% (48,000) more followers than Republicans (30,000). Therefore, leaving outlier accounts in the dataset, especially on the Republican side, was useful to offset these pre-existing discrepancies. During this period, which is the same as this study, there was not an "impressions" metric readily available on the platform that measures the overall number of views a tweet has based upon how many times the tweet appeared in a user's feed. Therefore, while "impressions" may have been a useful metric to include in this study to ascertain a tweet's overall reach, impressions do not necessarily indicate salience since they require no engagement other than quickly scrolling past the post.

CHAPTER V – ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Quantitative Measures and Outputs

Initial Outputs

As noted above, 268,320 tweets were collected from 488 candidates either in Congress or seeking office. 424 of these were House candidates and the other 64 were Senate candidates. Republicans accounted for 102,510 of the total tweet count, while Democrats provided 165,810 tweets. The average Republican tweeted roughly 435 times during this period, and the average Democrat tweeted roughly 657 times. The median number of Republican tweets per account was 252, while the median of Democrat tweets was 504. These figures and measures are in line with the Pew Research Center's (2020) comprehensive assessment of Twitter use amongst Congress members in 2020 (as detailed in the "Other Considerations" section of this piece). However, as this dataset included members *running* for Congress, this dataset provided new context and insight into the tweeting habits of non-incumbent challengers for Congress not previously detailed.

Of the 488 total candidates, 236 of those included were Republicans and 252 were Democrats. 301 of the candidates included were men, and 187 were women. 49 of the 50 states were represented in this sample, as only Vermont was omitted as the state did not have a Senate race, nor was their one at-large House district chosen in the random selection process. 243 of these candidates were incumbents and 245 were challengers or seeking office that was vacated. 196 of the candidates were in "competitive" races, and 292 were in "non-competitive" races. 261 of the candidates won their race, and 227 lost their races. 34 non-incumbents (including those vying for a seat vacated by a member of the same party) included in this dataset won their race

and 16 incumbents lost their race. 15 of the included races featured candidates vying for a vacated office.

Due to several candidates either not having a Twitter account, or having one that was inaccessible because their accounts were private, banned, or had all tweets completely deleted, the total number of candidates that tweets were pulled from does not exactly match the total number of candidates that were randomly selected in pairings. However, these sorts of omissions made up only a small percentage of candidates, as only two out of 66 Senate candidates did not have accessible accounts, and 42 House candidates out of 466 did not have accessible accounts (see "Limitations" section for further context).

Of the 268,320 tweets collected, 3,067 (slightly over 1%) contained one of the red-baiting or adjacent terms. This total does not account for *all* red-baiting terms, as the unit of analysis was the tweets themselves, as opposed to the raw word count. However, in the qualitative analysis, *all* instances of the red-baiting and adjacent terms were tallied, accounted for, and were analyzed for thematic context, frames, and sentiment. Though this number may appear trivial, individuals may only need to be exposed to a message a few times for it to achieve salience (Briggs & Stuart, 2006; McDonald, 1997), and *too many* exposures to a message can lead to diminished effectiveness (Batra & Ray, 1986). Therefore, even though the overall percentage of red-baiting tweets in the dataset is small, it falls in the optimal threshold for message salience.

Republicans accounted for the most red-baiting tweets, as 2,747 of these tweets came from them, with the average Republican having roughly 11 red-baiting tweets. Conversely, Democrats only accounted for 320 of the red-baiting tweets, with the average user providing roughly 1.25 of these tweets, on average. The median number of Republican red-baiting tweets per

user was three, and the median number of Democrat red-baiting tweets was zero. Of course, these numbers point to outliers in the dataset itself, but they are not necessarily outliers in terms of their relevance of the implications of this study. While Democrats out-Tweeted Republicans at a nearly 2:1 ratio, overall, this shows that red-baiting was far more of a Republican strategy than a Democratic one, in line with past research.

In terms of distribution of red-baiting tweets, a few Congressional candidates had an outsized impact on the overall number of these sorts of tweets. For example, Georgia House Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene had 436 separate tweets using a red-baiting term out of 2,524 of her total tweets. In this case, Taylor Greene's red-baiting tweets accounted for 14% of all red-baiting tweets by Congressional candidates for the allotted time period. While this proportion of red-baiting tweets initially appears to be an outlier that skews all of the data, Taylor Greene's followership of roughly 3 million users, roughly 100 times that of the average Republican (Pew Research Center, 2020), means that her tweets are far more visible to the average user, even prior to accounting for visibility boosts attributed to higher engagement levels. Therefore, since this study sought to uncover the perceptual salience of red-baiting based on *overall* activity between chambers and parties in Congress, outliers such as this underscore the importance of these prolific accounts on shaping political discourse on the platform.

Seven of the top ten most prolific accounts in terms of overall tweets were Democrats, though, Arizona House Republican challenger Josh Barnett was the top poster with 6454 tweets in the allotted timespan. Conversely, 9 of the top ten most prolific red-baiting accounts belonged to Republicans, while New York House challenger Nate McMurray was the only Democrat within that threshold, with 54 of his 5036 tweets containing red-baiting terms. Tennessee House Re-

publican Bill Hagerty was the most prolific red-baiting user of all incumbent candidates, with 230 of his 2540 tweets (9%) containing one of the terms. Three of the top ten red-baiting users won their races and were all Republican, including Marjorie Taylor Greene and Bill Hagerty, who were by far the two heaviest red-baiters, as well as Colorado House Republican challenger Lauren Boebert, who had 89 red-baiting tweets out of 2209 total. Wisconsin House Democrat Mark Pocan was the most prolific red-baiting Democrat to win their race, with 22 of his 766 (3%) tweets using one of the terms.

These totals align closely with pre-existing data and research regarding tweeting habits of both Republicans and Democrats. The relatively small percentage of red-baiting tweets compared to the overall total does not necessarily indicate a lack of salience on the given topic. Rather, calculating engagement levels with these tweets provided a more robust measure of the user-base's receptiveness towards red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric. Followership remains an important factor in these engagement metrics. The top 10% of each party's Congress members on Twitter account for roughly 84% of likes and 81% of reposts of all Congress members on the platform (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Statistical Analysis

RQ1. Relationship between Red-baiting and Engagement

To understand whether red-baiting tactics elicit engagement and possibly signify if the practice is salient to the public, a series of tests were run to ascertain red-baiting tweet engagement levels compared to non red-baiting tweet engagement levels. RQ1 asked "Do tweets with

red-baiting terms elicit more engagement than tweets without those terms?" For the purposes of this study, "engagement" is defined as the sum of quantifiable interactions with a tweet, including likes, retweets, quote tweets and replies. It was expected that tweets with red-baiting terms would elicit more engagement than those without red-baiting terms. To test this hypothesis, an independent samples T-test was run to see the breakdown of types of engagement with red-baiting and non red-baiting tweets.

Table 1. Red-baiting and engagement metrics

Variable	Statistic	*df*	*p*	Mean Difference
retweets	3.824	1106.376	< .001	88.603
quotes	1.992	1089.675	0.047	20.928
likes	2.240	1116.721	0.025	201.044
replies	2.422	1091.470	0.016	103.984

As the above table shows, there was a significant difference in the amount of retweets (mean = 88.60, t(1106.376) = 3.824, (p < .001), quote tweets (mean = 20.92, $t(113069) = 5.40$, ($p < .001$) and replies in red-baiting tweets (mean = 103.94, $t(113069) = 5.16$, ($p < .001$) compared to non red-baiting tweets, (t(df) = 4.0, p = <.001). The association between the number of likes and red-baiting versus non-redbaiting tweets was marginally significant (mean = 201.04, $t(113069) = 1.90$, ($p = .057$). In this case, the differences in most forms of engagement with red-baiting tweets and non red-baiting tweets were substantial. For example, tweets with one of the terms garnered nearly twice as many retweets, on average than tweets without one of the terms.

Similarly, red-baiting tweets had nearly three times the number of replies that non red-baiting tweets had.

To ascertain if this phenomenon held constant regardless of race competitiveness, another Welch test was conducted. For non-competitive races (see figure below), there were only significant differences in the number of replies (*mean* = 44.98), $t(1988.65) = 2.69$, ($p = .007$) that red-baiting tweets had compared to non red-baiting tweets.

Table 2. Red-baiting and engagement metrics controlling for competitiveness

Variable	Statistic	*df*	*p*	Mean Difference
retweets	0.532	2031.154	0.595	93.227
quotes	1.827	2017.469	0.068	6.413
likes	1.952	2002.079	0.051	79.439
replies	2.691	1988.653	0.007	44.980

No significant differences were found for likes (*mean* = 93.23), $t(2031.15) = 0.53$, ($p = .595$), quotes (*mean* = 6.41), $t(2017.47) = 1.83$, ($p = .068$), nor retweets (*mean* = 79.44), $t(2002.08) = 1.95$, ($p = .051$). Red-baiting tweets, regardless of the relative competitiveness level of their accompanying Congressional campaign, tended to generate more replies and retweets than non red-baiting tweets. When competition level was accounted for, likes were the only engagement metric that was not significantly associated with red-baiting. Regardless, RQ1 and its subsequent analysis shows that red-baiting is still a salient topic in the minds of Twitter users, based upon the uptick in engagements. As salience is key to a variety of media effects theories and their realized effects, RQ1 shows that red-baiting is in fact a practice that resonates with the

public, though it does not explicitly detail the attitudes and motivations behind these engagements.

RQ2 — Party affiliation and red-baiting frequency

For RQ2, an independent t-test was conducted to ascertain *which party* was using red-baiting terms in tweets more frequently. For this test, "More Frequently" was coded as "1," while "Same/Less Frequently was coded as "2." As noted previously, those pairings that combined for zero red-baiting tweets saw both members coded as "2," as neither used red-baiting terms more than the other, rather than including a separate category for those with no red-baiting tweets, as not all accounts were readily accessible via the API, so one could not say for certain whether the politician *had* used red-baiting tweets before their accounts were either suspended or wiped. As expected, Republicans posted tweets with red-baiting terms significantly more often than their Democratic counterparts in each given race ($p < .001$). Republicans used significantly more tweets with terms (*mean* = 11.64, *SD* = 34.84) than Democrats (*mean* = 1.27, *SD* = 34.84), $t(242.76) = -4.54$, ($p < .001$).

Table 3. Party affiliation and red-baiting frequency

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD
Number of tweets with red-baiting terms				
	Democrats	252	1.270	4.625
	Republicans	236	11.640	34.840

Table 3 shows that Republicans tweet using red-baiting language, on average, roughly ten times as often as Democrats overall. This comparison does not account for a race-by-race basis. Instead, this shows that in-line with conventional wisdom and the past red-baiting history of the right, Republicans still use these tactics far more than Democrats, as a whole.

RQ3 — Red-baiting frequency in relation to race competitiveness

RQ3 asked whether the relative competitiveness of each Congressional race was associated with whether candidates used red-baiting in their tweets more frequently than their opponents. It was expected that candidates in races deemed competitive (per the Cook Political Report) would use red-baiting more frequently than those in less competitive races.

