

Socialism bad, capitalism good: Unveiling the relationship between metaphorical political communication and political identity.


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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of metaphorical frameworks on political discourse in the United States, particularly in the context of the culture wars characterized by polarized interpretations of sociopolitical issues such as the Green New Deal, critical race theory, and wokeism. It examines how these metaphors, often oversimplified, influence individuals' confidence in their political understanding and actions. Utilizing a quantitative survey, the research contrasts self-reported data on epistemic political efficacy (EPE), political information efficacy (PIE), political identity, and understanding of the aforementioned metaphors. The findings reveal a surprising lack of correlation between political identity and understanding of these metaphors, suggesting a widespread deficiency in comprehension across the political spectrum. Additionally, the study identifies a paradoxical inverse relationship between EPE and PIE, challenging the assumption that increased access to political information necessarily enhances self-perceived political understanding. These results highlight the need for a deeper examination of the role of political metaphors and their potential to falsely elevate voter confidence, while simultaneously diminishing the substance of political debates in modern politics.

Keywords: epistemic political efficacy, political information efficacy, political identity, metaphors, political discourse

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Introduction

The title of this thesis, “Socialism Bad, Capitalism Good: Unveiling the Relationship Between Metaphorical Political Communication and Political Identity,” draws inspiration from a statement by Rep. Roger Williams (R-TX) during his advocacy for House Concurrent Resolution 9 (H. Con. Res. 9), entitled “Denouncing the horrors of socialism.” In February 2023, Williams concluded his remarks: “Bottom line: socialism bad, capitalism good,” a declaration embodying the trend of binary oversimplifications in contemporary political rhetoric. This tendency, as exemplified by Williams’ succinct statement, often eschews the intricate socio-economic and political nuances necessary for a comprehensive understanding of such complex matters. The resolution not only denounces socialism as an ideology linked to totalitarian and dictatorial outcomes but also exemplifies the prevalent misapplication and mischaracterization of terms within political dialogue.

This thesis aims to dissect the impacts of such reductive approaches on political communication, specifically focusing on how they sculpt the metaphorical lenses through which audiences perceive and interpret political subjects. It endeavors to unearth strategies that encourage a more deliberate and nuanced approach to political discourse.

The current political arena is increasingly characterized by metaphorical language to convey complex and contentious ideas, policies, and ideologies to a deeply divided electorate in the United States. A prime example is the metaphor “draining the swamp,” recently used to signify a commitment to extensive personal changes and the eradication of perceived corruption within the Federal Government (Burgers et al., 2019). This metaphor transcends mere communication of a political stance; it acts as a unifying call to action, rallying diverse groups under a shared banner and thus aiding in the formation of coalitions among voters united by a common frustration with systemic issues. Nonetheless, such metaphors, while unifying and

persuasive, risk oversimplifying the nuanced realities of political landscapes, potentially degrading public comprehension and the caliber of political discussions (Liaw et al., 2022).

Metaphors like “draining the swamp,” while offering simplified pathways to understanding and advocating perspectives, frequently lead to distorted and reductive portrayals of critical political issues. This effect is amplified by growing political polarization and the burgeoning influence of social media, intensifying the obstacles faced in fostering substantive political discourse. Consequently, scholars have advocated for further research to bridge the knowledge gap concerning the nuanced roles of political metaphors, particularly in how they shape reasoning, interpretation of political matters, and the evolution of political beliefs and attitudes (Bougher, 2012; Otieno et al., 2016).

This study employs a quantitative survey method to investigate how individuals with varying political identities interpret and react to key political metaphors. Anchored in the elaboration likelihood model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986) and framing theory (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974), this research focuses on metaphors pertaining to social justice, climate change, and other global issues. The survey will measure participants’ epistemic political efficacy (EPE) and political information efficacy (PIE) as well as their attitudes and perceived understanding of specific metaphors, including critical race theory (CRT), wokeism, and the Green New Deal (GND). The objective is to identify patterns in the perceived comprehension and attitudes toward political metaphors across self-identified political identities. In addition, the strength and direction of correlation between the two distinct measures of political efficacy will be assessed, pointing to future directions in the study of political metaphors and their relationship to voter confidence, partisan persuasion, and coalition-building.

Literature Review

Political Communication and Discourse

Pye (1993) defined political communication as “the flow of messages and information that give structure and meaning in the political process” (p. 442). His definition implies that political communication sets the parameters of competing political realities and is focused on creating shared meaning among politically involved members of the general public. It is this space of shared meaning that this body of work is specifically interested in. Wolton (1990) similarly described political communication as “the arena in which different types of discourse revolving around politics vie to gain ascendancy in the political interpretation of [a] situation” (pp. 12-13). His definition highlights the interplay of conflicting discourses presented by political actors with different levels of social status and legitimacy and how they contribute to the communicative dynamics of democracy.

In the modern context, political communication has evolved to frequently employ strategic metaphors, such as those seen in the discourse surrounding COVID-19, to frame political issues and influence public sentiment (Castro Seixas, 2021). Reflecting contemporary dynamics, Liaw et al. (2022) emphasized that political communication extends beyond traditional platforms, incorporating digital media to amplify campaign messages and engage with a more connected electorate. This digital expansion has further complicated the landscape, as it introduces new channels and forms of interaction that can both clarify and obfuscate the original intent of political messages.

In its simplest form, political communication represents how politicians, political institutions, the media, and citizens convey and receive (and interpret) information. Some of the desired outcomes of political communication are to shape public opinion, mobilize supporters,

and politically socialize citizens (Pfetsch & Esser, 2012). As a result, it is often persuasive since it seeks to promote understanding, instill beliefs, and drive advocacy in political affairs (McNair, 2011; Swanson et al., 1990). Persuasion, which is defined as “the principles and processes by which people’s attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors are formed, modified, or resist change in the face of others’ attempts at influence,” is used in the political process to convince targets to accept the beliefs and positions of a specific political party (Ledgerwood et al., 2006, p. 533).

In the larger realm of political communication, political discourse occurs when actors discuss issues and matters for political purposes (Graber, 1981). Put simply, political discourse is a subset of political communication that represents “the discourse of politicians” (Van Dijk, 2003, p. 212). However, researchers have extended the notion of political discourse to include ordinary citizens communicating about politics in online environments (Papacharissi, 2002) and the public sphere (Habermas, 1991). Political discourse research examines how we talk about politics—the language, narratives, and metaphors used to express, frame, and debate political ideas and ideologies through campaign rhetoric and everyday political conversations. Wilson (2015) asserted that political motivations drive political discourse, encompass all spoken or written communication that addresses political topics, and extend to the formal study of political language and how it serves political purposes such as persuasion and cultural reinforcement.

Culture Wars, Metaphors, and the Role of Framing

The concept of culture wars is a key part of political communication, where persuasion and language play crucial roles. These wars are about profound ideological differences in the United States, focusing on identity, morality, and societal norms (Hartman et. al, 2023; Hurst & Stern, 2020). They are not just isolated arguments but are closely linked to how politicians and media talk about these issues. Metaphorical framing is essential in this context, providing a

framework for turning complex cultural and political conflicts into more straightforward, more understandable ideas, guiding how people think and talk about these issues (Prabhakaran et al., 2021). This approach is a direct application of what political communication aims to do: shape public opinion and get people involved. It makes complicated political issues more relatable and understandable, fitting into the broader picture of how political ideas and ideologies are discussed and debated (Habermas, 1991; Papacharissi, 2002; Van Dijk, 2003). In essence, it shows how important language and metaphors influence people's political views and actions.

Framing theory provides the scaffolding for understanding this phenomenon. Goffman's (1974) seminal work laid the foundation, suggesting that frames shape the interpretation of social events. Framing theory was further refined by Entman (1993), who articulated framing as selecting certain aspects of reality to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation. This strategic highlighting and obscuring of information guide audiences toward a specific understanding, a tactic prevalent in the partisan portrayal of contentious or seemingly divisive issues (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993).

In the discourse surrounding the culture wars, metaphors become the scriptwriters, effectively transforming the meaning of political issues to resonate with or repel certain demographics. The strategic employment of terms such as the Green New Deal, CRT, and woke by partisan media illustrates this transformation, where the original intent of these concepts is often repurposed to evoke specific emotional responses (Burgers et al., 2019; Kendi, 2021; Sawchuck, 2021). The framing of these terms reflects the core attitudes and ideas of political actors and reveals their perceptions of audience competence and information-seeking habits (Howe, 2009).

The digital era, marked by the rise of social media platforms, has amplified the reach and impact of metaphorical framing, creating echo chambers that reinforce group identities and exacerbate ideological divides (Davis, 2019). This digital insulation fosters a unique environment where metaphorical frames can thrive, influencing the formation of voting coalitions and the evolution of political discourse (Sides et al., 2021). The role of metaphors in political communication, as established by scholars like Lakoff and Johnson (1980), extends beyond mere rhetorical flourish, serving as cognitive devices that shape our understanding of complex issues.

Conceptual metaphor theory, as established by Lakoff and Johnson (1980), posits that metaphors are fundamental to understanding abstract concepts and reasoning. This theory suggests that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, influencing not just language but thought and action. In the context of American political culture wars, this theory becomes particularly salient, as metaphors are often employed to frame complex political issues in terms that resonate with or antagonize specific ideological groups (Kövecses, 2020). These metaphorical frameworks are instrumental in shaping public opinion, as they simplify and polarize political discourse, making abstract concepts like freedom, justice, and equality concrete and emotionally charged within the battleground of political ideologies (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980).

Metaphors, particularly within the context of culture wars, serve as a reflection of deeply ingrained moral values that are closely tied to distinct political ideologies and party lines. This phenomenon is exemplified in the metaphorical use of family models, which profoundly shape political motivations and the comprehension of issues. Lakoff's seminal work (1996) introduced this concept, highlighting how metaphors rooted in family dynamics can encapsulate and influence political thought. He further elaborated on this in 2002, detailing the "nurturant parent"

model as a representation of liberal ideologies and the “strict father” model as an embodiment of conservative viewpoints. These metaphorical frameworks are not mere linguistic devices; they fundamentally shape policy preferences and moral agendas, offering a window into the underlying values of different political groups.

