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Introduction

After the United States presidential election of 2024, Donald Trump was proclaimed to be victorious. Not only did he win the Electoral College, but he also received approximately three million more votes in total than Kamala Harris (*The Associated Press*). The second tenure of Trump as the President of the United States means great uncertainty and unpredictability, even though he had already served as President before. According to the *Washington Post*, his first time in office was marked by over 30,000 statements of his that were untrue or misleading (Kessler et al.). Moreover, Trump's presidency does not bode well for public unity in the USA due to his divisive language. In one interview on Fox News, he warned against "the enemy from within," which is comprised of "radical left lunatics," who should be taken care of by the "National Guard or, if really necessary, by the military" (*Fox Business*). Whom he alluded to becomes apparent if we analyze other remarks he made in the run-up to the election. At a campaign rally in North Carolina, Trump called Kamala Harris "a radical left lunatic" (*Sky News*), and at a different rally in Florida, he voiced his disapproval of what he called the "radical left Democrat party" (*Sky News Australia*). In the same interview on Fox, Trump said immigrants would be "totally destroying our country" and that "the towns and villages are being inundated" (*Fox Business*). U.S. Americans who take these statements at face value will understandably become anxious about the future of the United States. This type of dramatic, emotional language seems to hint at a country in crisis, a country that seems to be on the brink of disunion. According to *The New Yorker*, an increasing number of Americans are even preparing for a potential civil war in their country, and one Republican senator indirectly threatened with an imminent civil war as a means of gaining power for Trump if he had lost the election (Bethea). Is the current state of the USA as bad as it is portrayed by conservatives? And were the January 6 riots the harbinger of future armed conflicts within the country? A glance behind the curtain of right-wing agitation reveals an American society that indeed struggles for a common identity and a common cause; however, it would appear sensible to focus on the facts and not get overly influenced by inflammatory remarks. In his book *Polarized: Making Sense of a Divided America*, James Campbell writes, "happily we are not on the precipice of another civil war" (2). Nevertheless, the growing rift between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party is confirmed by empirical evidence (24).

One reason for the divergence between the two parties is disagreements over the perceived character of the USA and the American nation in particular. A large portion of the population is gradually growing more diverse and non-religious (Jones), and while Democrats are

increasingly associated with secularism, many Republicans subscribe to Christian nationalism, which are two different approaches to conceptualizing the nature of the USA in diametrically opposed ways (Gorski 26-29). Christian nationalism is an old belief system, powerful, yet difficult to identify (Gorski and Perry 1). Considering Christian nationalism to be a mere fringe-movement would mean to highly underestimate its influence. In fact, it has become an important part of American society, and the lives of Americans are affected by Christian nationalism, whether they support or reject it (Whitehead and Perry 18). Studying this phenomenon can help understand seemingly paradoxical events and developments, for example why Evangelicals would vote for Donald Trump more readily than for other Republican candidates even though he is overtly less religious (Gorski and Perry 11). Another conundrum that can be solved if seen through the lens of Christian nationalism are the January 6 riots. On that day, many of the rioters who forcibly stormed the Capitol carried Christian flags and signs; some even started praying once they were inside the building (Perry and Whitehead 1). How was it possible that self-proclaimed adherents of Jesus, who taught to turn the other cheek, were able to inflict so much violence? Christian nationalism can provide some answers (13). One of Donald Trump's most loyal and successful followers was frequently accused of being a Christian nationalist: Charlie Kirk.

On 10 September 2025, Kirk was assassinated by a sniper during a campus debate at Utah Valley University. His untimely demise shocked the political landscape in America, and both Republicans and Democrats condemned the murder; some social media users sadly rejoiced at Kirk's killing. The death of this right-wing conservative is the result of heightened tensions in American politics that have culminated in lethal violence. Charlie Kirk's official *YouTube* channel is therefore the central focus of this master's thesis. The analysis of this political figure should contribute to the understanding of growing polarization in U.S. American politics and the oftentimes puzzling developments of the Trump era.