Table 4. Red-baiting in relation to race competitiveness

Variable	X^2	N	*Df*	*p*
Competitive	73.413	196	1	0.001
Non Competitive	68.749	292	1	0.001
Total	139.410	488	1	0.001

The chi-square test shows that in both cases of competitiveness, party **does** play a crucial role in red-baiting in races in varying levels of competitiveness. Significant associations were found across all categories. For competitive tweets, there was a significant relationship between party and frequency ($\chi^2(1, N = 196) = 73.41$, $p < .001$, with Republicans more likely to tweet competitively at higher frequencies. Similarly, for non-competitive tweets, a significant association was observed ($\chi^2(1, N = 292) = 68.75$, ($p < .001$). Overall, party affiliation was significantly

associated with total tweet frequency ($\chi^2(1, N = 488) = 139.41$, ($p < .001$).These findings are in-line with the expectation in that Republicans indeed use red-baiting in their tweets more than Democrats, generally, as well as more than their opponents on a race-by-race basis. However, it was expected that in competitive races, Republicans would use red-baiting in their tweets significantly more than their Democratic opponents in non-competitive races, but not necessarily in competitive races, owing to the concept of the Free Media Thesis. These results show that regardless of level of competition in a race, Republicans still use red-baiting in their tweets more frequently than their Democratic opponents.

It was also expected that non-incumbents would be more likely to use red-baiting in their tweets compared to incumbents, as those candidates would need to use more attack-based language as they may not have a substantial legislative record to campaign on for themselves, as well as the notion that they may have wanted to draw more press coverage for their campaign.

Initial examination indicated that a candidate's incumbency did **not** play a significant role as to whether they had more red-baiting tweets than their opponents. This ran counter to expectations that non-incumbents would use red-baiting in their tweets more frequently than their incumbent opponents. This test did not account for candidates vying for the same vacated office, as those candidates were both non-incumbent, even though one party had held the seat prior to the election. Similarly, this test did not account for effects of party affiliation while comparing incumbency status and whether the candidate had more red-baiting tweets than their opponent. So, another chi-square test was conducted to include party affiliation in this analysis.

Table 5. Red-baiting in relation to incumbency

Variable	X^2	N	*Df*	*p*
Incumbent	52.337	243	1	0.001
Non-Incumbent	89.035	245	1	0.001
Total	139.40	488	1	0.001

Upon further examination, results indicate that party affiliation **does** play a significant role in whether a candidate's incumbency status leads them to have more red-baiting tweets than their opponent. For incumbent candidates, there was a significant relationship between party and tweet frequency ($\chi^2(1, N = 243) = 52.34$, ($p < .001$), with Republican incumbents more likely to tweet more frequently than their opponents compared to Democratic incumbents. The association was even stronger for non-incumbent candidates ($\chi^2(1, N = 245) = 89.04$, ($p < .001$). Overall, when combining all candidates regardless of incumbency status, party affiliation remained significantly associated with tweet frequency ($\chi^2(1, N = 488) = 139.41$, $p < .001$.These results, again, follow the trend of Republican candidates having more red-baiting tweets than their Democratic opponents *regardless* of race-specific factors, such as incumbency status and competitiveness of the race. This means that in virtually any campaign context, Republicans are still significantly more likely than Democrats to use red-baiting in their tweets, making the answer to RQ3 contingent. Non-incumbents will use more red-baiting in their tweets than incumbents **so**

long as they are Republicans. Similarly, incumbents also had more red-baiting tweets than their opponent **so long as** they were Republican.

RQ4 — Does red-baiting impact election outcome?

RQ4 asked whether candidates that use red-baiting tweets more frequently than their opponents tended to win their races. To do this, another chi-square test was performed with "More/Less than Opponent" and "Win/Lose" as the only variables initially assessed.

Table 6. Red-baiting's impact on election outcome

Red-baiting frequency	Win	Lose	Total
More frequently	114	92	206
Less/equivalent frequently	147	135	1
Total*	261	227	488

*Chi-square test results: $x^2 = 0.494$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.482$

As these results show, there was not a significant association between using red-baiting tweets more frequently than one's opponent and winning or losing the given election. With *all* candidates taken into account, there was roughly a 50/50 split between those who used red-baiting tweets more frequently winning as losing, with the inverse true, as well. To further explore this association, party affiliation was factored in next with the other two variables. The previous three RQs showed that when party affiliation is accounted for, *in addition to* the other variables present, strong associations begin to emerge between Republicans and red-baiting behavior in

virtually any campaign context. Therefore, this test was conducted to see if a red-baiting was a winning **or** losing strategy in elections for one party compared to the other.

Table 7. Red-baiting and electoral outcome by party

Party	Red-baiting frequency	Win	Lose	Total
Democrat	More frequently	25	17	42
	Less/equivalent frequently	103	107	210
	Total*	128	124	252
Republican	More frequently	89	75	164
	Less/equivalent frequently	44	28	72
	Total*	133	103	236
Total	More frequently	114	92	206
	Less/equivalent frequently	147	135	282
	Total*	261	227	488

* Chi-square test results: Democrat ($x^2 = 1.537$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.215$), Republican ($x^2 = 0.935$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.329$)

This test revealed no significant associations between red-baiting frequency and winning elections, for either party ($\chi^2(1, N = 488) = 0.49$, ($p = .482$). For Democratic candidates, there was no significant association between tweet frequency and winning elections ($\chi^2(1, N = 252) = 1.54$, ($p = .215$). Similarly, Republican candidates showed no significant association between tweet frequency and electoral success ($\chi^2(1, N = 236) = 0.95$, ($p = .329$). When combining all

candidates regardless of party affiliation, tweet frequency was not significantly associated with electoral outcomes. In terms of raw numbers, Democrats that red-baited more than their opponents actually won their races more often than not, and when they red-baited less, they lost more often than not. Similarly, Republicans won more often than not regardless of whether they used red-baiting tweets more frequently than their Democratic opponent. However, these numbers were not enough to reflect a true association between party affiliation and the other two variables.

There have been historical accounts of men tending to red-bait more than women, as well as centering women as the chief target of red-baiting. Therefore, a subsequent test was conducted to assess to what extent gender plays a role, as it pertains to RQ4.

When accounting for gender, a few interesting patterns emerge. First, the data reveals that men won their elections more often than not, regardless of red-baiting strategies in their tweets. Similarly, women tended to lose their elections more often than not, independent of their red-baiting tactics. Men won roughly 30 more elections than they lost each when the candidates were categorized by their red-baiting frequency compared to their opponents. The discrepancy with women was narrower, as the numbers suggest that red-baiting more frequently than their opponent, without considering other factors specific to their race, seemed to close the gap between winning and losing. Results from this test prompted further inquiry to ascertain whether gender alone was a predictor of election outcome, as those results would further inform the rest of the inquires in this study and provide further overarching context.

Results from further testing confirms that men were significantly more likely to win their election than women. Of course, context is important for understanding these results. For exam-

ple, there were far more men (n=307) than women (n=181) included in this sample that ran for Congressional office in 2020. When broken down by party affiliation, men were far more likely to be Republican candidates for Congress in 2020 than women.

Table 8. Red-baiting and electoral outcome by gender

Gender	Red-baiting frequency	Win	Lose	Total
Male	More frequently	84	56	140
	Less/equivalent frequently	99	68	167
	Total*	183	124	307
Female	More frequently	30	36	66
	Less/equivalent frequently	48	67	115
	Total*	78	103	181
Total	More frequently	114	92	206
	Less/equivalent frequently	147	135	282
	Total*	261	227	488

Chi-square results: Male ($x^2 = 0.016$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.898$), Female ($x^2 = 0.236$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.627$), Total ($x^2 = 0.494$, $df = 1$, $p = 0.482$)

The split between males and females in the Democratic Party were more even, as there were only six more men than women running for Congress in this sample. According to the Center for Women and Politics at Rutgers University (2020), women comprised 328 of the total gen-

eral election candidates, and of those 328, 223 were Democrats and 105 were Republicans. Thus, this sample does not account for 147 women candidates, as the random sampling process did not include them. However, while this sample excluded roughly half of the women running for Congress, the data from this sample matches the overall trends of election outcomes, as 78 women in this sample won their elections, compared to the 144 total that won their elections in total (Pew Research Center, 2020).

Table 9. Red-baiting by incumbency status

Incumbency Status	Red-baiting frequency	Win	Lose	Total
Incumbent	More frequently	94	4	98
	Less/equivalent frequently	133	12	145
	Total	227	16	243
Non-incumbent	More frequently	20	88	108
	Less/equivalent frequently	14	123	137
	Total	34	211	245
Total	More frequently	114	92	206
	Less/equivalent frequently	147	135	282
	Total	261	227	488

When combining all candidates regardless of incumbency status, tweet frequency was not significantly associated with electoral outcomes, ($\chi^2(1, N = 488) = 0.49$, ($p = .482$). This further

reinforces the answer to RQ4 in that red-baiting more than a given candidate's opponent is largely inconsequential when it comes to election outcome.

In a final attempt to better understand the data and its implications, as it pertains to RQ4, a final test was conducted to account for the chamber of Congress that the candidate was running for as it related to red-baiting frequency and election outcome.

Table 10. Red-baiting by Chamber of Congress

Chamber	Red-baiting frequency	Win	Lose	Total
House	More frequently	99	79	178
	Less/equivalent frequently	129	117	246
	Total*	228	196	424
Senate	More frequently	15	13	108
	Less/equivalent frequently	18	18	36
	Total*	33	31	64
Total	More frequently	114	92	206
	Less/equivalent frequently	147	135	282
	Total*	261	227	488

*Chi-Square results: House (x^2 =0.420, *df* = 1, *p* = 0.517), Senate (x^2 = 0.080, *df* = 1, *p* = 0.777), Total (x^2 = 0.494 *df* = 1, *p* = 0.482)

When combining all candidates regardless of chamber, red-baiting tweet frequency was not significantly associated with electoral outcomes ($\chi^2(1, N = 488) = 0.49$, $p = .482$). This is

somewhat surprising in the sense that it was expected that more red-baiting in the Senate would not be an effective campaign strategy, given the larger state-wide scope of the electoral base and the need to appeal to more moderate voters over a broad swath of issues. Similarly, it was expected that in more localized elections, like in the House, extremist language would be more common, and may have had a significant impact on election outcome.

After accounting for several other variables, such as party affiliation, gender, and incumbency, the resounding answer to RQ4 is **no**, red-baiting frequency compared to a candidate's opponent was not a strong indicator of election outcome. Rather, incumbents and men were more likely to win their elections than their opponents, whether or not they red-baited more than their opponents in either chamber of Congress.

RQ5 — Most common themes and frames in red-baiting

Shifting to the qualitative portion of this analysis, RQ5 asked what the most common frames and themes were embedded in tweets with red-baiting language. Little, if any, contemporary research has explored the themes and frames of red-baiting in practice. Based on the historical precedent of red-baiting frames, it was expected that "personal freedoms," "us versus them," and violence frames would be some of the most used in modern day red-baiting. Conversely, it was also expected that most red-baiting tweets would generally **not** reference specific policy, in favor of more generalizations of a party's platform and personal attacks.