Subsequent research has continued to build upon Lakoff’s insights. McAdams et al. (2008) and Feinberg and Wehling (2018) expanded the understanding of how these metaphorical family models not only reflect ideological differences but also actively frame political issues, thereby defining the ideological battleground. Their work highlights the enduring relevance of these metaphors in political discourse, demonstrating how they influence the way different groups engage with and interpret political narratives. This ongoing exploration into the metaphorical framing of politics reveals the profound impact of these conceptual models in shaping the landscape of political communication and understanding.

The persuasive power of strategic metaphorical framing is not lost on political strategists and institutions. This systematic process can be exemplified through the rebranding of the “estate tax” as the “death tax.” The original term, “estate tax,” implied a tax relevant only to the wealthy, thus failing to resonate with the broader public. However, the term “death tax” reframed the issue, tapping into universal concerns about death and the perceived injustice of taxing grieving families. This shift in terminology effectively transformed public perception, rallying support against the tax (Luntz, 2007; Luu, 2016).

The success of such framing, however, is contingent on the audience’s existing knowledge and interest in the subject (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). As in the provided example, some instances of strategic framing first necessitate increasing the salience of the topic before a shift in meaning takes place. This highlights the nuanced relationship between metaphorical

framing and audience receptivity, particularly in the context of culture wars. The “death tax” case demonstrates how language can be strategically employed to not only alter public understanding of a policy but also to significantly sway public sentiment and political debate.

The strategic deployment and reinterpretation of terms such as the Green New Deal, CRT, and woke are clearly more than political jargon, indicative of the broader framing processes that reinforce and challenge existing power dynamics within the contemporary political landscape. These terms, often redefined and charged with emotional weight, serve to evoke specific reactions—negative emotions and resistance among conservative audiences or solidarity and recognition among progressives—thereby contributing to the ongoing culture wars and fostering greater political polarization (Burgers et al., 2019; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Therefore, framing these terms becomes a battleground where the struggle over public opinion and policy direction is intensely fought.

To understand the communicative power of these frames, dissecting the metaphorical underpinnings that make terms like the Green New Deal, critical race theory, and woke potent symbols in the culture wars is crucial. These are not static concepts but are dynamically shaped by the conceptual interactions within political discourse. The metaphors and frames applied to them encapsulate complex societal debates and distill them into concepts readily accessible to the public psyche. As this body of work examines the specifics of each term, we will explore how metaphorical framing serves as a critical lens through which these concepts are understood and debated. This analysis will shed light on the rhetorical strategies employed by different political factions and provide insight into how these strategies affect public perception and discourse.

Green New Deal

The Green New Deal (GND), a comprehensive proposal addressing climate change and economic inequality, has become a target for conservative criticism due to its allegedly radical suggestions for addressing important social issues (Dayaratna & Loris, 2019). The coverage of the GND by left-leaning media outlets often frames it as a transformative initiative that addresses both climate change and economic inequality, yet this portrayal is sometimes met with skepticism by establishment media who question its feasibility and economic implications (Spencer, 2019). Editorial cartoonists, reflecting the polarized media landscape, have both lampooned and praised the Green New Deal, with right-wing portrayals often skewering it as impractical. At the same time, left-wing depictions celebrate its ambition and urgency in addressing climate issues (Svoboda, 2019).

According to Galvin and Healy (2020), the GND is a transformative policy proposal representing a significant shift in American politics to address climate change and economic inequality by challenging the traditional growth-based, capitalist economy. Bauhardt (2014) discussed the association between the GND and ecofeminist perspectives and policies aimed at increasing the share of renewable energy, including an emphasis on racial equality. Furthermore, the GND proposes significant investments in renewable energy, public transportation, and other sectors, aiming to disrupt the oil industry's influence on political outcomes.

Luke (2009) similarly labeled the GND as a multifaceted policy that addresses environmental sustainability within the context of economic recovery. It represents a significant shift in American political communication that aims to reconcile economic activities with environmental preservation through investments in green sectors (Ocasio-Cortez, 2019). However, Luke (2009) critically analyzed its potential to address climate change and disrupt

entrenched market dependencies, implying that business as usual could continue. As a result, the GND represents the problematic issue of balancing environmental and economic goals within the American political scene.

Bhatti et al. (2021) elaborated on the GND's potential to reshape the American economy and its implications for the energy sector. They argued that its emphasis on renewable energy and sustainable practices could significantly reduce carbon emissions. However, they also cautioned that the transition to a green economy could be challenging due to entrenched interests and the scale of changes required. Additionally, they emphasized the role of the media in shaping public perception of the GND, noting significant differences in its portrayal across partisan lines. The authors argued that conservative media outlets often present the GND as a radical, impractical proposal.

In contrast, liberal media tends to highlight its potential for addressing climate change and economic inequality. This divergence in media representation contributes to the polarized public opinion on the GND and reinforces existing political biases (Bhatti et al., 2021).

Gustafson et al. (2019a, 2019b) revealed that Republicans' support for GND lessened with more exposure to Fox News. The researchers identified that the network's portrayal of the GND as an excessively left-leaning policy with family metaphors, such as equating it to a threat to the American family or a policy that would destroy the American dream, was a key influence. Consequently, many viewers quickly dismissed the GND as impractical without a comprehensive understanding of the initiative's objectives. Similarly, Feinberg and Wehling (2018) claimed that the idealized family model used in political discourse could polarize political cognition, as it is associated with values like loyalty, hierarchy, and obedience, which align more closely with conservative values.

According to Burgers (2016), metaphorical framing is most effective when it resonates with the audience's beliefs, values, and cultural norms. Burgers (2016) also highlighted the power of metaphorical frames in shaping public opinion as they tap into deep-rooted emotions and cognitive processes tied to people's experiences and values. For example, Republican-leaning voters display lower support for the GND policy based on its association with the Democratic party (McConnell, K., 2022).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory (CRT) is an intellectual movement and a framework of legal analysis according to which race is a socially constructed category that is used to oppress and exploit people of color. The theory argues that the law and legal institutions in the United States are inherently racist insofar as they function to create and maintain social, economic, and political inequalities between Whites and non-Whites, especially African Americans. Originating in the 1970s and 1980s, CRT was developed by legal scholars Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Richard Delgado, among others, as a response to what they saw as the slow pace of racial reform in the United States (Gilborn, 2015; Mills & Unsworth, 2018).

While conservative media have often framed CRT as a divisive and un-American ideology that threatens the nation's unity and values (Kendi, 2021; Stanley, 2020), left-leaning media outlets have been more inclined to present CRT in the context of its potential to reform and improve societal structures by addressing inherent racial biases. After a period of relative silence on the topic, left-leaning outlets began reporting on CRT in response to the surge in coverage from conservative media, particularly around the time of national racial justice protests and the declaration of Juneteenth as a national holiday (Silverstein, 2021). The language used by left-leaning outlets often emphasizes government reform aimed at promoting the experiences of

Black people and other marginalized groups, suggesting a more supportive stance toward the principles of CRT (Lawson-Borders, 2019; Romero, 2003).

Allen (2022) noted that conservative media's use of metaphors like "indoctrination" in discussing CRT serves to evoke fear and anxiety, thereby shaping public opinion against it. In contrast, left-leaning media's later engagement with the topic and less frequent reporting may reflect a consensus within their ideological sphere regarding the value of CRT, leading to less conflict-driven coverage (Han et al., 2018; Romero, 2003).

Kaufmann (2022) and Christian et al. (2019) discussed conservative politicians' strategic use of metaphors to frame CRT as a threat, which has been a potent tool in mobilizing their base. Meanwhile, left-leaning narratives tend to focus on the potential of CRT to address and dismantle systemic inequalities, suggesting a more constructive approach to the theory.

Benson (2022) contended that the campaign against CRT in American public schools is not just a dispute over educational content but a strategic maneuver within divisive politics, where fabricated controversies are leveraged to mobilize political bases and consolidate power. He posited that by casting CRT as an existential threat to traditional American values and an attack on White identity, political figures not only exploit existing racial anxieties but also deepen societal divisions. This tactic enables them to galvanize their supporters, presenting themselves as protectors of cultural heritage. Such a strategy starkly contrasts with the left-leaning view of CRT as an essential instrument for fostering a more equitable society, thereby highlighting the polarized narratives that shape the discourse on race, history, and equality in the United States (Benson, 2022).

Murashova (2021) discussed how metaphors create a shared understanding of complex issues, appeal to the audience's emotions and values, and ultimately influence their decision-

making. In the 2021 Virginia gubernatorial election, the issue of education management, particularly the teaching of CRT, became a strategic focal point for conservative politics. Glenn Youngkin, the Republican candidate, leveraged this issue, arguing that CRT was being used to indoctrinate rather than educate, a stance that resonated with many voters and significantly impacted the election's outcome (American Oversight, 2023). In his recent campaign, Youngkin stated:

There is a revolt against the way our schools have been managed comprehensively, and critical race theory is a big part of it. We've actually seen the McAuliffe-Northam administration try to teach our children what to think and we know that our schools are supposed to teach our kids how to think. We've watched critical race theory come into our schools and try to divide our children based on seeing everything through a lens as opposed to the content of their character. (Kudlow, 2022)

An article from Education Week, a leading publication in public education administration, highlighted the competing realities between conservative politics and the education community regarding CRT in public schools (Sawchuck, 2021). The author claimed that critics, primarily those from conservative political circles, argue that CRT is a divisive ideology taught in schools, fostering a negative view of America's history and promoting racial division among students. However, educators and scholars assert that CRT is not part of the K-12 curriculum but is a legal framework used in graduate-level education to examine systemic racism.

In the 1990s, there was a rise in *culturally relevant teaching*, an educational approach that emphasizes the importance of cultural backgrounds in student instruction and learning. This approach is distinct from CRT but has often been conflated with it in political discourse.