Although he lived to be only 31, Charlie Kirk had become almost indispensable for the Republican effort as well as a close personal ally to Donald Trump. Kirk's book *The MAGA Doctrine*, featuring Donald Trump hugging an American flag on its cover page, not only showers praise on the 47th President of the United States, but it is also directly dedicated to him. Kirk concludes his conspicuous admiration for his idol throughout the book with the words "Thank you for saving our country and, unlike many who have come before you, keeping your word!" (Kirk, *The MAGA Doctrine* 235). These feelings appear to be mutual, as Kirk had gained deep respect from Trump's family and associates, notably his close friend, Donald Trump Jr. (Draper). After

his passing, Trump called him “a great American hero,” “a martyr for American freedom,” and “a missionary with a noble spirit” (Smith and Levinson-King).

In 2024, Kirk published *Right Wing Revolution: How to Beat the Woke and Save the West*, further showcasing his political views. In addition to his books, he was also head of Turning Point USA, a nonprofit organization that he founded, with the aim of promoting typical conservative talking points, above all free market capitalism with minimal state interference (TPUSA). An important branch of this organization is TPUSA Faith, which encourages American Christians to become more politically active. On the official website, it is argued that a thriving church would be necessary for the USA and that the American Constitution is influenced by the Bible; moreover, human rights are described as “God-given” (TPUSA Faith). Kirk was also one of the most prominent political influencers on *YouTube*. As of 23 April 2026, his official channel, which is still running at the time of writing, has attracted 5.7 million subscribers, and his editors have uploaded more than 2,000 videos. It is no coincidence that he chose this platform to generate public sentiment in favor of Trump because, in 2023, *YouTube* was the most popular social networking site in the USA (Pew Research Center, “Americans’ Social Media Use”). Kirk’s strong social media presence and the increasing popularity of political commentators online are the most important reasons why I decided to investigate his presence on *YouTube*. I believe that this website facilitates practices that play a major role in dividing American society. First and foremost, the consumption of political *YouTube* videos can lead to a distorted sense of reality because users can easily consume content that relates to their desires and worldview. Unfortunately, different news outlets on *YouTube* may report remarkably differently about the same event, especially if the channels’ underlying values are diametrically opposed to one another (Chae and Hara 628). The typically contrasting news coverage by *Fox News* and *MSNBC* serves as a prime example (633). In addition, people preferably watch videos that match their ideology and largely avoid others (Lai et al. 13). *YouTube* can therefore be a tool to politically influence the masses or even to misinform them purposefully. This social medium provides fertile ground for “ideological entrepreneurs,” whose job it is to solely spread political ideas (Finlayson 63-65), and conservatives, such as Charlie Kirk, have recognized its power to reshape political discourse. In the videos on the official *Charlie Kirk* channel, the main protagonist mainly engages in monologues, dialogues with like-minded conservatives, or debates with college students who do not share his right-wing slant. Even though he was not an elected politician, his influence was considerable, and it had been growing in recent years (Draper). While there are some studies on right-wing content on *YouTube* in general (e.g., Munger and Phillips; Strick) and studies focusing on selected right-wing influencers

(Finlayson, Jurg et al., Topinka), no study has specifically analyzed American Christian nationalism in relation to Charlie Kirk on *YouTube* so far.

The aim of this master's thesis is therefore to ascertain whether Charlie Kirk propagates Christian nationalist tenets on *YouTube* since he is frequently accused of doing that. In addition, it investigates if Charlie Kirk's claims and arguments hold up to scrutiny.

The main research questions of this thesis are as follows:

1. Based on the classifications of Gorski and Perry, Whitehead, and Whitehead and Perry, which characteristics of Christian nationalism are promoted by Charlie Kirk on *YouTube*, and which are rejected?
2. Which of the statements uttered by Charlie Kirk in the *YouTube* videos that are analyzed are untrue or misleading?
3. To what degree does Charlie Kirk's audience agree with his views, as expressed in the *YouTube* comments?