To help answer this question, first, all tweets that contained a red-baiting term were entered into the Dedoose qualitative data analysis software. Then, on an individual basis, these tweets were manually coded inductively by myself, which were cross-referenced with a volunteer's coding of the tweets to check for inter-coder reliability. This process involved providing a

colleague a selection of 50 tweets, and a selection of codes that I had already generated and ascribed to the tweets, as well as a selection of codes I had *not* ascribed to any of the tweets, and allowed them to code based on the same guidelines of this study. This combination of inductive and deductive coding showed an inter-coder reliability alignment of approximately 87%. The codebook generated through this exercise was extensive, and it encapsulated virtually every facet of each tweet, such as the party affiliation of the candidate who posted the tweet, its general sentiment, its policy content, which red-baiting term was used, as well as overall themes and frames, such as "national security" or "economic." Boydstun's (2013) "Policy Frames Codebook" served as a guide as to what to name and how to condense the frames in this codebook, however, none were directly imported into this inductive codebook. Similarly, Boydstun (2013) was used as a general reference in terms of coding for sentiment. Boydstun (2013) used "positive," "negative," or "neutral" as a simplified set of sentiments to code for. While this codebook did indeed use those three terms as part of its sentiment analysis, more sentiments were also included, as well as reconfigured definitions of what the codes and sentiments represented. For example, "neutral" in Boydstun's codebook represented "both positive and negative sentiments that cancel one another out." Neutral, in the case of this study, meant that the tweet merely asked a neutral question, or provided information. For example, a tweet from one senator simply read "You need to look up the word socialist," was coded as neutral as there were no valuative terms in the rest of the tweet to contextualize "socialist" any further. A code was generated any time a segment of a red-baiting tweet would not fall under an existing code umbrella. In total, 43 total "parent" codes were generated to describe the content of the tweets, and 62 "child" codes were developed to supplement the parent codes. For example, a parent code that was generated called "Terminology" was sup-

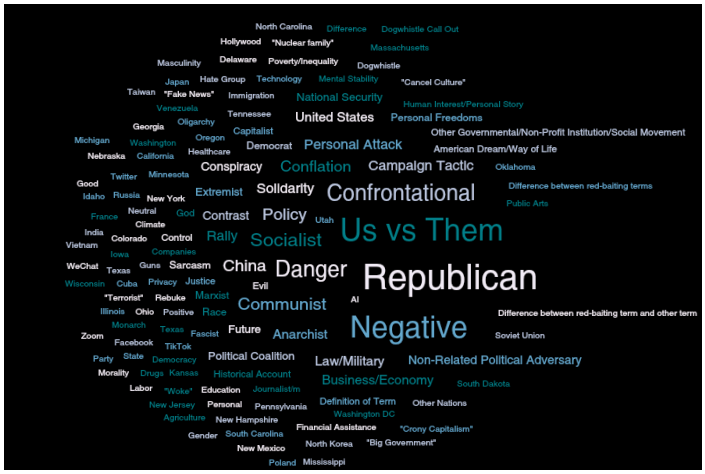
plemented by child codes that listed the specific red-baiting term found in the tweets. Again, this process was conducted inductively, as each red-baiting term was added to the terminology code *as they were revealed* in the qualitative analysis, rather than prior to the analysis. Similarly, parent codes were developed for each "State" and "Nation" mentioned, with the child codes representing each state and nation that were present in the tweets. In this case, only tweets that explicitly mentioned a state or nation were coded with that state or nation, as opposed to coding each tweet by the candidate's state, regardless if the state was mentioned or not, in order to gather a better understanding of *where* red-baiting sentiments were focused, rather than where they necessarily originated. While one of the goals of this study was to locate potential Red Scare incubators, red-baiting targets existential threats that may not be local to the candidate. Therefore, the origin of the red-baiting sentiments was less important than who, what, and where red-baiting claims were leveraged against. Conversely, *all* tweets were coded by party affiliation of the candidate that made the post to better understand *who* was sending red-baiting messages, and the differences in themes and frames surrounding those messages by party.

To get a better visual sense of the overall presence and prevalence of the codes used in this analysis, a word cloud was generated within the Dedoose software. Words appearing larger in the diagram reflect more frequent usage than smaller words, and the distance between the terms represents how frequently the two were used in tandem.

As Figure 6 shows, Republicans were the most frequent red-baiters, in terms of raw tweet count. The frame or theme of "us versus them" was extremely prevalent **(n=2096)**, as one of the tenants of Red Scare sentiment is "othering" and comparing the primarily dominant group to the perceptually threatening "other" group. For example, one tweet from Delaware Republican Sen-

ate candidate Lauren Witzke proclaimed, “We will NOT allow these anarchists to come for our churches!” In that case, the usage of “our” to signify ownership of the churches by the group Witzke was speaking on behalf of and the necessitation of defending those churches from the “anarchists” provided the necessary components to code as “us versus them.”

Figure 6. Qualitative Word Cloud



These tweets, overall took on a negative tone (n=2310), and used “danger” frames (n=1196) more often than others. Tweets were coded as “danger” if they included fear-monger-ing, referenced violence (either real or imagined), or implied the threat of violence. For example, Republican Georgia Senate candidate Kelly Loeffler tweeted,

> “They tried to take away my business. They tried to take away my Senate seat. Now, they’re trying to crash my campaign events. It won't work. BLM is a Marxist organization that wants to defund the police and destroy our cities. I'll NEVER stop speaking out!”

In addition to being coded as “us versus them,” “race-based” and “Marxist,” the words and phrases “crash my campaign” and “destroy our cities” implies, both directly and indirectly, violence from the “other” group led this tweet to include the “danger” tag.

Other important findings from this analysis include that many red-baiting tweets were confrontational (n=1469) in nature. In this case, "confrontational" refers to any red-baiting tweet that included a challenge or call to action against a political adversary, group, state or nation. The prevalence of "confrontational" tweets ties into another important recurring theme of these red-baiting tweets in that, often times, China was targeted as the dangerous "other." For example, many tweets called for "Holding the Chinese Communist Party" accountable for various activities, primarily for the alleged willing involvement in manufacturing and spreading the Covid-19 virus. In these cases, China and communism were sometimes used interchangeably, or more often in tandem, and the repeated referral to the "Chinese Communist Party" seemingly attempted to cast any potential nefarious activity from the United States' primary political adversary as the work of "communists."

As one of the observable tenants of red-baiting and Red Scares is conflating ideologies or conflating political groups with certain attributes or practices, "Conflation" was also used as a code to describe the nature of these tweets. In order for a tweet to be coded with "Conflation," it either had to use one of the selected political terms interchangeably with another, such as "the Marxist socialists…." **or** it included an unsubstantiated if/then statement. For example, Democratic Texas House candidate Julie Oliver tweeted, "Rep. Williams criticizes socialism, yet takes government funded help when he gets the chance. He should admit that we need a government that helps all of us." In this case, the "conflation" code was applied because the term "socialism" was explicitly equated with "government funded help," which is not the correct definition of socialism.

Similarly, Republican Colorado House candidate Lauren Boebert tweeted, “The majority of the Democrat Party have blown right past socialism and are already flirting with Communist principles. If we don’t stop this before it starts, there could be no turning back!” In this case, the “conflation” code was applied because not only was the Democratic Party equated with socialism and communism, but the unsubstantiated statement that if the party is not stopped, America would be a communist nation, conflated the election of Democrats in the future to fundamentally transforming the nation, which no evidence was provided to suggest. Conflation amounted to a substantial theme (n=865) in these tweets, and also often used in tandem with other themes that could confuse prospective voters.

Similar to “conflation,” “conspiracy” was also a relatively common theme in this dataset. A tweet was coded as “conspiracy” if there was an unsubstantiated claim made by the candidate without providing evidence. The primary difference between the two codes is that a “conspiracy” did not necessitate an if/then statement, and instead referenced alleged events from the past or that were ongoing. As previously referenced, one popular conspiracy claim made in this dataset was that China deliberately manufactured and spread the COVID-19 virus. For example, Tennessee Republican Senator Bill Hagerty tweeted, “China's disinformation campaign continues. This has been the crime of the century and China's Communist regime must be held accountable for unleashing the Wuhan coronavirus to the world.” Hagerty’s tweet was coded as “conspiracy” as it alleges that China is criminally culpable for deliberately creating and spreading the COVID-19 virus and subsequently attempted to cover up its scale without substantial proof outside of a heavily partisan news source (Breitbart).

Both "conspiracy" (n=458) and "conflation" (n=865) were used frequently compared to other thematic codes, and were sometimes used in tandem (n=158). The prevalence of these themes matches expectations in that misinformation and disinformation help fuel Red Scares, especially in the age of social media, and that they would proliferate due to algorithmic curation of each user's feed.

In contrast to the prevalent themes and frames present in this analysis, the themes and frames **not** present, or, present but not prevalent, also provided crucial context for RQ5. For example, tweets tended to be directed towards an existential enemy, such as the Chinese Communist Party, or towards an amorphous group that were defined within the context of the tweet (or not at all), such as "anarchists" or "socialists." In terms of frames, "morality," which also happened to be a frame included in Boydstun (2013), was not emphasized as much (n=**24)** as expected. Similarly, though many historical examples of red-baiting included gendered language and implications, they were largely absent in this dataset, perhaps signaling a shift away from the feminization of the political left that the Red Scares relied on.

Overall, to answer RQ5, the most common frames found in red-baiting tweets included, but were not limited to, "us versus them," "danger," and "personal freedoms." The most common themes included "China," "confrontational" and "negative" tones, "conflation" and "campaign tactic."

RQ6 — Do red-baiting tweets tend to be more policy-focused or candidate-focused?