Culturally relevant teaching aims to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The misrepresentation and misunderstanding of CRT and culturally relevant teaching in political discourse highlight the power of metaphorical interpretations in shaping public opinion and policy. This situation also highlights the need for clear communication and understanding of these concepts to ensure informed decision-making in education policy (Christian et al., 2019).

Wokeism

Wokeism, or being woke, which generally refers to an awareness of and active effort to combat systemic inequality, has been co-opted by conservatives to criticize what they perceive as excessive political correctness and identity politics (Kaufmann, 2022; Zavattaro & Bearfield, 2022). The term woke has recently gained significant attention in the media and political discourse as a metaphor for a particular type of progressive ideology. It has been defined in various ways but generally refers to an awareness of systemic inequality and an active effort to combat it. However, conservative media outlets and politicians use being woke as a negative term to criticize what they perceive as excessive political correctness and identity politics (Kaufmann, 2022; Zavattaro & Bearfield, 2022).

Conservative commentator Glenn Beck, for example, has described *wokeism* as a cult that is dividing America (Thomas, 2022). Republican lawmakers have also used the term to criticize progressive policies and initiatives, with NBC News reporting that Republicans are *crusading against woke* (Smith & Kapur, 2021). In Florida, Governor Ron DeSantis has made opposition to woke ideology a central part of his political platform, often using the term to criticize policies related to critical race theory, which demonstrates the cross-compatibility of metaphors within a political ideology (Bump, 2022).

The concept of woke in political discourse often employs repetition and saliency to emphasize specific points and to make them more memorable to the audience (Cammaerts, 2022). This strategy is not limited to speeches and public addresses but extends to political advertising, debates, and social media posts. However, according to Cammaerts (2022), excessive use of these tactics can lead to a lack of depth and nuance in discourse and may even be perceived as manipulative or propagandistic. Despite the potential drawbacks, the effectiveness of repetition and saliency in shaping public opinion and influencing voter behavior ensures their continued use in political discourse. The repeated use of the term woke increases salience and familiarity with the metaphorical framework, making it a central component in the ongoing culture wars (Cammaerts, 2022; Smith & Kapur, 2021). In a statement illustrating the political deployment of the term woke and its symbolism, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis declared:

We have respected our taxpayers, and we reject woke ideology. We fight the woke in the legislature. We fight the woke in the schools. We fight the woke in the corporations. We will never, ever surrender to the woke mob. Florida is where Woke goes to die. (Czachor, 2022)

Boeynaems et al. (2017a) found that the repetition of specific metaphors in discourse can contribute to their salience, making them more accessible and influential in shaping public opinion. By repeatedly employing the term woke, conservative politicians like DeSantis are reinforcing its negative connotations while promoting their opposition to what they perceive as excessive political correctness and identity politics.

Giora's (1999) graded salience hypothesis states that another byproduct of salience is adaptability—contributing to a metaphor's flexibility both in application and interpretation. In

practice, Hind, et al. (2023) found that Fox News has applied the term woke to a broad spectrum of over 200 entities and products, including but not limited to the military, M&M's, New York prep schools, and NASCAR. This wide-ranging application of the term suggests ambiguity in its usage, potentially diluting its original meaning and transforming it into a generalized term for various progressive policies and issues related to marginalized groups (Hind, et al., 2023).

Historically, the term woke has been rooted in Black American English and was initially used to describe awareness about racial and social justice issues (Mirzaei, 2019). However, its meaning has evolved and is now used more broadly to refer to a perceived awareness of various social, political, and environmental injustices. The term gained widespread recognition following the Black Lives Matter movement, where it was used to challenge individuals and institutions to acknowledge and address systemic racism. However, as the term has become more mainstream, it has also been co-opted by various groups, including marketers, who use it to signal alignment with social justice causes. This has led to criticism that the term is being used superficially and commodified, detracting from its original purpose of promoting meaningful social change (Mirzaei, 2019).

The term woke has become highly politicized, sparking debates about its implications and significance. While some contend that conservatives use the term to undermine progressive movements and downplay systemic inequality (Zavattaro & Bearfield, 2022), others view it as a potential appropriation of Black culture and history (Kocze, 2022). Despite such debates, the term remains a fixture in political and media discourse and is predominantly used to criticize progressive politics and identity-based movements. This situation highlights the influence of metaphors and framing in shaping perceptions of intricate issues (Burgers et al., 2019) and guiding the discourse and potential solutions (Lakoff, 2004; McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

Implications of Culture Wars

Considering the evolving dynamics of political discourse, terms such as wokeism, CRT, and the Green New Deal illustrate how language is strategically deployed in political discourse and persuasion. Right-wing media outlets have been repeatedly accused of co-opting and reinterpreting these terms, transforming them with symbolic meanings that function as proxies for a broad array of grievances against Democratic policies and proposals (Burgers et al., 2019; Djupe et al., 2014; McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In a parallel manner, left-leaning media outlets have been charged with similarly recontextualizing conservative terms such as “individual liberties,” “freedom of speech,” and “law and order” to critique the underlying assumptions of these concepts, much like how right-wing media have reinterpreted CRT, GND, and wokeism (Entman, 2010; Iyengar & Kinder, 2010; Office of the Republican Leader, 2023). This strategic reconfiguration serves a dual purpose: First, it simplifies complex policy debates into digestible talking points; second, it assigns a negative or contentious connotation to the terms, thus framing them in a manner that amplifies their socially divisive effects.

Iyengar and Hahn (2009) demonstrated that these frameworks serve as rhetorical devices and substantively contribute to the polarization of public opinion, particularly on topics central to so-called “culture war” issues. The manipulation of these terms effectively distorts their original intent and meaning, thereby reducing them to buzzwords that can be weaponized to stoke emotional reactions and drive wedges between different population segments. This semantic transformation is in keeping with the principles of issue salience and issue transformation highlighted in the research by Lindaman and Haider-Markel (2002). Therein, Lindaman and Haider-Markel highlighted the significant role that issue prominence plays within the framework

of culture wars and partisan polarization, as public sentiment and political discourse are both subject to change over time.

In this way, the manipulation of terms like wokeism, CRT, and GND can be seen as an extension of the broader framing processes delineated by Lindaman and Haider-Markel. Their findings illustrate how political parties guide partisan media in framing issues for the public (Lindaman & Haider-Markel, 2002; Schlesinger, 1985), thereby serving a functional role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy debates. Through this lens, the strategic deployment and reinterpretation of these terms become part of the larger machinery that reinforces existing power dynamics within the contemporary political landscape.

For example, woke and CRT have been framed by right-wing media as representing extreme left-wing ideologies that seek to impose a divisive and harmful narrative on race and social justice (Kendi, 2021; Sawchuck, 2021). This framing effectively commandeers the original intent behind these concepts and repurposes them to evoke negative emotions and resistance among conservative audiences. Similarly, the GND has been portrayed as a radical and impractical policy proposal leading to excessive government intervention and economic disruption (Dayaratna & Loris, 2019). By redefining these terms and attaching them to broader grievances against Democrats, right-wing political media and persuasion tactics contribute to the ongoing culture wars and foster greater political polarization (Burgers et al., 2019; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009).

Consistent with Lakoff's moral politics theory, idealized family structures have been shown to operate cognitively as proxies for government, informing audience members' perceptions of the nature and role of government in their lives (Lakoff, 1996). The application of family metaphors in political debates, particularly those surrounding contentious policy topics

like the Green New Deal, CRT, and “woke” agendas, serve as compelling and proven mechanisms for engaging public sentiment. For instance, framing the GND as a “death sentence for the American family” or as “killing the American dream” taps into the deeply embedded values of conservative audiences, many of whom are already skeptical of progressive policies and hold the traditional family unit as a cornerstone of societal stability (Murashova, 2021). These metaphors operate beyond mere rhetoric as cognitive tools that construct a shared understanding of intricate issues, shaping emotional responses and value judgments (Murashova, 2021).

Haidt’s (2012) conceptualization of moral foundations theory is foundational. Haidt (2012) identified key ethical dimensions that are prioritized differently by liberals and conservatives. Liberal discourse frequently employs metaphors that emphasize the moral foundations of care/harm and fairness/cheating. For example, within this ethical framework, CRT is often championed as a necessary tool for diagnosing and mitigating systemic racial inequities, the GND is lauded as a morally and socially approach to combat climate change, and woke ideologies are seen as crucial for challenging oppressive societal norms and promoting social justice.

In stark contrast, conservative rhetoric leans heavily on the moral foundations of loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, and sanctity/degradation (Haidt, 2012). Through this lens, CRT is vilified as an assault on cherished American values, the GND is framed as an existential threat to economic prosperity, and woke ideologies are perceived as divisive movements that undermine the very fabric of societal cohesion. This divergence in ethical priorities perpetuates profound schisms between political factions, often leading each side to view the other as politically and morally misguided (Haidt, 2012).

Family metaphors are more than ornamental in political discourse; they serve as potent framing devices that resonate with specific ethical foundations, shaping public perceptions and influencing policy debates. By integrating metaphors with underlying moral frameworks, political discourse reinforces pre-existing ideological divisions, further polarizing an already divided American populace. When these issues are framed through a partisan lens, they resonate with the underlying values and beliefs of various political factions, exacerbating the culture wars. In political communication, biased media can shape public opinion and perceptions of these issues by using metaphors that align with the values of their respective audiences. Other researchers have discussed how information is presented or framed influences how people process and understand it (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Partisan media outlets' strategic framing of the Green New Deal, wokeism, and CRT highlights and emphasizes specific aspects of these concepts and contributes to the ongoing culture wars by reinforcing existing ideological divisions.

The attacks on CRT, the Green New Deal, and woke have mainly been perceived as politically motivated, with Republicans accusing Democrats of promoting a radical agenda that undermines traditional American values (Borter, 2021). However, these attacks have also had real-world consequences, as states like Florida have passed laws banning the teaching of CRT in schools (Bump, 2022). According to Zavattaro and Bearfield (2022), this has led to a situation where the language of wokeism and CRT has become highly politicized, with conservative politicians using it to mobilize their base and demonize their opponents.