Furthermore, the following hypotheses will be tested:

H1: In the selected *YouTube* videos, Charlie Kirk supports every principle indicative of Christian nationalism.

H2: Charlie Kirk's views are generally endorsed by the top comments accompanying his *YouTube* videos.

In Chapter 1, I go into more detail about the methodology I used for the analysis. Chapter 2, then, provides a clear definition of the term Christian nationalism to distinguish what it encompasses and what it does not. Doing so is necessary since it represents something unique, which is related, but not identical to, the American civil religion, evangelicalism, or conservatism (Gorski and Perry 9; Whitehead and Perry 13). Chapter 3 explains the rhetorical strategies employed by right-wing influencers on *YouTube*, and Chapter 4 provides background information about Charlie Kirk's views and religious beliefs based on his own book *Right Wing Revolution: How to Beat the Woke and Save the West*. The results of the video analysis are presented and interpreted in chapters 5 through 14, which form the heart of this master's thesis.

1. Methodology

As mentioned above, Charlie Kirk's official *YouTube* channel, called *Charlie Kirk*, has grown to a collection of over 2,000 videos. I have conducted an analysis of several of those videos, with a focus on the ones uploaded during the run-up to the 2024 United States presidential

election. In order to avoid deliberate out-of-context representations or distortions of Kirk's views by his political opponents, I only chose videos that are part of his official channel. I have closely watched every video on Charlie Kirk's channel that was uploaded between the 1 August 2024 and 5 November 2024, the day of the presidential election. This amounts to a total of 122 videos, averaging around 10 minutes in length. My aim was to identify the political stance of Charlie Kirk in relation to the most salient characteristics of Christian nationalism (Gorski and Perry; Whitehead; Whitehead and Perry):

- Spreading nationalistic ideas instead of patriotism
- Creating a sharp distinction between good vs. bad people, between "us" vs "them"
- Literal belief in the Bible
- Good Christians are characterized by strong faith, not charity.
- Warning about the potential downfall of Christian America
- Donald Trump as the savior of Christian America
- Promoting the free market since it rewards the virtuous
- Stoking fears and calling for violence
- Promoting authoritarianism

While watching the videos, I noted interesting sequences and assigned them to one of the pertinent categories for later use. In order to work more efficiently, I used the online program Transkriptor, which generates instant transcriptions of *YouTube* videos and formats the transcriptions in a neatly arranged layout (Transkriptor). Furthermore, I fact-checked Charlie Kirk's remarks. Kirk is an eloquent, confident, and knowledgeable public speaker and debater, similar to Ben Shapiro (Jurg et al.). He may succeed at convincing others through his conversational style alone, with the effect that it becomes more difficult to focus on what he says. Like other right-wing influencers, he strategically employs pathos to advance his agenda (Strick); as a result, the actual content of right-wing messages might be overlooked.

Robert Topinka has demonstrated that analyzing *YouTube* comments can yield interesting results, which is why I have also included some of the top comments accompanying the videos of my analysis. I was particularly interested in the loyalty of Charlie Kirk's audience and whether they also sometimes disagree with him.

2. Christian nationalism

The ongoing conflicts between the political left and the right in the USA are not an anomaly, and a look back at human history puts the situation into perspective. In order to overcome or