Lastly, RQ6 asked whether red-baiting tweets tended to be more policy-focused or candidate-focused. Further, RQ6 inquired into *which* policies were subject to red-baiting charges, as well as *who* red-baiting attacks were focused on. It was expected that red-baiting tweets would

primarily be candidate focused, due to the historical precedent of ad hominem attacks in Red Scare periods, as well as the campaign context of this study. Still, it was expected that policy would be the focus of *some* red-baiting tweets, but less frequently than candidate-focused tweets. In some cases, red-baiting was focused at both a politician (or political coalition) *and* policy. For example, Republican Michigan Senate candidate Eric Esshaki tweeted,

"@AOC, the radical Left, and #FakeNews don't just hate the police—they hate America. Their goal ultimate goal isn't to defund the police, its to destroy capitalism. @realDonaldTrump won't let that happen, and so they hate him too. #Trump2020 #VoteRed #EsshakiCongress #MI11"

In order to answer RQ6, tweets where red-baiting was used against a person or group were coded as "personal attack" — a red-baiting term levied negatively against a political adversary (primarily their opponent), "Non-related political adversary" — mention of a political figure that the candidate was not running against, "solidarity" — a positive mention of another political figure, and "other group or institution" — mention of a group of individuals, such as a social movement, federal government arm (like the Department of Justice), or a multi-state body (like the United Nations). Codes pertaining to policy were categorized in a few different ways. General mentions of societal institutions with policy implications, such as the economy or law enforcement and the military were coded simply as "Economy" and "Law/Military," which were separate from other policy mentions, due to their general nature. Conversely, specific policies were coded under the "Policy" parent code. In order for a policy to be coded in specific terms, the tweet had to mention a piece of legislation, proposed legislation, or a policy-related campaign platform or promise. The resulting sub-codes under "policy" included:

- Agriculture

- Climate

- Drugs

- Financial Assistance

- Guns

- Healthcare

- Immigration

- Public Arts

In order to calculate the answer to RQ6, those tweets coded as politician or political body-focused were added together and from that sum, the co-occurance of those codes were subtracted as to not double count, as some tweets contained several of these codes depending upon their context. The same process was then done for policy-focused tweets. For instances such as the Eric Esshaki tweet above, the co-occurance of policy and politician codes were also tallied and counted as "Both," as to answer RQ6. To tally the number of applications of each code, Dedoose provided a simple count next to each code in the Code Menu.

While this provided the raw numbers of code applications, the Dedoose software also provided a tool to both illuminate code occurrence and co-occurance. This allowed me to subtract co-occurances so that they would not be double counted.

Results from this analysis revealed that tweets tended to associate various policies with red-baiting terms more often than individuals or groups with those terms. The most prevalent policy matters discussed under the lens of red-baiting were the economy (**n=335)** and law enforcement **(n=324)**. Historically, the economy has been a primary focus of Red Scares in that the threat of leftist politics were said to pose a threat to the American economy, the American work-

er, and the American Way of Life, which matches well with the results from this data analysis. In the case of law enforcement policy discussed under the lens of red-baiting, it was typically used in this dataset to remark on how the expansion of law enforcement policy is necessary to protect the American public *from* those alleged to usher in communism, socialism, and anarchy. For example, New York Republican House candidate Nicole Malliotakis wrote, *"*Disgusting! Our nation's 244th birthday week & Founding Fathers like George Washington are under attack. Anarchy happens when politicians like Bill de Blasio & Max Rose support eliminating bail, closing jails & defunding #NYPD.*"* As shown in this example, the co-occurrence of "Anarchy" and "Law" was quite prevalent (n=169) compared to other political terms like "communism" (n=35) and "socialism" (n=75).

This trend is likely attributed to the nationwide protests over the 2020 murder of George Floyd, in which protestors were frequently equated with "anarchists" due to the destruction of property, in some instances. This runs counter to previous Red Scare iterations, where there was not a notable emphasis on the role of law enforcement in combatting the spread of left-wing politics domestically, and instead saw a greater emphasis on the role of the military in quelling left-wing politics abroad from infiltrating the country.

Specific policy matters were mentioned far less frequently (n=310) than general policy (n=656). Of the specific policies mentioned, healthcare (n=95), immigration (n=40), and environmental policy (n=47) were the most frequently mentioned. These trends of specific policy mentions align well with historical Red Scare precedent in that immigration and healthcare were heavily emphasized issues during the two clearly defined periods. Environmental policy was not discussed nearly as often in past Red Scares, however, due to the proliferation of climate change

and its subsequent environmental impacts in recent years, it should come as no surprise that some environmental policy (mainly, the Green New Deal) has made its way into the red-baiting repertoire.

When individuals and groups were the focus of red-baiting in these tweets, they tended to be fashioned as personal attacks against a candidate's given opponent (n=631). However, many red-baiting charges were levied against other political figures and organizations, as opposed to the candidate's opponent (n=411). Sometimes, these tweets also implied connections, either real or imagined, between those figures and other less prominent candidates. In those cases, tweets were coded as "political coalition," (n=197) referring to an informal grouping of politicians that went beyond mere party affiliation. The most common red-baiting word associated with these personal attacks was "socialist" (n=327). Red-baiting style personal attacks did not tend to occur in a vacuum, and instead tended to connect the accused politician of being associated with nefarious practices or enterprises, as opposed to simply calling an opponent a "communist," for example. Therefore, there was extensive cross-over with attacks on individuals and other prevalent themes in this dataset. For example, personal attacks were often coded alongside "danger" (n=249), implying that not only was the given politician a harbinger of left-wing politics, they also posed a tangible danger to the American public, as well.

An important note to these findings is that they almost exclusively came from Republican candidates. Republicans tended to have a more unified message in their tweets, mentioning similar subjects and using similar phrasing, which falls in line with historical trends. Democrats, on the other hand, are noted as having a less cohesive party message as they tend to encompass a broader segment of the political spectrum. Democrats tended to use red-baiting adjacent terms

slightly to attack less their opponent (n=96) than to reference policy (n=185). Majority of these attacks targeted the candidate's opponent, Donald Trump, and China, emphasizing the connections between the three, as well as emphasizing the "communist" aspect of the "Chinese Communist Party," much like their Republican counterparts.

Few Democrats challenged red-baiting charges from their opponents directly, which were coded as "Rebuke" (n=73). In these cases, the candidates either denied their opponents claims, redefined their claims, or even took ownership of them, in rare cases. Democratic Nebraska House candidate Kara Eastman was perhaps the most vociferous in combatting misinformation and disinformation in her opponent's red-baiting rhetoric. For example, Eastman tweeted,

*"*Socialized Medicine!" Ah yes. There it is. Along with "Communist" and "Marxist" that's the refrain Republicans have been using for more than 90 YEARS against Democrats. They did it with Social Security, they did it with Medicare*."*

Democrats had far more "rebukes" (n=73) than Republicans (n=10). Democrats tended to use the terms "communist" (n=57) and "fascist" (n=96) to describe Republican candidates, their practices, and policy. Republicans tended to not push back against these claims, especially against the label "Communist," as there is little historical precedent or evidence to tie the two together.

Overall, to answer RQ6, red-baiting tweets tended to discuss policy (n=1315) more than candidates (n=1042). This runs counter to expectations, which assumed that red-baiting tweets would be more so directed at a specific political figure or group, as opposed to policy. Republicans tended to tweet more about policy related to red-baiting terms (n=1186) than Democrats (n=129), with a heavier emphasis on generalizations about the economy and law enforcement .

While these findings were the inverse of expectations, the renewed emphasis on "Chinese Communism" and supposedly "Marxist" social movements spurred policy-related attacks to combat those new versions of the "Red Menace."

Chapter VI - Discussion

Summary

The previous section detailed the findings of this work and dataset, but the implications of these findings and lingering questions resulting from it are essential to understanding the state of red-baiting and Red Scare-style politics and what it means for the future. This study sought to describe Red Scare periods and their relation to the practice of red-baiting to understand whether the contemporary or near future political context could be accurately described as a Red Scare. Since there is no true criteria nor concrete benchmarks to signify a Red Scare era, this study examined past historical Red Scare contexts and conditions and compared them to the current political climate. As red-baiting is a central practice to Red Scares, this study then assessed the prevalence of red-baiting by Congressional candidates on Twitter and its subsequent impacts to help better understand if the practice is relevant and salient in contemporary politics, and if so, what the implications of that are. While there cannot be a truly definitive answer to the question of "is this a new Red Scare" based upon this set of data and its analysis, nor one derived from any dataset as Red Scares are essentially subjective, the data and the findings resulting from it has provided several significant insights both for the present and the future. The findings and implications discussed in this section are also non-exhaustive yet highlight arguably the most important takeaways towards understanding red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric for contemporary times, especially in the novel context of social media campaigns. Implications from these results are wide-ranging and can assist in potentially developing new guidelines for platforms to combat this phenomenon, creating greater user awareness that could mitigate the effects of red-baiting,

and rethinking campaign strategy considering red-baiting's effectiveness in election outcomes for practitioners, among others.

Cultivation Model of Political Realities

Based on the findings from this study, the interconnected communication theories outlined in my predicted "Cultivation Model of Political Realities*"* are clearly evident. The Free Media Thesis and social media algorithms worked in tandem to boost visibility and pervasiveness of red-baiting rhetoric, as shown in the analysis of RQ1, where those tweets accrued more engagement than others. This combination of attention-seeking tweeting, coupled with algorithmic curation helped set the agenda by making those posts more visible, whether engagement reflected agreement or dissent with the red-baiting claims. From there, framing and priming effects worked together, exemplified by how specific red-baiting terms became attached to particular entities, such as "anarchists" for protesters, and "communist" for China. This created (and continues to create) a simplified framework that primes audiences to interpret these entities as inherently dangerous. Even though red-baiting tweets comprised about 2% of the total dataset, the higher levels of engagement and salience allowed for these frames to prevail due to algorithmic curation. Though I suspect the same holds true for social media users themselves (though, I could not *prove* this from the data collected), the spiral of silence was noticeable in the lack of rebuttals to red-baiting claims, allowing those themes and frames to persist. In either case, this rhetoric and themes become normalized in the absence of pushback to non-factual claims. As a result, the "us versus them" frame became a fixture of political discourse.

My model's prediction of self-reinforcement, I argue, is evidenced by both parties adopting red-baiting rhetoric, though Republicans engaged in this practice far more often. When Democ-

rats, though relatively seldomly, use red-baiting terms and use them incorrectly, this reinforces the distorted definitions used by the opposition. The language and conversation of political discourse between the two parties seems to not consist of substantive debate over facts and policy, but rather, towards gaining leverage of the many weaponized frames and themes shown in this tweet dataset.

This feedback loop demonstrates how the cultivated political reality sustains itself, with social media algorithms continuing to reward sensational content, while the public's understanding of their own political system, and the terms used to define them, becomes increasingly divorced from their true definitions and operations. Ultimately, this perpetuates the very red-baiting practices that my Cultivation model suggests will continue to proliferate in political discourse. This supports my prevailing argument that American society is living in a perpetual Red Scare.