Christian et al. (2019) have posited CRT as an indispensable framework for understanding the embedded structures of racism and White supremacy in American society. They argued that CRT facilitates the interrogation and eventual dismantling of these systemic

injustices, thereby fostering social justice. However, this academic perspective faces significant opposition, notably due to the portrayal of “wokeism” by conservative politicians as a divisive and polarizing concept. This politicization has muddied the waters, impeding constructive discourse on pressing social issues such as CRT, the Green New Deal, and woke ideologies.

Despite the contentious political landscape, the debates surrounding these topics have already led to tangible legislative outcomes. Schwartz (2023) reported that in the 2022 legislative session, multiple state bills were introduced targeting CRT by listing certain “divisive concepts” as impermissible subject matter in public education (p. 2). Influenced by the prevailing political climate, these legislative initiatives have introduced ambiguity into educational settings, leaving educators needing clarification about what forms of instruction are sanctioned (Schwartz, 2023, p. 2). As previously mentioned, CRT is not technically part of any K-12 public school curriculum in the United States, though it is often conflated with what is known as “culturally relevant teaching.” Amplifying this dichotomy is the fact that while 36 states have moved legislation forward to restrict education on racism, bias, and cultural contributions from minority groups, 17 states have done the exact opposite, initiating expansion to their curriculums to include more topics aimed at reducing bias and increasing cultural awareness (Stout & Wilburn. 2023). Thus, the influence of these contested issues is not merely rhetorical or confined to academic debate; they have real-world implications, shaping legislation and impacting educational systems across states.

Pingree (2011) and Pingree et al. (2014) argued that citizens must understand the issues at stake to participate meaningfully in the political process. By framing the debate around the Green New Deal, CRT, and woke in terms of a political ideology rather than substantive policy issues, conservative media may be undermining the ability of citizens to engage with these

complex issues productively. Additionally, this metaphorical framing has shown the potential to increase polarization and division, as people are more likely to view these issues as black and white rather than nuanced and complex.

Finally, relying on metaphorical framing and language may contribute to a false sense of political efficacy among the general public. Pingree (2011) claimed that political efficacy, specifically epistemic political efficacy, is crucial for meaningful participation in the political process. However, the over-reliance on metaphorical language can lead to an oversimplification of complex issues, potentially undermining the depth of knowledge and understanding perceptively required for effective participation in political conversations. Thus, while using metaphors and frames may democratize the political communication process, it also highlights the need for a more nuanced and informed approach to political discourse that avoids using simplistic and polarizing metaphors and promotes a more informed and informed approach to constructive dialogue on complex issues.

The literature reviewed around these three topics highlights the significant role that metaphorical framing and language play in shaping public discourse and political persuasion. As Burgers et al. (2016) suggested, figurative framing, such as metaphors, can simplify complex issues, making them more accessible to the public. However, this simplification can come at a cost. Thibodeau (2017) noted that using metaphorical framing in social discourse is only sometimes deliberate. Instead, it may be used unconsciously by individuals or media outlets, potentially oversimplifying complex issues and undermining nuanced conversation.

Political Information Efficacy

Political information efficacy (PIE) is the belief in one's ability to effectively understand and utilize political information (Dunn et al., 2015). The concept of political information efficacy

is intricately linked with internal political efficacy, focusing on an individual's confidence in their political knowledge and their ability to participate effectively in politics. This construct is often measured using elements from internal political efficacy measures, combined with additional questions about political information, highlighting its distinct but related nature to general political efficacy (Kavanaugh et al., 2016, p. 9). PIE is distinct from political efficacy, which refers to the broader capacity to influence political processes. It also differs from self-efficacy, a general belief in one's competence across various life domains (Tedesco, 2007). Dunn et al. (2015) explored the role of this concept among young voters. They found it significantly influenced attitudes and participation in low-involvement elections, such as gubernatorial races. Dunn et al. (2015) provided a foundational understanding of the role of political information efficacy in democratic participation, mainly focusing on young voters. Their research zoomed in on low-involvement elections, such as gubernatorial races, and discovered that political information efficacy significantly influenced young voters' attitudes and participation in this aspect of the electoral process.

Building on this work, Geers et al. (2020) extended the discourse by examining the impact of election news exposure on voting behavior through political information efficacy. Their study found that higher levels of election news exposure increased political information efficacy, leading to crystallization, a type of voting behavior where latent support for a party solidifies. This research adds a media-centric perspective to understanding political information efficacy, particularly in how news exposure can catalyze democratic participation (Geers et al., 2017).

In the context of political conflict and protest, the role of information technology in enhancing political information efficacy becomes even more pronounced. Studies have shown

that exposure to various forms of campaign messages, including social media, increases political information efficacy among young adults, particularly in politically contentious environments (Kavanaugh et al., 2016).

Oh et al. (2021) examined how different types of news repertoires are associated with varying levels of political information efficacy. They found that those relying on a commentary-oriented news repertoire have higher political information efficacy, while TV and social media news repertoires do not have significant effects. This study enriches the discourse by highlighting the role of news consumption patterns in shaping political information efficacy and compliments the relevance of online political media in shaping discourse (Oh et al., 2021).

Tedesco (2007) contributed to our understanding of political information efficacy, investigating the effects of Internet interactivity on young adult political information efficacy. Tedesco found that interactive Internet features, such as forums and social media, positively impacted young adults' political information efficacy. This aligns with Lariscy et al.'s insights into how perceptions of political participation, political information efficacy, and cynicism vary across age groups and are influenced by the use of the Internet as a political information source (Lariscy et al., 2007; Tedesco, 2007).

The research surrounding political information efficacy is both rich and evolving. Dunn et al. (2015) set the stage by highlighting how this form of efficacy is pivotal for young voters, especially in elections beyond more salient presidential elections. Geers et al. (2017) built on this by showing how media exposure can fuel this sense of efficacy, encouraging democratic participation. Oh et al. (2021) examined PIE in the context of social media, dissecting how online and offline environments offer different pathways for political engagement. They make it clear that the type of news sources people rely on can significantly shape their sense of political

efficacy. Tedesco et al. (2007) added another layer to this conversation by exploring the role of Internet interactivity and age-related differences in shaping political information efficacy.

These studies make a case for the need to understand political information efficacy as it relates to the persuasive and coalition-building potential of political metaphors that simplify sociopolitical concepts. Whether through media exposure, online engagement, or understanding age-specific nuances, enhancing this form of efficacy appears vital in fostering a more informed and active democratic citizenry better equipped to participate in political discourse.

Political Identity

Huddy (2002) defined political identity as an individual's sense of self related to political beliefs, affiliations, and values. The term encompasses how individuals identify with political groups, parties, and ideologies and how these identities shape their attitudes and behaviors toward political issues and events. Political identity is also influenced by various factors, including socialization, culture, and personal experiences. This multifaceted nature of political identity makes it a complex yet crucial area of study for understanding civic engagement and political discourse.

Bretl (2022) identified that factors like gender and political identity significantly shaped how adolescents judged certain unethical behaviors. While some of these patterns mirrored those observed in adults, there were also notable differences. These variations became more prominent in a conservative, U.S.-based sociocultural environment. The study highlights the importance of considering demographic and cultural contexts when examining the role of political identity in ethical judgments.

Sihidi et al. (2022) argued that political identity serves as a mechanism to sustain group cohesion and achieve collective political objectives. They emphasized that the heightened focus on political identity among U.S. scholars is primarily driven by the current challenges to

democratic stability, particularly following the election of Donald Trump, who has been accused of exploiting White nationalism and posing a severe threat to democracy both domestically and internationally. This scholarly attention to political identity highlights its critical role in the dynamics of contemporary democratic governance and the dynamic of group membership.

According to Gentry (2018), political identity plays a crucial role in shaping political behavior, particularly among young voters. His research contributes to understanding how political identity is formed and how it influences political participation. Extending on this, Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) highlighted the role of political identities in shaping political attitudes and behaviors, suggesting that the metaphors and framing used in political discourse influence individuals' political identities, attitudes, and behaviors. Therefore, the language used in political communication can be seen as a powerful tool in reinforcing or challenging pre-existing political identities.

Kreiss et al. (2020) introduced the notion of identity ownership to highlight the fluidity of political identities. They highlighted how these identities are persistently reshaped and built via campaign dialogue during election periods, which turn into platforms for discussing the most effective leadership for their electorate. This dialogue encompasses facets such as partisan leanings, racial and ethnic identities, genders, religious affiliations, and personal values, thus accentuating the divergence from out-groups. The authors maintain that this mechanism tactically situates each party as the genuine representative of certain social groups.

Chen et al.'s (2016) concept of causal centrality also offers an intriguing perspective on the fluidity of political identities discussed by Kreiss et al. (2020). Causal centrality refers to the perception that a particular identity or attribute is a core, defining feature that has a causal influence on various aspects of an individual's self-concept and behavior. In this context,

political metaphors and framing, as highlighted by Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017), can reinforce or challenge the causal centrality of political identity. If political identity is causally central to an individual's self-concept, changes in political dialogue, campaign narratives, and metaphors could have a more profound impact on their attitudes and behaviors. This cognitive approach provides a psychological explanation for the tactical positioning of parties as genuine representatives of certain social groups, as it directly influences who is more or less likely to act in ways consistent with their political identity (Chen et al., 2016).

Adding to this, research has shown that political identity can significantly influence political information cognition. For instance, individuals tend to trust the government more when their own political party is in power, suggesting that political identity can affect the perception and processing of political information (Jost et al., 2003). Moreover, the distinction between competing political identities is evident in the observation that members of the Republican Party are more ideologically zealous than those of the Democratic Party, displaying intolerance for deviation from conservative values (Jost et al., 2003).

Partisan Identity

Although interrelated, political and partisan identities are distinct elements of an individual's political self-perception. Huddy et al. (2015) defined political identity as a comprehensive construct that includes an individual's alignment with various political ideologies, groups, and values. Influenced by personal beliefs, socialization experiences, and emotional responses to political events, political identity provides a broad framework for understanding an individual's political orientation.