prevent internal division, every country has to find a way to unify its citizens, whether it be through a common history, symbols, language, etc. It is perhaps the most difficult challenge that fledgling countries face due to their artificial character. In the USA, internal union was achieved through the American civil religion (ACR), which Robert Bellah calls “a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity” (46). This civil religion draws from themes of the Old Testament, which were first used by early colonists such as the Puritans to justify their actions and to elevate their perceived status in this world (Gorski, “The past and future” 21). They imagined themselves to be similar to the ancient Israelites, chosen by God and destined to serve as an example for all humanity (21). Likewise, the American Revolution was often compared to the events of the biblical book Exodus, because in both cases an oppressed people had freed itself from its master and finally gained its freedom in a new land (Bellah 47). Equally important for the ACR are non-religious symbols commemorating pivotal events in U.S. history (Gorski, “The past and future” 20). Some examples are *The Constitution of the United States*, the Gettysburg Address delivered by Abraham Lincoln, or the festivities on the Fourth of July, whose main purpose is to celebrate American independence (Bellah 47-49). The dual nature of the ACR allowed it to be accepted by religious and secular citizens; however, this powerful unifying framework is losing its importance (Gorski, “The past and future” 21, 28).

Instead, Gorski and Perry claim that Christian nationalism is gaining strength as a counter movement owing to changing demographics, i.e., the number and power of white Christians in the USA are decreasing (117). In an attempt to preserve their position in the hierarchy, white Christian nationalists become engaged in politics as they can no longer rely on democracy, and thus democratic ideals or democratic processes are called into question (119). Despite its prevalence, defining Christian nationalism is a difficult undertaking. Whitehead and Perry describe it as

a cultural framework that blurs distinctions between Christian identity and American identity, viewing the two as closely related and seeking to enhance and preserve their union. It is undergirded by identification with a conservative political orientation (though not necessarily a political party), Bible belief, pre-millennial visions of moral decay, and divine sanction for conquest. Finally its conception of morality centers exclusively on fidelity to religion and fidelity to the nation. (15)

The pre-millennial worldview warrants further explanation. Its proponents believe that Jesus Christ’s Second Coming is imminent, ushering into a worldwide kingdom led by Christ, which will last for a thousand years (11). Prior to these future events, moral decay is spreading in society, and Christian nationalists consider it their responsibility to curb this development (11).

Individuals can, as a consequence, be marked as good or evil, leading to processes of inclusion and exclusion of particular people (Gorski and Perry 7). Some Christian nationalists, however, hold postmillennial views (Whitehead and Perry 11). They claim that we are currently living in the said kingdom of Jesus Christ, which is signified by Christianity's dominance on Earth, and thus as many people as possible must be convinced to believe in Jesus until his Second Coming (11).

Christian nationalism further promotes

strong moral traditionalism based on creating and sustaining social hierarchies. Oftentimes these revolve around gender and sexuality. The second element is a comfort with authoritarian social control. The world is a chaotic place, and at times society needs strong rules and rulers to make use of violence, or at least the threat of violence, to maintain order. The final element is a desire for strict boundaries around national identity, civic participation, and social belonging that fall along ethno-racial lines. (Whitehead 29)

In their book *The Flag and the Cross*, Philip Gorski and Samuel Perry shed light on the history of Christian nationalism and how it manifests today. The origins of Christian nationalism can be traced back to the late 17th century (47). It is closely intertwined with the history of early immigrants from Europe, namely the Protestant Pilgrims and the Puritans, who established their new home on the East Coast of the North American continent (Paul 137). Even though the Americas had been populated long before their arrival, these settlers have traditionally been considered as the 'first Americans,' i.e., the earliest group of individuals who played a significant role in the formation of what being American means today (Gorski, "The past and future" 21). The Puritans imagined themselves to be similar to the ancient Israelites, chosen by God and destined to serve as an example for all humanity (21). Analogous to the ancient biblical land of Canaan, which, as the Bible argues, was promised to Moses and his followers, the Puritans viewed the New World as their Promised Land, where they could establish a new society guided by the divine providence of God (Paul 138, 150). As a result, the first seeds of American exceptionalism were sown (Paul 137), which culminates today in the frequently stated assertion, 'America is the greatest country in the world.' U.S. politicians of the 19th century built on this religious rhetoric to justify the expansion of the former U.S. territories, arguing it was their "manifest destiny" to do so (Paul 322).