Salience of Red-Baiting

Perhaps the most important takeaway from this study was that red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric appears to remain salient to the general public. Results from RQ1 show that red-baiting language elicits significantly more engagement than tweets without. The raw engagement metrics do not necessarily tell the full story of the public's attitudes towards red-baiting and Red Scare language and rhetoric. For example, without a more in-depth sentiment analysis of the content of replies that a red-baiting tweet, there is no way to know whether the replies are generally in agreement or dissent. Indeed, much of the engagement with red-baiting tweets *could* be pushing back against red-baiting claims. The lack of significant difference in likes that red-baiting tweets elicit versus those without red-baiting terms may be evidence to further highlight this discrepancy. At the same time, perhaps it does not matter whether the sentiment of replies or quote

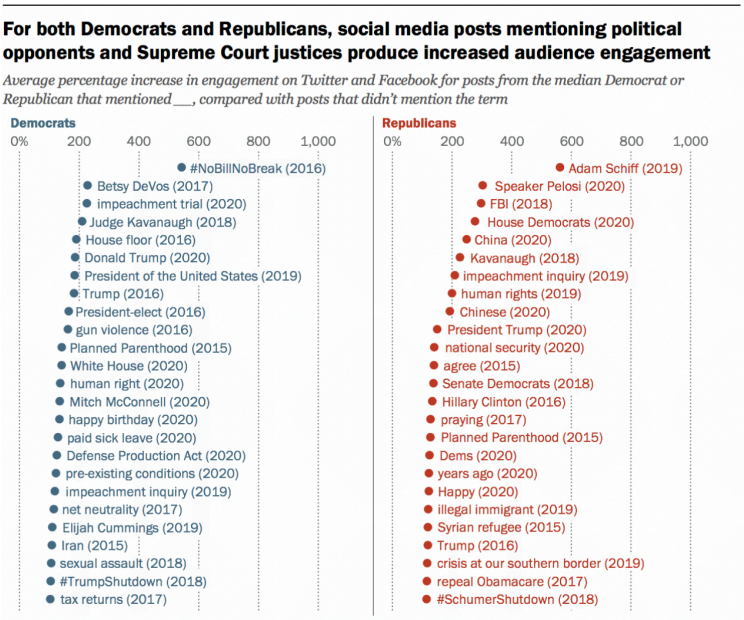
tweets is positive or negative in terms of the overall salience of the issue. Since the algorithm responsible for curating one's feed is supposed to be agnostic in its evaluation of the actual content of the tweet, as well as the sentiment surrounding it, heavy engagement will push rhetorical strategies like red-baiting to the fore. Because of this, Cultivation theory suggests that, in this case, those without political expertise may see repeated mention of socialism or communism as a pejorative and construct their understanding of those terms and related reality around those frames. Richey et al. (1974) describes differences in positive and negative salience that may be applicable to this case. For example, negative information tends to outweigh positive information in a person's evaluation of another or a given subject (Richey et al., 1974). Thus, repeated and prevalent negative mentions of red-baiting terms, compared to positive ones, is arguably likely to keep the topic more salient to the audience.

This prevalence of red-baiting is relative to other topics discussed by Congressional candidates. According to the Pew Research Center (2020), there were up to 572 key words or phrases with at least 1000 mentions by Congress members from 2015 to 2020 that were associated with at least a 10% increase in engagement compared to tweets without those words.

RQ6 illustrated that there was substantial overlap between red-baiting and mentioning political opponents and certain policy matters. This begs the question as to whether red-baiting is truly driving engagement on its own, as opposed to riding the coattails of other terms like those listed in Figure X below. Similarly, none of the terms operationalized in this study appeared on the Pew Research Center's chart above, however, neither were many of the political figures and policy matters uncovered by RQ6's analysis, either. This may indicate that red-baiting terms *do*

influence engagement metrics when attached to less popular politicians or policy matters. add to list

Figure 7. Congress member tweets by topic



In any case, whether red-baiting terms drive engagement on their own or not may not be of as much consequence as the idea that when these terms are present, they elicit higher levels of engagement. Regardless as to whether red-baiting terms do the heavy lifting in eliciting engagement, in this case, the fact that they *are* present and that these tweets are more likely to be seen by the average Twitter user due to algorithmic curation can lead to higher perceptions of salience, bringing red-baiting terms to the general fore of political discourse on the platform.

Partisan differences and similarities

In an age where political polarization in the United States is rapidly expanding, especially from 2016 onward (Dinkelberg et al., 2021), partisan differences on policy preference, as well as candidate preference, likely impact the prevalence of red-baiting rhetoric. Analysis of this dataset

showed that Republicans were far more likely to use red-baiting language than Democrats, which unsurprisingly followed historical precedent.

Republicans tended to use red-baiting to not only disparage opponents and their policies, but to build solidarity with their bases and the bases of others in their party, as well. Tweets oriented towards one's base to make an explicit call to action, such as a call to vote, were coded as "Rally," and tweets that mentioned alignment with another politician or group were coded as "Solidarity," both of which were far more prevalent among Republicans than Democrats. Republicans also tended to mention America rather than their individual districts or states, emphasizing that the fabric of the country is at stake if "the Reds" are not fended off. Accordingly, Republicans tended to call for national security and law enforcement measures to deal with this impeding danger, as "danger" was a very common theme throughout Republican red-baiting tweets. Conspiracy was also a common theme amongst Republicans, as tweets with unsubstantiated claims of plans or actions were tagged with this code. Conspiracies were wide-ranging, from public schools being sites of Marxist indoctrination to "ballot" harvesting to ensure Democratic electoral victories as just a few of the nefarious supposed plans of the left. These themes were similar to those found in previous Red Scares, and suggests that while the framework of Red Scares remains in place, the primary difference is merely context-based.

As Democrats used red-baiting far less than Republicans, it was difficult to ascertain over-arching trends, though, there were a few. For example, Democrats tended to use sarcasm more in their tweets than Republicans when it came to either levying red-baiting claims or, in rare cases, refuting them. Democrats also tended to restrict red-baiting to present or past actions, rather than forecasting potential future dangers. There was a lesser tendency among Democrats

to use an “us versus them” frame when using red-baiting terms, opting instead to direct their red-baiting at a specific entity without mentioning the opposing side, with Donald Trump being the primary target.

While there were indeed similarities between both parties and their usage of red-baiting, the outsized number of tweets from Republicans compared to Democrats rendered it difficult to find substantial alignment. However, both party’s uses of confrontational and negative sentiments, as well as personal attack, and framing China as the primary enemy to the “American way of life” via their communist tendencies shows that both parties are at fault in the continued practice of red-baiting. Republicans more explicitly encourage the behavior through their tweets, and Democrats tacitly encourage it through their silence and rather flippant attitudes towards the practice, rather than stopping the practice all together or through more consistent rebuke. Because of this, I argue that red-baiting rhetoric is unlikely to exit political discourse for some time, at least until the problem is confronted more head-on and false claims are pushed back against by citizens or the tech platforms themselves.

China as "Red Menace”

While the Cold War provided the Soviet Union as a convenient and common enemy for the United States to rally against in the Second Red Scare, there seems to be less consensus as to where red-baiting efforts are focused now. The “Reds” of the Soviet Union were spoken about in similar manners as labor unions before and during the First Red Scare, yet, a uniform, scapegoat-worthy populace has generally eluded capture in the political climate of the 2010-2020s. The most common overlap in the dataset between an entity and red-baiting terms was China. Specifically, the “Chinese **Communist** Party” was the target of a substantial number of red-baiting

charges and seemed to serve as a faceless boogeyman to blame for ills in virtually every facet of society and governance, such as economic issues, privacy issues, and corruption. In fact, China was mentioned alongside "communism" in virtually every instance (there were a handful of mentions of "socialism" and "Marxist," but they were dwarfed by mentions of "communism," rather than any of the other red-baiting terms.

Both parties were engaged in this practice, but with slightly different focuses. Republicans tended to remark on the "national security" issues China presents, as well as related personal privacy issues, and charges of not only creating the COVID-19 virus, but intentionally spreading it and obstructing inquiries into its spread. For example, Republican Iowa Senator Joni Ernst tweeted,

"The @WHO failed to hold Communist China accountable as they continued to spread lies & misinformation about #COVID19. They failed to keep Americans healthy and safe. It's past time they're held accountable."

Here, we see a wide array of connotations and connections between "Communist China" and national security interests, conspiracies related to COVID-19, and the World Health Organization (WHO) as a tangential target, all while using an "us versus them" frame where Americans are supposedly fighting to stay healthy and safe in light of Chinese malfeasance. Many of the elements of this tweet match previously discussed common Red Scare themes, frames, and rhetoric, such as an "us versus them" frame, connecting a red-baiting term to dangerous or nefarious practices, and disdain for extra-governmental organizations like the WHO. Though this tweet from Senator Ernst represents just one example, the vast majority of tweets in this dataset pertaining to China were in a very similar vein.

Democrats, on the other hand, tended to cast the Chinese Communist Party as nefarious economic predators, dangerous for American (and global) democracy, and Donald Trump affiliated. For example, California Democratic Representative Harley Rouda tweeted,

"In 2018, I defeated the Kremlin's candidate, Dana Rohrabacher. Yesterday, the @WSJ reported that my opponent's husband was implicated in a "pay to play" scheme with Chinese Communist Party leaders. I'll keep fighting to represent Orange County — not a hostile foreign nation."

Seldom did Democrats explicitly connect the Chinese Communist Party to intentionally spreading the COVID-19 virus like their Republican counterparts, nor did they attempt to frame the Chinese government as an immanent physical danger.

While there were several differences in how China and the Chinese Communist Party were framed from party to party, the similarities were striking. The "us versus them" framing of China was prevalent across both parties, nearly as often as China was referred to synonymously with the "Chinese Communist Party." Similarly, the "us versus them" frame parlayed into a variety of topics spanning both parties, such as "Our (American) jobs being at risk via the CCP," as well as the CCP ("them") as hostile to global democracy and its proponents ("us" - specifically to the United States and Hong Kong.

These similarities and parallels are consistent with historical red-baiting related rhetoric of the past two defined Red Scares with slightly different variables based on context. Instead of the Soviet Union

Grouping adversaries

While in several instances red-baiting terms were used interchangeably with one another, another interesting phenomenon that this analysis illuminated is that certain entities are more

likely targets for specific red-baiting terms. For example, the George Floyd protests were a widely remarked on event in the 2020 Congressional Twitterverse, and politicians looking to frame the protests or the protesters themselves negatively tended to use the word "anarchists," as opposed to other red-baiting terms. This is perhaps due to a misunderstanding or conflation of the term "anarchy" with "crime" or "unruly behavior." Of course, "anarchy" in the political context traditionally has meant "without hierarchy," which is *technically* true in the sense that the protests largely were not structured by a grander entity that exercised control over individuals beneath it, in these tweet contexts the "structure" aspect was ignored in favor of using "anarchy" synonymously with chaos. For example, Republican Minnesota House Candidate Tim Lewis tweeted,

"Theft, anarchy, and arson… Just a typical day of "righteous protest" in Senator Tina Smith's Minnesota. It's time for public order in our streets, and that's exactly what I'll demand as Minnesota's next U.S. Senator."

More broadly, "anarchy" also tended to be used when discussing any sort of criminal activity and reform or opposition to law enforcement. The topic of law enforcement reform came to the forefront of political discourse in the wake of the police murder of George Floyd and was largely represented on Twitter and other social media platforms as #DefundThePolice. The #DefundThePolice movement largely referred to shifting public funding from police forces to mental health, community, and social services, rather than police abolition. Despite this, the call for reform tended to be misrepresented simply as "anarchy," perhaps in an effort to delegitimize any calls for reform as ill-intended. Often in this dataset, this manifested as a sort of dichotomy between "anarchy or your family's safety," and Democrats were often cited as proponents of this

supposed anarchy. For example, Republican Tennessee Representative Bill Hagerty tweeted, "Our law enforcement officers are the only thing standing between anarchy and your family' safety. We cannot defund or dismantle the police."