Conversely, partisan identity is a more specific form of political identity that pertains to an individual's affiliation with one particular political party, often shaped by the social and

political context in which the individual operates (Greene, 2002; Ruckelshaus, 2022). Dalton (2021) emphasized the enduring influence of partisan identity, describing it as a long-term emotional attachment to a preferred political party. This type of identity encourages consistent support for the party, regardless of changes in candidates or issues, and mobilizes individuals to vote and participate in campaigns. In the face of complex political issues, partisan ties serve as a guide, directing individuals on which positions to support, thereby underscoring the significant role of political and partisan identities in shaping contemporary democracies.

Epistemic Political Efficacy

One of the desired outcomes of political communication and discourse is the development of epistemic political efficacy (EPE), which is defined as “confidence in one’s own ability to achieve a reasonable threshold of certainty about the factual aspects of politics” (Pingree, 2011, p. 25). This definition recognizes the objective and subjective elements of what is considered the truth in political arguments, with objective truths centered on logic and facts. Pingree’s concept of EPE draws on Bandura’s notion of self-efficacy, which emphasizes the importance of belief in one’s aptitude to complete a task (Bandura, 1977; Pingree et al., 2011). In this way, EPE can be conceptualized as self-efficacy in the specific context of discerning truth in politics when confronted with multiple perspectives or information sources, otherwise known as adjudication (Pingree et al., 2014).

Pingree (2011) argued that metaphorical language in political discourse can increase EPE by fostering empowerment and proficiency in comprehending detailed political information. Using metaphorical language to reveal complex political issues mitigates the discomforting effects of exposure to the news with unresolved factual disputes, thus bolstering citizens’ sense of political efficacy. Put simply, metaphors can serve as workarounds for otherwise necessary

levels of intentional cognition to understand factual disputes in political media. This research is relevant in enhancing political engagement, decision-making, and perceptions of agency and competence, particularly for individuals with lower political literacy levels (Pingree, 2011).

Pingree et al. (2012) found that journalistic adjudication (i.e., active fact-checking and correction of misinformation) increases EPE by providing clarity and reducing confusion. Similarly, their later work highlighted how journalistic adjudication improves factual beliefs, news evaluations, promotes information seeking, and enhances EPE, underscoring journalism's important role in fostering an informed citizenry (Pingree et al., 2014). Conversely, game framing in political discourse, which portrays politics as a strategic game, can increase cynicism and reduce EPE (Pingree et al., 2012).

Lumer (2023) discussed the role of epistemic norms in public political arguments, emphasizing the potential for partisan differences. He suggested that these norms are influenced by the political leanings of individuals or groups, leading to variations in how facts, logic, and evidence are interpreted and used in political discourse. This divergence in epistemic norms can further contribute to the polarization of political debates, as different parties may adhere to distinct standards of evidence and reasoning. These findings emphasize recognizing and addressing these partisan differences in epistemic norms to foster more productive and balanced political discussions (Lumer, 2023).

Geers et al. (2020) found that media literacy educational intervention significantly improved news media literacy, political knowledge, and political efficacy among lower-educated youth. This research highlights the potential of media literacy programs to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate political information effectively. Ultimately, their findings suggest that incorporating media literacy interventions into political communication and

discourse could empower individuals with the tools needed to engage with political information critically, ultimately fostering a more informed and engaged citizenry.

Kim (2021) examined the impact of election outcomes on internal political efficacy and its relation to EPE. Findings from this research indicated that election outcomes significantly influence individuals' internal political efficacy, affecting their EPE. This research also found that the political environment and election results shape individuals' confidence in understanding and engaging with politics (Kim, 2021).

EPE directly relates to political literacy, which involves understanding political concepts, institutions, and processes (Galston, 2001). It reflects a person's belief in their competence to navigate political information, while political literacy represents the objective knowledge and skills needed to engage with politics effectively. Recognizing the relationship between metaphorical language and EPE can provide insights into how metaphors are transformed and weaponized in partisan political dialogue, allowing for the development of strategies to navigate and counteract such tactics, ultimately promoting a more informed and engaged citizenry.

According to Ebeling (2016), epistemic political egalitarianism suggests that all citizens should have an equal say in political decision-making, regardless of their political knowledge or expertise level. This concept, closely tied to political literacy and EPE, uncovers the importance of understanding political concepts, institutions, and processes in fostering individuals' confidence in their ability to engage with politics. Enhancing political literacy can also bolster EPE by equipping individuals with the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in political discourse and decision-making (Ebeling, 2016).

Farman et al. (2017) found that EPE significantly predicts online information-seeking and partisan cable viewing, particularly for MSNBC, even after controlling for partisanship. Their

research suggested that voters high in EPE, or those who believe that political facts or truths exist, actively take steps to find and understand them. Their study also highlights the need for additional research into the relationship between EPE and partisan media, as the relationship between EPE and Fox News viewership remains unclear (Farman et al., 2017).

Theoretical Framework

Elaboration Likelihood Model

Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is a comprehensive framework for understanding the processing and creation of persuasive messages, considering both the sender and receiver and factually sound and logical versus emotional arguments. ELM "is a framework for organizing and understanding the basic processes responsible for attitude change" (Petty et al., 1993, p. 336). These researchers claimed that ELM focuses on how much people's attitudes are influenced by carefully analyzing all the information available and considering the essential elements of the issue or using simple cues in the persuasive context that create associations without deep thinking or careful processing of the message.

According to the ELM, persuasive attempts can be classified into two distinct routes—the central and peripheral (O'Keefe, 2013). The central route represents high levels of elaboration and careful examination of information contained in the persuasive message. In contrast, the peripheral route represents low levels of elaboration and decision-making based on heuristics and shortcuts. O'Keefe (2013) argued that the route individuals take, whether central or peripheral, is determined by their motivation and ability to process the message and their level of ego involvement with the issue being addressed in the persuasive attempt.

The central and peripheral routes of persuasion are also crucial in understanding the dynamics of selective media exposure. Arceneaux et al. (2013) suggested that the rise of niche

news and the expansion of entertainment options led to a shift in how individuals consumed political news. They proposed that while ideological shows had the potential to polarize political attitudes, the impact was significantly reduced when individuals had the option to tune out.

Bennett and Iyengar (2010) challenged the traditional media effects paradigm, arguing that the rise of self-selected news audiences and the ability to screen out political news altogether has shifted the foundations of political communication. They suggested that while the ELM might explain some aspects of persuasion in this new communication landscape, it might not account for the increasing resistance to information that contradicts individuals' beliefs, further emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of persuasion in the context of the ELM.

Shi et al. (2018) applied the elaboration likelihood model to examine information dissemination behavior on social networking sites. They found that users employ both central and peripheral routes of persuasion when sharing information online. The central route is used when users find the information personally relevant, while the peripheral route is used based on superficial cues such as post popularity or source credibility (Shi et al., 2018). This research highlights the complexity of information dissemination on social networking sites that serve as a dominant and historically novel channel of political discourse.

The process through which individuals use political metaphors to facilitate the cognitive mapping process to comprehend abstract concepts through their association with more concrete, familiar experiences can be further explained with the elaboration likelihood model. For example, understanding abstract concepts requires high levels of elaboration and careful examination of information represented by the central route. However, individuals also rely on associations with more tangible and familiar experiences associated with the heuristic processing characterized by the peripheral route of ELM. ELM is related to EPE since the latter “essentially

gauges how self-assured individuals are they can distinguish political fact from fiction” (York et al., 2019, p. 4).

Research Questions

Taking this into consideration, the following research questions are focused on identifying relationships between political participants’ political identity, their perceived levels of EPE and PIE, and their understanding and attitudes toward the political metaphors that comprise the culture wars of American politics. Additionally, these questions also focus on assessing relationships between perceived levels of EPE and PIE and attitudes toward the political metaphors.

RQ1: Are there any relationships between political identity, epistemic political efficacy (EPE), and political information efficacy (PIE)?

RQ2: Is political identity related to understanding of the Green New Deal (GND), critical race theory (CRT), and wokeism?

RQ3: What associations exist between epistemic political efficacy (EPE) and attitudes toward critical race theory (CRT), wokeism, and the Green New Deal (GND)?

RQ4: How does political information efficacy (PIE) relate to the understanding of critical race theory (CRT), wokeism, and the Green New Deal (GND)?

RQ5: What is the correlation, if any, between epistemic political efficacy (EPE) and political information efficacy (PIE) relating to perceived levels of understanding and attitudes toward the Green New Deal, critical race theory, and woke?

Methods

This study utilized a 29-question quantitative survey created using Qualtrics (<https://www.qualtrics.com>), designed to capture participants’ self-reported understanding and attitudes toward political metaphors. However, it’s important to acknowledge that these

responses reflect their perceived, not necessarily actual, knowledge of the topics in question. The survey included measures of understanding toward each of the three metaphors in question, aiming to explore how attitudes, interpretations, and levels of understanding differ across self-reported partisan lines. In terms of subject recruitment, a combination of snowball and convenience sampling was employed. This approach was strategically chosen to ensure a diverse range of viewpoints, encompassing both the significant diversity found on campus as well as the generally homogeneous population of the surrounding rural area. This sampling method was vital for obtaining a broad and balanced spectrum of opinions, which is essential in analyzing the complex interpretations of political metaphors through a partisan lens. A full list of survey items is available in Appendix B.

Measures

Epistemic Political Efficacy

This variable was measured using a composite score calculated from a three-item scale developed by Pingree (2011) that included items related to the respondent's confidence in finding the truth, figuring out facts of political issues, and belief in objective facts behind political disputes. Respondents indicated their level of agreement on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. The scale had an internal consistency of .753 in previous studies (Pingree, 2011) and a Cronbach's alpha of .672 in the current study.

Political Identity

Measurement of this variable involved calculating a composite score from a three-item scale developed by Saldaña et al. (2021) with responses gathered on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Liberal to Strongly Conservative. Items in this measure assessed respondents' views of political identity on social and economic issues. This scale exhibited high

reliability in Saldana et al.'s (2021) study with a Cronbach's alpha of .87 and resulted in a Cronbach's alpha of .914 in the present study.