However, the history of the early settlers also possesses a darker side. During King Philip's War, when tribes of Native Americans were fighting against the colonists in 1675-1676, racism became increasingly prominent among the Puritans. The fusion of racism with Christianity was further refined when religious scholars sought to justify the enslavement of Black people with

the help of the Bible. A clear us-vs.-them mentality developed, and the insiders were white Protestant British people settling in the New World. Freedom was critical to them as it set them apart from French Catholics at that time, who prevented Protestants from freely practicing their religion, both in France and in the French colonies of North America. To preserve the self-perceived freedom of the colonists, it was deemed necessary to inflict violence not only against other Europeans but against anyone who would threaten their way of life, for example against Black slaves who would revolt to gain their freedom. This proto-Christian nationalism finally became American through the struggles between the newly formed USA and the English motherland with their allied Native Americans during the American Revolution and the War of 1812. The ideology of Christian nationalism significantly transformed again in the 1980s in light of the nuclear threat, when prominent Evangelicals proclaimed that the world was in a stage before the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, and therefore the war of good vs. evil had commenced. In addition, libertarianism was combined with Christian nationalism for the reason that the free market would “punish vice and reward virtue, to assure that everyone gets their just desserts” (Gorski and Perry 73). Matters related to sex would start to play an important role. Protestants no longer formed the ‘us’ category alone because many people adhering to other Christian denominations and even Jews united under Christian nationalism. Eventually, Donald Trump secularized Christian nationalism by means of the Make-America-Great-Again rhetoric, the effects of which are currently felt in U.S. American politics. (Gorski and Perry 47-89)

The most salient attribute of Christian nationalists is the stance that the USA is inherently a Christian nation, coupled with the idea that true Americans should be Christians (Whitehead and Perry 15), and, ideally, white (Whitehead 31). What follows this belief is racism expressed through an us-vs-them rhetoric (29). The arguments of Christian nationalists are frequently based on supposedly historical events, meaning that they, deliberately or not, misinterpret and redefine history in a way that suits their agenda (Seidel 14). For example, the Founding Fathers were not as religious as Christian nationalists often claim (Seidel 26; Whitehead and Perry 124). Andrew Seidel even argues that references to God were intentionally omitted when the American Constitution was written, with the aim of founding a secular country (32-34). While Gorski also condemns the viewpoints of Christian nationalists, he cautions against adopting the stance of “radical secularists” (27) as this would deny the USA’s Christian heritage and disregard its large number of Christian citizens (28).

It is imperative to stress that Christian nationalism cannot be equated with high levels of religiosity in general. While truly devout Christians typically advocate for supporting people in need

and for reducing the wealth gap in the USA, Christian nationalists do not consider these issues to be important (Whitehead, Perry and Baker 15). They view remaining loyal to God and the country as more significant (15). This is one reason why Andrew Whitehead calls Christian nationalism an “idolatrous ideology” (xii) in his book *American Idolatry*, and he argues that the gospel of Christian nationalism revolves around “power, control, domination, fear, and violence” (13), rather than love. A large number of Christian nationalists do read the Bible, and many of them are convinced that it contains the word of God that needs to be read and interpreted literally (172); however, they engage in selective reading and avoid citing passages that would run counter to their worldviews, such as loving your neighbor (172). Another important distinction must be made between Christian nationalism and Evangelicalism, even though most Christian nationalists are Evangelicals (Whitehead and Perry 42). Some members of this community completely reject the enmeshment of politics and religion (42). Still, the connection between Christian nationalism and certain Christian denominations must not be overlooked. The likelihood of identifying with Christian nationalism is considerably higher for members of sectarian denominations – those who are often described as fundamentalists – and lower for more liberal churches as well as Catholics (Sherkat, Lehman and Julkif 278). Whitehead and Perry (148) claim that Christian nationalism is a political movement rather than a religious one; however, it is also not a synonym for conservatism. Being conservative, in the traditional sense of the word, would entail advocating for gradual change of the current state of affairs, if any change; in contrast, Trump and his supporters, many of whom are Christian nationalists, eagerly take swift, far-reaching, and unprecedented measures to maintain power (105).