Similarly, the loose "group" Black Lives Matter and its allies was typically referred to as "Marxist," rather than "anarchists," which was used to describe protests more broadly. The "Marxist" tag seems to stem from one of the founders of the decentralized movement mentioning personally being influenced by Karl Marx, as opposed to forming the basis for the collective movement. Nonetheless, conservative groups capitalized on this mention and "Marxist" became a common red-baiting charge levied against the movement, as a whole. Accordingly, conservative politicians used this tagline often in their tweets to discredit its methods and aims.

While there was some overlap in referring to BLM protestors and its allies as "communist" and "anarchist," Marxist was the most typical descriptor used (n=22) and was often used in tandem with "revolutionaries." Thus, BLM was cast more as a force of violent societal change and upheaval, as opposed to disorganized chaos that the "anarchist" protestors represented. For example, Georgia Republican Senate candidate Kelly Loeffler tweeted,

.@RealCandaceO is spot on. @joebiden won't condemn the Marxist BLM political organization out of fear of upsetting his radical left-wing base. I've spoken out against the BLM organization since day 1, and I will NEVER bend a knee to the mob and their cancel culture.

Interestingly, this characterization of racial equality and liberation movements as distinctly and dangerously "left" matches trends from other Red Scares, particularly at the tail-end of the Second Red Scare, where the Black Panther movement was explicitly cast as "Marxist" (Johnson, 2017; Rhodes, 1999). Through using these terms to describe calls for reform and equality,

conservative pundits and politicians effectively frame these concepts as foreign and dangerous to American society, and out of the realm of reasonable political discourse. Interestingly, the distinction between using "anarchist" to describe a faceless individual or group of people, as opposed to "Marxist" to describe a (perceptually) more closely affiliated group of people with a specific aim may lead one to question whether these politicians and pundits truly are ignorant of these terms and their uses, and instead are more calculated in their word choice?

Lack of rebuttal

Red-baiting politicians tended to exhibit a dearth of proof to their claims of communist boogeymen threatening American society, or "socialists" in Washington coming to destroy the nuclear family, among other claims. Despite this, tweets in this dataset revealed that many of the politicians faced with these claims, majority of them being Democrats, tended to not contest or dispute these claims, and even fewer attempted to correct the largely false claims.

Indeed, there may be several valid reasons for not pushing back on red-baiting claims. From a strategic standpoint, the mere acknowledgement of a red-baiting claim, even in disagreement, could perceptually give credence and legitimacy to the claims. Thus, true ideological rebuttals are typically rare in online political discourse (Wicks et al., 2011). Benoit and Scheafer (2006) use the "Functional Model of Political Discourse" to describe motivations and rationale for types of campaign messaging, all which serve to explain (to an extent) the phenomena exhibited in these tweets. One of Benoit's axioms is that campaign messages primarily function to "distinguish or differentiate one candidate from the other." Similarly, Benoit's (2006) model presupposes that voters learn about candidates and issues from *several* sources. With this in mind, candidates charged with red-baiting claims may simply ignore these claims as their communica-

tive time and effort is likely better spent on contrasting themselves from their opponent, rather than refuting their claims.

There were a few exceptions to this rule, as candidates such as Nebraska Democratic House candidate Kara Eastman and Ohio Democratic House candidate Alaina Shearer posted several tweets in rebuttal to the charges levied against not only them, but the incorrect usage of these terms as a whole. Eastman, of all candidates, was the most vociferous in rejecting red-baiting. For example, she tweeted,

"Here's a preview of what @DonJBacon's TV ads and social media will look like the next few months: "Kara Eastman is a RADICAL SOCIALIST DEEPSTATE GLOBALISM UNAMERICAN Communism FEMINIST!" Who's tired of STUPID politics? Let's vote this guy out. Our brains deserve better."

Here, Eastman is not directly responding to a specific red-baiting claim, and instead seems to attack the very practice of red-baiting and leverages this to differentiate herself by calling this practice "stupid politics." Again, these sorts of instances were rare and did not result in election wins for these candidates.

Other instances showed Democratic candidates pushing back on red-baiting claims by reinforcing their commitment to the status quo. Again, Benoit's model comes to the fore, as the final axiom of his model is predicated upon the idea that candidate's messaging needs to appeal to the broadest possible audience to win the most votes. Thus, the refutation of red-baiting by framing those concepts in a positive light or even "owning" those claims are few and far between. For example, when called a "socialist," Shearer tweeted,

*"*Ahhhhhh.... Socialist Shearer. That's so cute you guys!!! But I'm not a socialist. I am a capitalist. I own two businesses.
Also, just in case you would like to read up on what socialism actually is:*"*

Here, we also see a rare occurrence in this dataset, which was to not only refute the claims of red-baiting, but to correct these claims on a factual basis.

Overall, this analysis rejected H6a in that candidates did not tend to reject red-baiting claims on a wide-scale. H6a was initially birthed out of prominent Democratic politicians like Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden echoing Harry Truman and his quote (featured at the beginning of this essay) essentially embracing the term "socialism" for policies that help people, which if one subscribes to a two-step flow model of political communication, would lead one to believe that lower-level candidates would follow suit. Instead, Benoit's (2006) model and its rejection of two-step flow seems to more accurately explain why candidates tend to side-step these claims all together. Perhaps candidates like Eastman and Shearer felt more compelled or comfortable taking a risk in these refutations as they were both in non-competitive races and may have had to try unconventional avenues to win their races. Ultimately, the argument I make is that while refuting red-baiting claims may be politically expedient, the lack thereof may hamper the public's understanding of these terms if they are allowed to disseminate incorrect information, which is fueled by the dataset suggesting that red-baiting drives engagement, regardless of accuracy.

What is socialism?

As previously discussed, certain red-baiting terms seem linked to certain entities more than others. However, in most of these cases, the terms that seem entrenched in discourse surrounding groups like Black Lives Matter, or nations like China are not used appropriately according to their pre-existing definitions (as outlined in Chapter II). Of course, the concept of red-baiting does not necessarily rely on truth-telling as much as it does disparaging an enemy. How-

ever, virtually none of the terms were used in their appropriate manner and were often conflated with other terms (that were also misused), or relied on inaccurate information to land on the given red-baiting descriptor. For example, the term "communist" was more often used in relation to China than any other entity, perhaps merely owing to its nominal place in the "Chinese Communist Party." Of course, a common argument may be that these charges are justified since the word "communist" is in the official party name. However, in order for Chinese society, government, and economy to be truly communist, the means of production would necessarily need to be owned and presided over by the proletariat, which many scholars say is not the case and the nation, in its most charitable description, is a hybrid economy mainly dominated by state-owned enterprise (Zhao & Nichols, 2019). In this case, it is hard to discern whether the offending politicians genuinely believe China is communist because it is in the name of the ruling party, their understandings of historical conceptions of China, or if the term was merely used to inflame and in bad faith due to the negative connotations pre-existing in American society. One could argue that these terms are more likely used intentionally to negatively frame the target enemy, as political terms are frequently used in the official names of other nation-states that are not necessarily congruent with their governance. For example, North Korea's official state name is the "Democratic People's Republic of Korea," yet, no serious scholar or observer would argue that North Korea is in any way a democracy. This begs the question as to whether politicians that call China "communist" have a true understanding of its government and economic system, the same way they likely understand that North Korea is "democratic" in name only?

Even among the few candidates that pushed back on red-baiting claims, fewer used the terms correctly in their refutations. Texas Democratic House candidate Julie Oliver tweeted,

*"*So billionaires get tax breaks for haircuts and pay their adult children "consulting fees", but @RogerWilliamsTX voted against $600/week for struggling Texans and said they should get "zero". Can someone ask him if this makes Donald Trump a socialist or a capitalist? Yes or no?"

Here, Oliver conflates "tax breaks" and nepotism with "socialism" in her attack of both her opponent and president Trump without offering another definition of the term or further rationale as to why those practices are different from capitalism (which they really are not). In a sense, this sort of conflation may not only serve to further confuse voters as to what these terms actually mean, but it also might provide unwarranted support for the equally false charges from the other side of the political spectrum.

If "tax breaks" and small monthly allowances for families are considered socialism by Democratic politicians, Republicans are essentially then able to point to similar practices, such as tax breaks for residential solar panels or extended unemployment benefits, two policies often championed by Democrats, as evidence of the socialism that they warn prospective voters about. Thus, a feedback loop is created where red-baiting creates definitions and frames these terms, opponents respond to the incorrect claims using those definitions created by the red-baiters, ultimately legitimizing those definitions from both sides as examples of "socialism," like tax incentives, are pointed to as evidence of encroaching leftist politics.

Harkening back to the previous example of selective embrace of political terms (Democratic People's Republic of Korea vs. Chinese Communist Party), the same seems to be the case when describing policy. Certainly, not *all* politicians are ignorant of what these terms mean (as exhibited in Eastman's tweets, among others). Yet, "socialism," specifically, seems to be a foil used by Democratic candidates (such as Oliver, among others) to describe policy that "helps" people, and is facilitated by the government, more broadly, in contrast to concepts like "crony"

capitalism. This is not a new phenomenon, as shown in the previously referenced Truman quote, yet this encapsulates the idea that these terms are used only in politically expedient manners, rather than in any sort of way that educates voters. So, while some politicians *may* understand that these terms are being used incorrectly, they are largely used in recognizable contexts with definitions that are familiar to the public, rather than their true definitions. Because of this tendency exhibited in this dataset, I continue to sound the alarm as to the over-ambiguity and misappropriation of political terms as debates over these topics tend to get mired by their incorrect usage, as the public is no better off with ill-defined terms comprising its political discourse.

Sentiments

One of the common tropes of Red Scares and red-baiting is the "us versus them" framing of issues (n=2096). Consequently, casting an opponent or policy as "them" tended to lead to more "confrontational" sentiments in this dataset. Red-baiting tweets were coded as "confrontational" if there was accompanying language suggesting that an entity or policy needs to be defeated or challenged, beyond framing the entity or policy negatively. Many times, this took the form of a call-to-action with the tweeting candidate asking voters to "join the fight against…" The codes "confrontational" and "negative" were coded in tandem with one another (n=1340). These tweets were not exclusive to one party or another, nor were they tied to the competitiveness of a race. For instance, one tweet coded as "confrontational" and "negative" came from Texas Republican House candidate Dan Crenshaw, stating, "The left's anti-church rhetoric has transitioned from words to actions, with multiple churches across the country desecrated. The Marxist goal is to tear down all elements of western civilization, from our Founding to our churches. We must not let them." In this example, the clear binary presented in the form of an

"us versus them" frame is used as a call-to-action amongst voters courted by Crenshaw to stop the "Marxists" from destroying "our" churches.