Political Information Efficacy

This scale, which was adapted from Kavanaugh et al. (2016), after modifying the scale from its original focus on Mexican politics to American politics, PIE was quantified using a composite score calculated from a four-item scale. Each item was rated on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Items evaluated respondent perceptions of their qualifications and aptitude for political participation. The scale demonstrated strong internal consistency with an alpha of 0.91 in previous studies (Kavanaugh et al., 2016), with a Cronbach's alpha of .899 in the current study.

Political Affiliation

This variable was assessed using a single item, rated on a 7-point Likert scale that ranged from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Since this was a single-item measure, traditional reliability coefficients like Cronbach's alpha were not applicable. Instead, the measure's face validity and relevance to the studied construct were considered.

Political Metaphor Attitudes

This measure assessed respondents' perceptions of three distinct political metaphors: critical race theory (CRT), wokeism, and the Green New Deal. Each metaphor was represented by a single Likert scale item, with respondents providing ratings on a 5-point scale. Given the single-item nature of this measure for each metaphor, traditional reliability coefficients, such as Cronbach's alpha, were not applicable. Instead, each item's face validity and construct relevance were carefully considered in evaluating the suitability of the measure.

Political Metaphor Understanding

This measure assessed respondents' perceptions of three distinct political metaphors: CRT, wokeism, and the Green New Deal. Each metaphor was represented by a single Likert scale item, with respondents providing ratings on a 5-point scale. Given the single-item nature of this measure for each metaphor, traditional reliability coefficients, such as Cronbach's alpha, were not applicable. Instead, each item's face validity and construct relevance were carefully considered in evaluating the suitability of the measure.

Results

Participants

The study initially engaged $N = 129$ participants. However, after negating incomplete survey responses, the final sample size was reduced to $N = 109$. Data analysis was performed using IBM SPSS (Version 27), enabling a comprehensive statistical examination of the participant responses. The sample demonstrated considerable diversity across gender, age, race, and ethnicity dimensions. Gender representation was balanced with 53 males (48.6%), 51 females (46.8%), four individuals identifying as non-binary or other (3.7%), and one participant (0.9%) who preferred not to disclose their gender. The age distribution of the participants was varied: 57 (52.3%) were aged between 18 and 21 years, 19 (17.4%) between 22 and 26 years, 24 (22.0%) between 27 and 32 years, five (4.6%) between 33 and 39 years, and four (3.7%) were over 40 years old. Regarding racial and ethnic backgrounds, the composition was as follows: Asian/Pacific Islander (three participants, 2.8%), Black/African American (10 participants, 9.2%), Hispanic/Latino (eight participants, 7.3%), White/Caucasian (83 participants, 76.1%), Other (three participants, 2.8%), and two participants (1.8%) who chose not to specify.

The participants also demonstrated a range of educational backgrounds and hometown population sizes. Regarding education, 16 (15%) had a high school diploma or equivalent, 51 (47%) had some college education without a degree, 14 (13%) held an associate degree, 21

(19%) had a bachelor's degree, and seven (6%) had a graduate degree. In terms of hometown population, 26 participants (24%) were from areas with less than 10,000 people, 27 (25%) from areas with 10,000 to 25,000 people, 23 (21%) from areas with 25,000 to 100,000 people, 15 (14%) from areas with 100,000 to 500,000 people, five (5%) from areas with 500,000 to 1,000,000 people, and 12 (11%) from areas with over 1,000,000 people.

RQ1: Political Identity, EPE, and PIE

Due to the nonparametric nature of the data, the researcher used Spearman's rank-order correlations to explore potential associations between political identity, epistemic political efficacy (EPE), and political information efficacy (PIE). The findings indicated a weak negative correlation between political identity and EPE ($r_s = -.035$, $p = .720$) and a very weak positive correlation with PIE ($r_s = .006$, $p = .954$), neither of which reached statistical significance. These results indicate that individuals across the political spectrum, from strongly liberal to strongly conservative, do not significantly differ in their perceived levels of EPE and PIE in the context of this study. In other words, political ideology may not be a strong predictor of EPE or PIE.

RQ2: Political Identity and Understanding of Political Metaphors

The study uncovered correlations between partisan identity and perceptions of understanding for three political metaphors. It revealed that a stronger conservative partisan identity is associated with diminished perceptions of comprehension regarding the Green New Deal (GND) ($r_s = -.210$, $p = .046$) and wokeism ($r_s = -.238$, $p = .017$). In the case of Critical Race Theory (CRT), there was a negative correlation ($r_s = -.186$, $p = .056$), though it did not reach statistical significance, suggesting a potential link between conservative partisan identity and slightly reduced perceived understanding of CRT. These findings suggest that an individual's partisan identity plays a role in shaping their perceptions of understanding these political concepts. More conservative partisan identities are generally associated with reduced

comprehension of the GND and wokeism, while the relationship with CRT is less clear-cut and may warrant further investigation.

RQ3: EPE and Attitudes Toward Political Metaphors

This research question examined the relationship between EPE and attitudes toward political metaphors: CRT, wokeism, and the GND. The analysis revealed a strong negative correlation between EPE and attitudes towards wokeism ($r_s = -0.574$, $p < .001$) and a moderate positive correlation with GND attitudes ($r_s = 0.276$, $p = 0.01$). The weak and non-significant correlation with CRT ($r_s = -0.137$, $p = 0.16$) suggests minimal influence. These findings indicate that higher EPE is associated with more negative attitudes towards wtokeism and positive attitudes towards the GND.

RQ4: PIE and Understanding of Political Metaphors

The study found significant correlations between PIE and respondents' understanding of political metaphors. A significant negative correlation was observed between PIE and understanding of CRT ($r_s = -.487$, $p < .001$), significant positive correlations with understanding of Wokeism ($r_s = .435$, $p < .001$) and GND ($r_s = .549$, $p < .001$). These results suggest that respondents with higher levels of PIE perceive themselves as having a better understanding of wokeism and the GND, but a reduced understanding of CRT.

RQ5: EPE and PIE

A moderate negative correlation was observed between EPE and PIE ($r_s = -.265$, $p = .006$). This indicates that EPE tends to decrease as PIE increases, highlighting a moderate inverse relationship between these two variables. Put simply, respondents with higher levels of perceived PIE exhibit lower levels of EPE. This trend suggests that individuals who are more confident in their ability to process and understand political information (high PIE) may simultaneously

perceive a reduced need to actively engage in or critically evaluate political discussions, potentially leading to lower EPE.

Discussion

This study investigated the intricate relationships between political identity, epistemic political efficacy (EPE), political information efficacy (PIE), and political participants' comprehension of political metaphors. In lay terms, the research questions posed in this study were focused on identifying the interplay between people's political identities and affiliations and their political knowledge and ability to find and use political information effectively. Findings from this study enhance our understanding of the domain of political communication and provide valuable insights for researchers seeking to navigate the complexities of political identity and communication.

In the context of political dialogue and participation, perceived levels of EPE or PIE appear to be uncorrelated with individuals' identification as staunch liberals, moderates, or loyal conservatives. In other words, the disconnect between political identity and the ability to gather, comprehend, and engage in political debates may indicate a more nuanced and independently informed approach to civic engagement. Additionally, the contemporary media landscape, which is marked by the proliferation of right- and left-leaning media outlets and social media platforms, inundates individuals with information that readily reinforces competing partisan viewpoints.

These findings diverge with extant research that emphasizes the influence of political alignment on political engagement and efficacy (Jones, 2023; Smith, 2022). This discrepancy may reflect an evolving political landscape where traditional measures of political engagement are less predictive of respondents' perceptions and beliefs of efficacy. This finding highlights the

need for contemporary political theory to account for a broader range of influences beyond partisan identification.

The study's findings regarding the relationships between EPE, PIE, and attitudes toward political metaphors such as wokeism, CRT, and the GND significantly contribute to understanding how political efficacy shapes perceptions of political narratives. The negative correlation between EPE and wokeism contrasted with a positive stance towards the GND, reflects how personal political efficacy intertwines with ideological leanings (Greene, 2002; Reichert, 2016). In addition, these differences could be a product of the nature of these concepts.

Whereas the Green New Deal was semantically designed to allude to both the New Deal and mainstream ideas surrounding renewable energy, the term woke remains broadly ambiguous in definition, leaving space for audience members to apply their subjective interpretations. These findings challenge and extend existing models of political cognition, suggesting a more complex interplay between personal efficacy beliefs and political ideology.

People who are confident in their ability to engage in political debates may find themselves puzzled by the term "wokeism." An intriguing observation from the study's data is the self-reported lower understanding of CRT among conservatives, despite its frequent presence in conservative media (Benson, 2022). This paradoxical finding may reflect a broader trend in political communication where frequent exposure does not necessarily equate to deeper comprehension. Instead, it may indicate that the portrayal of CRT in conservative media is often framed in a way that reinforces pre-existing biases and misconceptions, rather than providing a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the concept. This phenomenon highlights the complex relationship between media consumption, political identity, and the understanding of political metaphors, further complicating the landscape of political discourse and efficacy.

On the other hand, individuals with higher confidence in their grasp of political issues and positions tended to exhibit a deeper understanding of the GND. This comprehension may be attributed to the GND's tangible elements, which align with the principles of conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). According to Petty and Cacioppo's elaboration likelihood model (ELM), the tangible and concrete nature of the GND likely facilitates central route processing, leading to more thoughtful and enduring cognitive engagement (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). The GND metaphor and policy hold substantial historical and substantive examples, relating back to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. This historical link combined with the policy's multifaceted nature might contribute to a more profound comprehension of its significance. In isolation, the three metaphors that were chosen for this study based on their salience are operationalized in different ways.