Donald Trump managed to tap into this movement by recreating some of its underlying themes in a secular way (10), and according to his narrative, the USA is in chaos, the elites are conspiring against the common people, foreigners represent the root cause of many problems, white Christians in America are in danger, and only he is able to save America (Gorski and Perry 84). According to Whitehead, Perry, and Baker, Christian nationalism was the most important factor predicting voting behavior for Trump in the 2016 Presidential Elections, besides islamophobia (166). By many, Trump is seen as a bulwark defending a supposedly Christian America (165).

3. Populism as a rhetorical strategy on *YouTube*

Political ideas need to be communicated to the people to take effect, but the manner in which those ideas are promulgated is probably one of the greatest drivers of polarization within the USA. Especially on social media, the discursive culture nowadays largely permits disrespectful behavior towards political opponents. In recent years, it seems as if subtlety is no longer

required in American politics, as hyperbole, personal attacks, or even outright lying have become accepted in political discourse. Many have identified Donald Trump as responsible for the decline of respectful language within political culture, but that would be too easy an explanation. Trump is just the epitome of a movement that started long before he took power: populism in the United States of America. In fact, it is the rhetorical strategies indicative of right-wing populism that Trump has been using to advance his policies (Wilson 15). First and foremost, right-wing populism is about stirring “anger and resentment” (7) among a certain group of people against a different group of people. Crucially, those targeted may only serve as “scapegoats” (11) to deflect from the true intentions of the populist. Right-wing populists often harbor authoritarian beliefs and consider disingenuous political tactics as legitimate means to achieve their goals (8), which is reminiscent of Trump’s behavior. The first seeds of today’s right-wing media landscape were sown already 30 years ago, namely by Rush Limbaugh and his radio show during the early 90s (82). Fox News further contributed to the dangerous transition of news outlets from reporting to opinion-making and pushed the Republicans to the right (83). I myself have demonstrated how Fox News acts as a vehicle of propaganda, instead of a trustworthy news source, through my Bachelor’s Thesis *Carlson, Hannity and Ingraham* (Fank). Donald Trump has chosen to continue the toxic tradition of right-wing populism, perfected it, and won two presidential elections with its help.

On social media, populist strategies are particularly effective. In his book *Rechte Gefühle* [Right Feelings], Simon Strick uncovers the online communication strategies employed by right-wing influencers and populists in the USA, but also in Germany and Austria. He demonstrates how the Alternative Right creates a communicative room on *YouTube* imbued with emotions by discussing everyday topics and events (73-76). Overt hate speech, on the other hand, is typically avoided in the public sphere; the strategies are much more subtle (70). These content creators are well-versed at tapping into feelings of despair, uneasiness and confusion and they aim to provide an explanation for the causes of those feelings: The world is purposefully designed by the declared enemies (Democrats, Liberals, feminists, Marxists, the Radical Left etc.) in an attempt to dominate others, especially white conservative men (78, 100). Interestingly, in their videos right-wing YouTubers rarely engage in debates with people holding an opposing view (168). They prefer to discuss issues with like-minded people who share their general ideas, which helps to reinforce the message (274). So, in a sense, Charlie Kirk might be an exception since he frequently engages in discussions on *YouTube*, especially with college students. Strick highlights *YouTube*’s indispensable role for populists and right-wing instigators (216). He advances his arguments by analyzing direct quotes of the videos’ protagonists, the verbal and non-

verbal content in general, the emotional tone, images, and comments (35, 83, 176, 181). The analysis in this Master's thesis draws on the methodology used by Strick. He demonstrates that the deconstruction of verbal content does not suffice to fully understand the effects of political *YouTube* videos on the audience.