This theme of "stopping" or "defeating" a supposed enemy was prevalent throughout many of these red-baiting tweets, while serving to court constituents to be a part of the "us" group that requires action to stop erasure of institutions, culture, and the constituents themselves. Effectively, red-baiting seems to frame political action and discourse as a zero-sum game where one side either preserves itself or gets completely destroyed. While the "us versus them" frame is especially prevalent across Red Scare eras, this binary seems to have been exacerbated. This is perhaps due to what some scholars call "excessive" polarization in the American political arena (Heltzel & Laurin, 2020) compared to past decades. This excessive polarization has created an atmosphere where citizens are more likely to dismiss and separate themselves from those with opposing ideologies than they are towards those of a different race, religion, or socioeconomic class (Heltzel & Laurin, 2020), leading to a relatively new form of ideological tribalism advanced by social media (Bernstein et al., 2023).

As red-baiting tweets are popular in terms of engagement, their messages, and subsequent calls to action have a relatively substantial reach. These confrontational and negative sentiments are normalized as they become more frequently seen. Tribalism and polarization have led to increased politically-based violence in the 2010s and 2020s, such as the January 6th Capitol Insurrection, and is rooted in self-perception of victimhood (Hameiri et al., 2023). These perceptions of victimhood is likely proliferated by the "us versus them" sentiments that are found in these red-baiting tweets, and their confrontational calls to action are more likely to be exacted by those who feel victimized (Hameiri et al., 2023). Therefore, the sentiments and implications found in

these tweets are as important as the explicit red-baiting instances alone. As ideological tribalism proliferates, red-baiting tweets and confrontational calls to action may lead to further instances of violence against opposing groups**.**

Where is red-baiting directed?

Following Red Scare tradition, many red-baiting claims targeted foreign governments and political opposition. As previously referenced, China has assumed the role of the USSR as the new red-baiting boogeyman, as many of the same language and frames have been applied to it to reflect the supposed threat that the Chinese Communist Party poses to Americans. Similarly, women and minorities have historically been targets of red-baiting claims, and this trend continues. A coalition of women of color has emerged as a sort of new face of the American left since the 2016 election, comprised of politicians like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ilhan Omar, among others. Oppositions have dubbed this coalition, in many cases, as the "Socialist Squad," and were the targets of several red-baiting charges. For example, Ohio Republican House candidate Steve Chabot tied his opponent to "the Squad" and their "radical policies" when he tweeted,

".@KateForCongress' extreme agenda (including the job-crushing Green New Deal and policies to undermine public safety) places her more in line with AOC and the Socialist Squad in Washington than with the hardworking people of #OH01*."*

This coalition was mentioned frequently alongside Democratic leaders like Joe Biden, Nancy Pelosi, and Chuck Schumer as harbingers of dangerous left-wing policy. However, The Squad was interestingly generally mentioned by that moniker alone, or as "AOC and the Socialist Squad," giving the coalition a sort of facelessness not applied to other Democratic caucuses. I argue that this obfuscation of exactly *who* is a part of this coalition is intentional and serves to further dehumanize those that represent anti-establishment policy from the left, especially

women of color, given that other opposition figures like Nancy Pelosi and those she works closely with were generally referred to by name.

Additionally, the Red Scare playbook was applied to red-baiting against corporations and industries, as was the case during the first two Red Scares. This time, "Hollywood," a substantial target of the Second Red Scare, took a backseat to tech industries and social media platforms as corporations like Google, Meta, and TikTok were cast as "communist" for their supposed censorship of speech and invasions of privacy. For example, the oft-referenced Bill Hagerty tweeted, "These big tech platforms will censor you until you think like a liberal. They will disregard facts and promote Communist Chinese propaganda. FACT: the WUHAN virus came from WUHAN, CHINA."

Tech corporations were not alone in these charges, as other organizations like the National Basketball Association and Disney were called "communist" on several occasions for not explicitly denouncing the CCP.

Essentially, the Red Scare framework was on display in this dataset, as many of the same charges were levied against similar types of people, coalitions, and industries as previous Red Scares, only with updated contextual references.

Other takeaways

By no means are the trends and outcomes outlined in this section wholly indicative of the state of red-baiting and its consequences. One could comb through every tweet again and derive more insights, but those included so far in this section are key similarities between previous Red Scare eras and now to help determine if we are currently living in a Red Scare, as well as new trends that tie the past to the present. In an effort to succinctly summarize other themes and trends uncovered in this analysis that still arguably carry importance for understanding the cur-

rent state of red-baiting in political discourse, the list below outlines a few of these supplementary findings:

- Republicans romanticize the "American way of life" and relied on nostalgia reflective of the 1950s-60s supposedly in jeopardy from the creeping Red menace, while Democrats did not use this frame
- Republicans were more likely to conflate ideologies than Democrats, while Democrats sometimes used their platform to correct some of these conflations (albeit seldomly), but did not tend to conflate ideologies themselves
- Religious framing and mentions of God were generally less prevalent than expected compared to previous Red Scares
- "Fascist" was used by Republicans in a variety of contemporary contexts, ranging from describing protestors to political tactics from the left, whereas Democrats used the term to sometimes describe Donald Trump, but largely relegated it to the past in their mentions of "triumphs over fascism" in World War II
- Personal freedoms and business/economic interests were cast as most in jeopardy by Republicans, whereas democracy was the primary concern for Democrats
- The prolific mentions of political coalitions and solidarity within party likely provides further evidence of the excessively polarized political climate

Is this a Red Scare?

This brings us to a proposed solution to the ultimate question of this study, which is "are we living in a new Red Scare?" Given that there is no explicit check-list of Red Scare conditions and activities, one must deduce this based on a collection of evidence and analysis of current conditions compared to the past. Based on the evidence found in this research and analysis process, my argument is essentially that American politics have perpetually been in a state of Red Scare at least since the Haymarket Affair, with ebbs and flows depending upon social conditions. The culture of American politics and society, marked by individualism, religion, and capitalistic ideals, are generally opposed to leftist politics, so those politics are likely seen as an existential threat to America and its way of life, which is supported by many of these tweets that warn of American institutions being destroyed at the hands of the left. Certain events seem to coincide with inflamed Red Scare rhetoric, such as a war, like World War II, or a national crisis, like 9/11 or the COVID-19 Pandemic, which I argue allows political opportunists to repackage-Red Scare sentiment to fit with current conditions, given that red-baiting terms and frames seem to remain salient, according to the data. Indeed, much of the past Red Scare playbooks have been re-tooled in modern times, simply re-framing the enemies and specific policy matters in accord with their political expedience; China is the new USSR, the Green New Deal has taken place of Roosevelt's New Deal, Anarchists are now protestors instead of labor unions, among others.

Social media has provided a greater platform for red-baiting to take place, but the sheer abundance of messages somewhat dilutes the perception that this problem is pervasive. While only about 2% of the tweets collected in total for this study contained red-baiting terms, the en-

gagement levels on these tweets showed that these topics are relevant and salient to the American public (at least to those on Twitter). Further, the subsequent topics tagged with red-baiting terms still prime users to view those same topics through the lens of red-baiting, even if those terms are not present. So, if protestors are called "anarchists" in even a few highly visible tweets, the audience is likely still primed to view protestors as anarchists when the term is not explicitly mentioned alongside of them, cultivating and skewing perceptions long after the tweet has fallen down on a user's newsfeed.

The exact conditions and variables of the first two Red Scares may be absent, but the framework has always remained in place and has followed the undercurrent of American politics and media's place within it.

Limitations

One technical limitation was the sheer number of tweets that were analyzed. As was not feasible, both time-wise, nor monetarily, to analyze every tweet from every candidate during this period, some notable examples of the practice, and subsequent conclusions that can be drawn from those tweets may be missed. As such, certain prolific Twitter-using Congress members or candidates may have been excluded from the sample, either after the random selection process, or because they were not up for election during this cycle. Likewise, certain candidates had a sparse following or were limited in their postings, which limited their reach and influence. With Republican candidates, past research suggests that Republicans are more cohesive in their overall messaging than their Democrat counterparts, which gives credence to extrapolating their posts as more representative of Republican sentiment. Democrats have been noted as having less cohesive messaging, especially since the party occupies a larger swath of the political spectrum than

Republicans do. As exhibited in the analysis, some of the messaging from Democrats was not all that unlike that of Republicans. For example, consistent allusions to the "Chinese Communist Party" as a pariah to rally against were seen across both parties extensively. However, some Democrats rejected using red-baiting terms, and even pushed back on them (such as Nebraska House candidate Kara Eastman) several times. Even though she made these claims several times, they are still not representative of the rest of the party, or even the overall campaign rhetoric, despite showing up with a higher raw number of tweets. Thus, the themes used in their posts may be reflective of grander sentiments, especially within their party, but they could not serve as definitive evidence of rhetoric on a broader scale.

In terms of the sample, politicians with banned or deleted accounts *were* included in this study, so long as their opponent had a Twitter account *and* their pairing was part of the random selection process. While this *potentially* could have shifted results in terms of more pushback on red-baiting claims since the hypothetical candidate could have defended themselves against red-baiting claims, these cases were so few that they would not have shifted the overall answers to the RQs if they were disclosed.

In a similar vein, the tweets analyzed in this study are not holistically representative of the entire political landscape. The central argument in this piece is not that "because of the rhetoric exhibited in these tweets, there is definitively a new Red Scare upon us." Instead, by looking at a sample of political rhetoric of when both politicians and the public are most engaged (Levy, Solomon & Collet-Gildard, 2016), we are better able to gauge what topic and themes are salient in nationwide political discourse. Understanding the level of salience of the various themes and topics explored in this study allowed for a measure of comparison between Red

Scare eras, and given the numerous similarities of those topics *and* their salience, one can then infer whether a Red Scare is present.

This study was also limited in that it does not attempt to draw a direct connection between activities, suppression, and rhetoric during Red Scare eras and those same features present day. As there is no definitive checklist, nor are there strict sets of events that directly signify a Red Scare period, this study merely attempted to showcase correlations in Red Scare conditions and behaviors between the present and the past. However, the central argument to this piece still holds that there are indeed numerous similarities between Red Scare periods and the current political landscape. These similarities should serve as warning signs that mistakes of the past are still very prevalent, and that without proper recognition and adjustments, they may persist and even grow worse.

To further explore salience, a future study may include more data on the followers of the candidates to ensure the localization of engagement metrics. This study *did not* collect data on followers, so there were some blind spots in terms of knowing for certain *where* most of the followers were located and if they were actual constituents of the candidates. This *potentially* could have skewed the engagement metric analysis to account for bots more easily, and given greater context to confirm *where* red-baiting terms and themes were more salient. However, the answers to the RQs would have remained unchanged even with additional this context.

Future Implications/Solutions

This brings us to ponder the future of American politics and its surrounding discourse in light of understanding that Red Scares will likely inflame at certain periods, depending on cur-

rent conditions since many of the tenants that underly the practice of red-baiting seem interwoven with the fabric of American society and its political structure. As it stands, Red Scares are likely to remain in a state of ebb and flow, given the culture and history of America and the institutions that maintain it. Anything human-made, such as culture or social norms can be human-altered or human-destroyed. Therefore, while I believe the challenge that red-baiting presents and the problems it exacerbates is a very daunting task, it *can* be tackled and amended to create a more just and fair democracy that is rooted in truth.