Their differences reflect the variety of political metaphors that shape our body politic as well as categoric differences in their intended purposes when disseminated by partisan media or actors. For example, the Green New Deal as a metaphor for socially equitable climate change mitigation is rooted in tangible constructs (an evolution of existing climate goals associated with the contemporary Democratic Party). Conversely, critical race theory is inherently theoretical in nature. However, as this study shows, despite the outsized role that critical race theory has played in political discourse (specifically in the context of public schools amid accusations of institutional indoctrination), a technical understanding of the CRT is not necessary for it to become a driving force in both discourse and political behavior motivation. Additionally, without knowing anything about its origins in legal studies, one can discern that the semantics alone carried much of the gravity in its rapid increase in salience. Specifically, the combination of the terms critical (negative assessment) + race (perceptively inflating racial division) + theory

(abstract, unproven, and undeniably associated with accusations of ideological indoctrination leveled against high education and public schools) effectively promote divergent partisan interpretations.

Finally, woke or wokeism has come to represent an ambiguous yet powerful means of rationalizing one's feelings toward an increased awareness of racial and social issues whether positive or negative (Zavattaro & Bearfield, 2022). Its ambiguity has been arguably intentional, creating the conditions for what some political journalists have coined as a *choose-your-own-adventure* phenomenon wherein gaps in understanding can be filled with the subjective experiences or concerns of individual audience members (Luu, 2022).

The theoretical underpinnings of conceptual metaphor theory posit that metaphors are a foundational element of language, permeating all forms of communication, including political discourse (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). This ubiquity of metaphors in political dialogue suggests that their presence, in and of itself, is neutral, bearing no inherent bias or valence in application. Despite the prevalent assumption that metaphorical language in politics may contribute to polarization or misinformation, it could be argued that an increased use of metaphors could serve as accessible entry points for voters who are otherwise less involved or informed. This accessibility potentially reduces uncertainty and boosts internal confidence in their understanding of key issues, thereby influencing their political behaviors, such as voting or social media engagement and expression. In this context, political metaphors might play a democratizing role in political information dissemination, potentially enhancing voter engagement and participation.

However, this research indicates that the real challenge lies not in the presence of metaphors themselves but in the general public's diminished need for detailed political information. Political media, politicians, and influencers are increasingly incentivized to employ

short-form, compressed language, particularly suited to the dominant platforms for political information dissemination—social media. Such language, often metaphorical, simplifies complex issues to the extent that minimal prior knowledge is required for an individual to confidently adopt a political stance. This research thus highlights an urgent need to cultivate both digital and media literacy, focusing particularly on enhancing understanding of how metaphors simplify issues, potentially to the detriment of political discourse and functionality.

To address this, audiences should be encouraged to recognize when metaphors are serving as proxies for legislative goals or narrative agendas. Such awareness may not immediately translate into a heightened demand for technical political information, but it could significantly contribute to more nuanced evaluations of political actors, the trustworthiness of media sources, and the overall depth of political discourse. Metaphors are an inevitable aspect of political communication, but the public's continued unawareness of their functional role is unsustainable.

Consequently, the study's findings not only illuminate how personal political efficacy influences the reliance on political metaphors to construct political realities but highlights the role of pre-existing knowledge and potential resistance to oversimplified political metaphors that fail to capture the nuance of these topics.

Political Identity and Political Metaphors

The study's findings of a negative correlation between stronger partisan identity and the understanding of political metaphors are consistent with existing literature that suggests robust partisan biases can constrain the breadth and depth of political comprehension (Bolsen et al., 2014; Irvin, 2019). One plausible reason for this negative correlation could be the presence of confirmation bias (Klayman, 1995; Modgil et al., 2021). In other words, individuals with strong

political identities may tend to seek information and interpretations that align with their existing beliefs, which, in turn, limits their exposure to alternative viewpoints and impedes their grasp of diverse political metaphors.

Additionally, the current political climate, marked by increasing polarization and ideological entrenchment, may explain the negative relationships between political identity and political metaphor understanding. People with strong political identities and attitudes may be less inclined to engage with metaphors that challenge their ideological positions due to cognitive dissonance and a desire to reduce discomfort (Mullainathan & Washington, 2009). In addition to cognitive dissonance, literature surrounding the topic of echo chambers may provide further insight into this aspect of engagement with competing political language (Brummette et al., 2018).

EPE and PIE Relationship

This study also revealed an inverse relationship between EPE and PIE, which is a novel finding in political psychology and communication. This finding could reflect a more informed public's realization of the complexities and nuances in political matters, leading to a more modest self-assessment of their political capabilities. This idea goes against the conventional wisdom that more information naturally leads to a greater sense of political empowerment (Angelique et al., 2002). Related research indicates that high EPE is associated with overconfidence in understanding political matters and undervaluation of the need for detailed political information (Garrett & Weeks, 2017; Moore & Healy, 2008). This paradoxical effect also suggests that while political information can enhance awareness, it may also introduce complexities that challenge individuals' confidence in their political understanding. It can be argued that the adage "*the more you know, the less you know*" at least superficially applies to the

distinction between the two measures of political efficacy in question. It can be further argued, then, that individuals with high levels of self-reported EPE may exhibit a greater awareness of competing viewpoints (consistent with EPE's emphasis on adjudication in the context of political media and fact-checking). Conversely, individuals with higher levels of self-reported PIE may exhibit an overconfidence in their preferred or trusted information channels, limiting the internalized desire for competing viewpoints which can potentially lead to a dismissal of adjudication and fact-checking efforts in media. This particular finding points to potential further research exploring these findings' relevance to constructs like the Dunning-Krueger effect, the boomerang effect, cognitive dissonance and other measures of that address self-preservation and artificial confidence.

Framing Theory and Elaboration Likelihood Model

In the field of political communication, particularly in metaphor comprehension, the integration of framing theory and the elaboration likelihood model (ELM) is crucial for understanding the dissemination and impact of political narratives. These theories, though not the primary focus of this study, provide a deep understanding of how political metaphors are constructed and their effectiveness as persuasive tools. They also shed light on how these metaphors influence information quality and reinforce group ideologies.

Extant research on framing theory (e.g., Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974) is key in understanding how metaphors are crafted by media and political figures to shape public perception. It emphasizes the impact of presentation or "framing" on audience interpretation. This approach is evident in how metaphors like the "Green New Deal," "CRT," and "wokeism" are framed to evoke specific emotional responses and guide public perception towards the framer's goals.

Petty and Cacioppo's (1986) ELM complements framing theory by exploring the cognitive processing of these metaphors. It posits that the depth of metaphor processing depends on the audience's motivation and ability to engage with the content. This model explains why a metaphor in line with an individual's beliefs might be processed more deeply, leading to a stronger cognitive engagement, while those that don't resonate as much are processed more superficially.

The combination of framing theory and ELM offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing political metaphor comprehension. It helps in understanding how metaphors are designed to resonate with specific audiences and the cognitive ways in which these audiences interact with them. This integration is significant for political communication strategies, highlighting the need to consider both the framing of narratives and the cognitive routes through which they are processed. This dual approach is essential for effectively engaging diverse audiences and fostering a deeper understanding of political issues.

Although framing theory and ELM were not the primary focus of this study, their application has been invaluable in examining the intricate relationship between metaphor construction and audience comprehension. These theories provide insights into the strategic use of political metaphors and the varied cognitive responses they elicit. As the landscape of political communication grows more complex, the knowledge gained from these theories will be crucial in guiding future research and practices in strategic communications.

Future Directions and Broader Implications

The study's findings have significant implications for understanding contemporary political discourse. In an era where political narratives are increasingly complex and multifaceted, the roles of EPE, PIE, and political identity in shaping political understanding have

become crucial. These insights can inform strategies to enhance political engagement and discourse, especially in educational and policy-making contexts.

Given the dynamic nature of political beliefs and attitudes, future research should explore longitudinal changes in these relationships. Additionally, examining the influence of digital media and online communities on political efficacy and metaphor understanding could provide further insights into how modern communication platforms impact political cognition.

Future research should also consider the impact of digital literacy on political efficacy, particularly in the context of understanding and interpreting political metaphors. As digital platforms become primary conduits for political information, the ability to discern and critically evaluate metaphorical language in political discourse becomes increasingly important.

Investigating how digital literacy influences the interpretation of political metaphors can provide insights into designing effective digital media literacy programs. Such programs could enhance both EPE and PIE, helping diverse populations navigate the often metaphor-laden political landscape encountered online.

Another crucial area for future research is the role of educational interventions in increasing political information efficacy, with a specific focus on the comprehension of political metaphors. Exploring how educational settings and curricula can be optimized to foster critical thinking and nuanced understanding of metaphorical political language could lead to more informed and active participation in democratic processes. This line of inquiry is particularly pertinent for younger demographics and could significantly impact educational practices, contributing to the development of a politically literate society adept at interpreting and engaging with metaphorical political discourse (Tully et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the influence of cultural and societal factors on the interpretation and use of political metaphors in shaping political identity and efficacy deserves in-depth exploration. In diverse societies, the way different cultural backgrounds and social environments influence the understanding of political metaphors can vary significantly. Research in this area could reveal new strategies for political communication and engagement that are attuned to cultural nuances in metaphor usage. Such insights would promote a more inclusive and representative political discourse, acknowledging the diverse ways in which political metaphors are perceived and utilized across different communities.

Moreover, there is a pressing need to evaluate the persuasive and symbolic roles of political metaphors through media literacy. Understanding how these metaphors are framed and disseminated in various media formats is critical is essential to investigate how media literacy affects the perception and impact of these metaphors, especially in an era of rapidly evolving digital communication channels (Geers et. al., 2020; Graham, 1989; Kahne & Bowyer, 2019).

Limitations

This study utilized a convenient sampling method and obtained nonparametric data, thereby limiting the depth of our analysis. Future research could benefit from employing random sampling techniques and more robust analytical methods such as regressions to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, our subscales for assessing political metaphor understanding and attitudes consisted of single items, which may not fully capture the multifaceted nature of these constructs. Further research could enhance the validity and reliability of measurements by developing subscales containing multiple items and considering a broader range of political metaphors commonly employed in politics.

Another important area for improvement in future research is the inclusivity of the survey. Future iterations should aim to encompass a more diverse participant base beyond eligible voters to better capture perspectives of non-citizens, international students, etc., to ensure a more representative and comprehensive understanding of different perspectives. As with anything that suggests the need to interpret perceptions, a qualitative approach could benefit this line of questioning. Although it may limit generalizability, a qualitative approach would offer a deeper analysis of the reliance on metaphorical conceptualizations among political partisans.