First, this study suggests that red-baiting is not necessarily a winning political strategy, therefore campaign managers and consultants may encourage their candidates to shy away from the practice. While increased engagement metrics may lead to promotion of these topics through algorithmic curation and subsequently boost the profile of a given candidate (Francia, 2018), the practice of red-baiting alone is not enough to win an election. Though the practice likely persists even in non-election years, burying red-baiting at the bottom of the rhetorical toolkit via dormancy during campaigns may be a start to phasing it out.

While this study did not analyze the two-way discourse between candidates and their followers, results show that these tweets generated a significant number of replies. Perhaps through analyzing those replies, a better gauge of attitudes towards the practice could lead to further suggestions for phasing out red-baiting if public attitudes are strongly against it. Those involved in campaigns should encourage the candidate to re-frame their policy preferences and characterizations outside of a red-baiting lens, especially as attitudes towards socialism and related ideologies are becoming *more* popular among younger generations, and large minority voting blocs that will wield even more power in the future (Pew Research Center, 2022).

It is impossible to discern whether these red-baiting politicians truly believe their claims or not, but the issue persists. Due to the lack of political literacy by the American constituency and reliance on social media as a primary news source, especially among younger generations, the public has little in the way of tools to separate political posturing from actual threats. Instead of social media platforms like Twitter becoming an ideal Habermasian public sphere where topics and ideas can be hashed out and debated on their merits, algorithmic curation and intentional promotion of certain political ideas by their owners (like Elon Musk), at least in this case, seem to do little in the way of educating citizens and providing a true avenue for civil discussion. While Twitter has the Community Notes feature to attempt to combat the spread of false information, a largely politically illiterate base may lack the tools to discern fact from fiction when it comes to nuanced discussion of politics, let alone red-baiting claims. In fact, studies concurrent with this one suggest that the Community Notes feature has not significantly reduced engagement with misinformation and disinformation on the platform (Chuai et al., 2023).

A possible next step is to put these tweets under a greater microscope to discourage those that foster uncivil discourse or tacitly encourage violence or ostracization towards others. Luckily, many of the frames and themes built into the red-baiting toolkit would likely fall under this more intense scrutiny. For example, the "us versus them" frame prevalent in red-baiting often coincided with "danger" frames, which led to calls to action to stop a group or person. Therefore, platforms could develop tools to detect language associated with both of these frames to flag them as potentially harmful. While this flagging would likely seep over into other less insidious arenas and topics, such as sports discourse that includes "us versus them" frames, platforms also could

categorize accounts as "political," making this set of alerts to red-baiting rhetoric only pertain to political accounts.

A broader social media solution that could at least begin to tackle the issue without likely pushback on supposed censorship would be to simply reconfigure algorithms to disincentivize tacit misinformation and disinformation. As it stands, engagement metrics are the primary drivers in Twitter's algorithmic boosting. Blatant hate speech and other objectionable content *may* be removed from the platform, and more obvious misinformation and disinformation may be combatted by the Community Notes feature. However, less obvious dog-whistling rhetoric and technical misuses of words and phrases are more difficult to detect. Twitter, in this case, could reconfigure their algorithm to give a less substantial boost to tweets by politicians using these terms, regardless of their engagement metrics. For example, if a tweet has 100,000 likes and retweets each, yet contains one of the red-baiting terms, the algorithm may treat the tweet as though it garnered a fraction of those metrics, thereby lowering its visibility. Politicians may still argue that this is a form of censorship, but given that these red-baiting words are seldom used positively, or even to discuss actual policy, perhaps this change would encourage them to use alternative terms or to use the terms in good-faith.

An aspirational outcome of this study would be for politicians to abandon the practice of red-baiting all together. Analysis from the dataset shows that politicians do not gain a competitive advantage when they red-bait more than their opponents, nor do the engagement metrics always suggest support for their sentiments (e.g. replies may be contrary opinions). While there is not necessarily a disadvantage either, as politicians who red-bait more than their opponents do not tend to lose *more,* the fact that red-baiting is not a winning strategy, on its own, may lead to

candidates focusing their energy on campaign messages that will convert fence-sitters to their side, and followers into voters. One may push-back on this suggestion, as identity politics, like those promoted by red-baiting, are part of the total package and appeal of a candidate to their supporters (Perry, 2023). So, while red-baiting, on its own, is not necessarily going to lead to an electoral victory, its strategic use in positioning the candidate and their supporters as part of the "in-group" may bolster their image and other campaign messages. That said, negative campaign messaging's consequences are inconclusive and context dependent. For example, incumbents are generally penalized for using negative campaign ads and frivolous claims tend to turn off voters (Fridkin & Kenny, 2004). Therefore, if politicians still feel compelled to use red-baiting phrases, perhaps the evidence from this study, coupled with past trends, will incentivize them to use the terms in more substantive manners, which could actually help spur healthy democratic debate.

Summary of Study

Red-baiting and Red Scare rhetoric persist in American politics, though their manifestations have evolved with the times. This study began by asking whether contemporary American politics exhibits characteristics of a new Red Scare period by analyzing Congressional campaign communications on Twitter during the 2020 election cycle. Through examining over 268,000 tweets from 488 Congressional candidates, I argued that Red Scares never truly went away - rather, they simmer beneath the surface of American political discourse, ready to inflame under the right conditions.

The evidence from this study suggests that while explicit red-baiting language appeared in only about 1% of campaign tweets, these posts generated significantly higher engagement than

typical campaign messages, indicating the rhetoric remains salient to the American public. Red-baiting tweets drove discussion and reaction regardless of their accuracy or context. The core themes, frames, and targets mirror those of past Red Scares, merely repackaged for current contexts. China has replaced the Soviet Union as the primary foreign communist threat, the Green New Deal stands in for the New Deal as evidence of creeping socialism, and social movements like Black Lives Matter face "Marxist" accusations much like labor unions once did.

The data revealed clear patterns that suggest an enduring Red Scare mentality in American politics. Republicans employed red-baiting rhetoric roughly ten times more frequently than Democrats, continuing the historical partisan divide in these tactics. Their messages consistently employed "us versus them" framing while claiming to defend an idealized "American way of life" against radical threats. Algorithmic amplification of high-engagement content on social media platforms creates a feedback loop that may make this rhetoric appear more prevalent and accepted than it truly is in the broader public sphere.

One of the most troubling findings for democratic discourse is the persistent misuse and conflation of political terms. "Socialism," "communism," and "Marxism" were rarely used according to their actual definitions, instead serving as interchangeable pejoratives stripped of meaning. Combined with low levels of political literacy and increasing reliance on social media for political information, this phenomenon creates fertile ground for Red Scare rhetoric to shape perceptions and constrain substantive policy debates before they can begin.

The implications for democracy in the social media age are significant. Meta has opted to remove fact checking barriers to misinformation and disinformation in the US, in favor of a Community Notes feature, similar to Twitter. While red-baiting alone did not appear to determine

electoral outcomes in this study, its prevalence on platforms like Twitter likely contributes to political polarization and degrades the quality of democratic discourse. Similarly, one must not overstate the seemingly lacking association between red-baiting and electoral outcomes. Future studies may necessitate a multi-variate analysis between engagement metrics, red-baiting, and election outcomes to uncover if there is more below the surface. Engagement-driven algorithms mean inflammatory rhetoric gets amplified regardless of accuracy, potentially creating distorted perceptions of political reality among users.

Concluding Remarks

The political and social media landscape has fundamentally shifted since the beginning of this study. The parallels drawn between the initial Red Scares and today's political climate are unfortunately becoming more prophetic by the day, as many of the themes, frames, and rhetorical tactics noted as perilous to democracy have come to the fore. This work was initially intended to better inform civic-minded social media platforms and candidates who championed democracy on how to more appropriately employ accurate definitions in their messaging to combat the erosion of political literacy that destroys democracies. Instead, social media platforms have shifted farther rightward. Twitter has seemingly turned into a breeding ground for even greater divisiveness and disinformation under the direction of Elon Musk. Meta announced it would abandon its fact-checking tools in the US, instead opting for a Community Notes feature similar to Twitter, which previously mentioned research has shown to be ineffectual. Some analysts have called this shift a "MAGA Makeover," where platforms eager to win favor from right-wing politicians like

Donald Trump, are pushing back on “censorship” (i.e. fact checking), instead deferring to users to determine what constitutes as truth (Stelter, 2025).

Following the 2024 election, waves of users have left Twitter, in favor of platforms like Bluesky, which have a larger left-leaning user base (Cooper, 2024). Rather than the aspirational Habermasian Public Sphere that many, like myself, had hoped social media platforms would become, these platforms are rapidly becoming increasingly segmented echo-chambers where little meaningful dialogue and debate occurs. These platforms seem no longer maintaining the veil of impartiality.

As of this writing in mid-2025, the parallels between the Red Scares and the first few months of Trump’s second term are unmissable. Building off of his previous rhetoric about ousting “communists” and “Marxists” from America and deeming them the enemy, we can see the Cultivation Model of Political Realities in full gear. First, one could argue that Trump has taken the Free Media Thesis and expanded it beyond just campaign rhetoric. On a near daily basis, new outlandish claims, undemocratic actions, and blatantly unconstitutional decrees are proposed — generating constant media coverage and debates over issues that would never have been possible to discuss on a mainstream basis. This tactic also has been helpful to the Trump regime as the extra media coverage makes it harder for opposition to focus on any particular issue, so there are dozens of simultaneous “fires” to put out at any given moment.

Perhaps most troubling is how the Cultivation model is actualized as concrete government action, mirroring historical Red Scare tactics and practices. For example, on college campuses alone, the Trump administration has manufactured a reality where pro-Palestinian allies are seen as “terrorists,” and students and faculty that speak to the contrary are either deported or face

losing their jobs or student status — an easily recognizable trait from the earlier Red Scares. Similarly, other members of the Trump regime and its partner, the Heritage Foundation, have complied and disseminated lists of individuals and groups that are seen as "dangerous" to be targeted and suppressed in a variety of ways (Contreras, 2025) — almost exactly like the blacklists during McCarthyism. Fact-checking has all but been abandoned, both in news media's lack of challenges to blatantly false claims by the administration, as well as on social media, creating an environment where the government seems to have full control of whatever narrative they choose — not unlike the anti-communist propaganda during the Red Scares. All of this is the culmination of years of effort by the right, and is a shining example of my Cultivation model in action. This self-perpetuating cycle, happening in real time, is now reaching a new, unprecedented end, as these Red Scare tactics, practices, and policies are becoming normalized with each passing day as standard government practice. Unchecked, this cycle will undoubtedly continue and the future could look even more frightening for those who wish to preserve the democracy that was idealized in this country for over two centuries.

So, what can we do? Substantial positive political change has rarely materialized through the aid of state or corporate actors; revolutions and reclamations of just societies have been built through mutual aid. The solution is simple, yet monumental — the onus is on us, those civic minded champions of truth and democracy, to educate one another on a fundamental level, word by word, to establish a political system that works for all.

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