Conclusion

This study significantly enriches our understanding of the interplay between political efficacy, political identity, and political metaphor comprehension. By unraveling the intricate and sometimes counterintuitive dynamics within these realms, it offers a nuanced perspective on how individuals engage with and interpret political narratives, with broad implications for political communication strategies and democratic engagement.

Reflecting on the research questions posed at the outset, this study has explored the relationships between political identity, epistemic political efficacy (EPE), and political information efficacy (PIE), and their collective impact on the understanding of politically charged metaphors like critical race theory (CRT), wokeism, and the Green New Deal (GND). The findings suggest that political identity is intricately linked to the comprehension of these metaphors, with EPE and PIE playing significant roles in shaping individuals' attitudes and understandings of these complex political concepts.

The observations from this study highlight the need for a higher quality of political discourse and a deeper understanding of audience needs. The current state of political communication often relies on oversimplified metaphors, which, while effective in reinforcing

group identities and persuading audiences, do not necessarily contribute to a well-informed electorate. A more salient awareness of the nature and impact of these metaphors could lead to audiences demanding more nuanced and detailed information from politicians, thereby enhancing the overall quality of political discourse.

Moreover, a broader understanding of the role and influence of political metaphors could foster more effective cross-party communication. Recognizing the limitations of metaphors as proxies for complex legislative policies could encourage audiences to seek more comprehensive and nuanced information, thereby reducing the reliance on brevity and ambiguity in political narratives. This shift could potentially diminish the ability of metaphors to solely build coalitions or dominate political discourse, leading to a more informed and engaged electorate.

However, as long as audiences remain unaware of the oversimplified nature of political metaphors, they are likely to continue accepting them as valid representations of political issues and experiences. Therefore, making this phenomenon more salient could reduce the effectiveness of metaphors in shaping political identities and influencing discourse.

Finally, this study highlights the need for further research into the partisan differences in the deployment of political metaphors. Understanding the genesis, motivations, and dissemination of these metaphors across the political landscape is crucial. Researchers must be prepared to develop new measures, scales, and theories that capture the evolving complexity of these relationships. This may involve delving into the partisan divisions that characterize contemporary politics, thereby contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the cultural wars and their impact on political communication.

This research opens new avenues for enhancing the quality of political discourse and understanding the multifaceted nature of political metaphor comprehension. As the landscape of

political communication continues to evolve, the insights from this study will be instrumental in shaping future research and practice in the field of strategic communications.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent

You are invited to participate in a research survey entitled: “Unveiling the relationship between metaphorical political communication, partisan identity, and epistemic political efficacy.” This study is being conducted by Mikey Rodgers (mrodgers1@radford.edu; P.O. Box 6932), a graduate student in Radford University’s Strategic Communication Master’s Program, and Dr. John Brummette (jbrummett@radford.edu), his faculty mentor and professor.

This research study examines how individuals of different political identities interpret, discuss, and employ political metaphors within political discourse. Your participation in the survey will contribute to a better understanding of the perceptions of individuals with varying political affiliations and how they use metaphors in political discourse. We estimate it will take about 15 to 20 minutes to complete the questionnaire. You can contact the investigator at the above address and phone number to discuss the survey. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study. Please note that participation is entirely voluntary.

This study has no more risks than you may find in daily life. The only risks this study poses are any anxiety you may experience by revealing some of your political beliefs and perceptions or fear of this information being viewed or disseminated by other people outside this research team. If any of the questions we ask you as part of this study may make you feel uncomfortable, you can refuse to answer any item or stop participating by simply closing the web browser.

Additionally, the researchers will minimize the aforementioned risks by ensuring that no identifiable information will be obtained at any point during the survey, and all data collected will be kept securely by the research team to ensure your anonymity. The research team will work to protect your data to the extent permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that an unauthorized individual could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. This risk is similar to your everyday use of the internet. IP addresses will not be recorded during the survey phase of the study.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may withdraw from participation without penalty. If you wish to withdraw from the study or have questions, contact the investigator listed above. If you choose not to participate or decide to withdraw, there will be no impact on your grades, academic standing, or employment (if applicable). If you have any questions or wish to update your email address, please email Mikey Rodgers (mrodgers1@radford.edu) or Dr. John Brummette (jbrummett@radford.edu). You may also request a copy of the survey from the contact information above.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or have complaints about this study, you should contact Dr. Jeanne Mekolichick, Institutional

Official and Associate Provost for Research, Faculty Success, and Strategic Initiatives, through email at jmekolic@radford.edu, or by phone at 540.831.6504.

If you agree to participate, please press the arrow button at the bottom right of the screen. Otherwise, use the X at the upper right corner to close this window and disconnect. Thank you.

Appendix B

Survey Questions

Demographics

1. Please select your gender:

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary / Other
- Prefer not to say.

2. Please select your age:

- 18-21
- 22-26
- 27-32
- 33-39
- 40+

3. What is the highest level of school you have completed or the highest degree you have received?

- Less than a high school degree
- High school degree or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- Some college but no degree
- Associate degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Graduate degree

4. What was the population size of the area you grew up in?

- Less than 10,000 people
- 10,000 - 25,000 people
- 25,000 - 100,000 people
- 100,000 - 500,000 people
- 500,000 - 1,000,000 people
- More than 1,000,000 people

5. Select your Ethnicity/Race:

- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Black/African-American
- Hispanic/Latino
- Native-American/Indigenous
- White/Caucasian
- Other
- Prefer not to say

Epistemic Political Efficacy

Please answer the following questions by selecting one of the seven available options that range from:

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Somewhat Disagree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat Agree

Agree

Strongly Agree

6. I feel confident that I can find the truth about political issues.*
7. If I wanted to, I could figure out the facts behind most political disputes.*
8. There are objective facts behind most political disputes. *

Political Identity

Please indicate your political stance by answering the following questions by selecting one of the options that range from:

Strongly Liberal

Liberal

Somewhat Liberal

Neutral/Moderate

Somewhat Conservative

Conservative

Strongly Conservative

9. Please indicate which best represents your political identity.
10. How would you describe your views on social issues?
11. How would you describe your views on economic issues?

Partisan Identity

Please indicate which option best represents your political identity.

12. Which category best describes your political affiliation?

- Strong Democrat
- Democrat
- Lean Democrat
- No partisan affiliation whatsoever
- Lean Republican
- Republican
- Strong Republican

**denotes reverse coding*

Political Information Efficacy

Please select what option most closely reflects your own position for the questions below.

Options:

Strongly agree

Agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Disagree

Strongly disagree

13. I consider myself well-qualified to participate in politics.

14. I think I am better informed about politics and government than most people.

15. I feel that I have a pretty good understanding of the important political issues facing our country.

16. If a friend asked me about the presidential election, I feel I would have enough information to help my friend figure out who to vote for.

Critical Race Theory

Please indicate your level of understanding for Critical Race Theory.

17. How would you describe your understanding of Critical Race Theory (CRT)?

- No Understanding
- Limited Understanding
- Moderate Understanding
- Comprehensive Understanding

Please indicate which option most closely aligns with your attitude toward CRT.

18. To what extent do you agree with the statement: "CRT has a positive impact on American values and culture?"

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Somewhat agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Based on your attitudes, select which option best reflects your opinion.

19. Do you believe that Critical Race Theory (CRT) should be included in the K-12 curriculum?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

Wokeism

Select the option that best describes your understanding of being "woke" or "wokeism" in general.

20. How would you describe your understanding of the term “woke” or “wokeism” in general.

- Extremely Familiar
- Very Familiar
- Moderately Familiar
- Slightly Familiar
- Not at all Familiar

Select your level of agreement with the questions below.

21. To what extent do you agree that the term “woke” has become a positive factor in political and cultural discourse?

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither Agree nor Disagree
- Somewhat Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

From the options below, select which option best reflects your own attitude.

22. How much do you agree or disagree that the use of “wokeism” in public promotes unity or division within society?

- Strongly Promotes Unity
- Moderately Promotes Unity
- No Effect on Unity Whatsoever
- Moderately Promotes Division
- Strongly Promotes Division

From the option below, select which one best reflects your own position.

23. Do you believe that the original meaning of "woke" has been preserved or changed in contemporary discourse?

- Preserved entirely
- Mostly Preserved
- Partially Changed
- Mostly Changed
- Changed Entirely

Select the option that best represents your perceptions of “wokeism” and identity politics.

24. How do you perceive the relationship between the term “woke” and identity politics?

- Strongly Positive Relationship
- Slightly positive relationship
- No relationship between the two concepts
- Slightly negative relationship

- Strong negative relationship

Green New Deal

Please indicate your level of understanding of the Green New Deal (GND).

25. How would you describe your understanding of the Green New Deal?

- Very Familiar
- Somewhat Familiar
- Moderately Familiar
- Somewhat Unfamiliar
- Very Unfamiliar

Select the options that best represents your attitudes toward the following question.

26. To what extent do you agree that the Green New Deal has become a negative factor in political and environmental discourse?

- Strongly Agree
- Somewhat Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Strongly disagree

Select the option below that best represents your beliefs toward environmental preservation and economic growth.

27. How much do you agree or disagree that the Green New Deal promotes a balance between economic growth and environmental preservation?

- Strongly Promotes Balance
- Moderately Promotes Balance
- Neither Promotes Balance or Imbalance
- Moderately Promotes Imbalance
- Strongly Promotes Imbalance

Select which option below best reflects your beliefs regarding the economic potential of the Green New Deal.

28. Do you believe that the Green New Deal has the potential to transform the American economy toward renewable energy and sustainability?

- Highly Likely
- Likely
- Neutral / Uncertain
- Unlikely
- Highly Unlikely

Select the option below that best represents your beliefs regarding the practicality of the Green New Deal.

29. To what extent do you agree that the Green New Deal is a practical or impractical proposal?

- Very Practical
- Somewhat Practical
- Neutral
- Somewhat Practical
- Very Impractical

END OF SURVEY