As of late, researchers have started to focus more on specific political influencers, but not with regard to Christian nationalists. Alan Finlayson, for example, conducted an analysis of 28 videos uploaded to the official channel of Paul Joseph Watson, a right-wing conspiracy theorist operating on *YouTube*. Finlayson explains Watson's worldview, and he dissects the rhetorical style of this ideological entrepreneur. Watson uses classic populist tactics, such as creating an us-vs-them dichotomy, hurling slurs at political enemies to disparage them, and mentioning cultural crises that are affecting people in the West (71-72). Jurg et al. investigated the perception of Ben Shapiro by his audience, a right-wing commentator on *YouTube*. He is famously part of the vanguard of "conservative counterculture" (4). The authors analyzed *YouTube* comments and interviewed college students who watch Shapiro's interpretations of recent political and non-political events on a daily basis (3). By his audience, Shapiro seems to be perceived as a rational journalist and entertainer, who impresses with his eloquence and intelligence (11, 12). Thirdly, Robert Topinka studied the *YouTube* channel of an extraordinary celebrity who underwent a remarkable ideological shift to the right, Russel Brand. A former actor and comedian, Brand is currently active as a political commentator on his social media channels. As of 23 April 2026, his official *YouTube* channel boasts over 6.7 million subscribers, and he intimately engages with Donald Trump's acolytes, while spreading conspiracy theories and sowing doubts about narratives that are dominant in the media. In his study, Topinka primarily focused on the comments accompanying Russell Brand's *YouTube* videos, in order to track noticeable changes during Brand's ideological journey from the political left to the right. Topinka noticed that as the videos became more right-wing, the attached comments became more numerous but also shorter on average (8). The number of likes per comment increased while the number of replies per comment decreased (9). The reason for those developments is that the commenters rarely engaged in discussions anymore; instead, they had largely formed an ideological community, in which members declared their admiration of Russell Brand, affirmed each other's opinions, and expressed how they felt about the video's content (10). Paul Joseph Watson, Ben Shapiro and Russel Brand have in common that they reach their audiences through lengthy monologues, and they profess to be experts who know how the world works and how society ought to be. The most salient feature of their *YouTube* presence is that all three provide content that evokes negative emotions, such as fear and anger. They usually address a problem, identify a culprit

and then criticize this person, organization, or group of people in a condescending way. I will show in the analysis section of this Master's thesis that Charlie Kirk operates in a similar fashion on *YouTube*.

4. Charlie Kirk's worldview

The values and opinions of Charlie Kirk, the main character of this master's thesis, can not only be identified by monitoring his social media presence but also by reading his books. In 2024, a couple of months before the 2024 Presidential Election, he published *Right Wing Revolution: How to Beat the Woke and Save the West*. In it he describes his imagined pathway to success for the conservative movement. It is a call to action, it should serve as a source of motivation, and it could be classified as a self-help book for conservatives. Some passages are commendable, such as "Tolerance can be beautiful when it is coupled with compassion. Understood properly, tolerance is a kind of patience." (Kirk, *Right Wing Revolution* 103) or "There are some conservatives who [...] get the lesson that we should be more violent and aggressive to get what we want. This is a mistake, and not just because wanton violence is wrong. It's also a mistake because it's stupid" (128). Kirk also encourages his readers to lead a happy life (230). But overall, the book's content adds to the internal division of the United States and evokes negative emotions. He warns of wokeness, a new "pattern of thought" or "social force", as he calls it, which would be the source of most problems in the USA (30). Kirk claims that wokeness is a new system of discrimination, devised by liberals to assert dominance (4). The following two quotes, which are taken from his book, illustrate Kirk's worldview:

The premise of America, going back to the Declaration of Independence, is that all men are created equal. But the norms that rule woke America are those of George Orwell's novel *Animal Farm*: All men may be equal, but some are more equal than others (also some of them are women now). Wokeness is devouring all in its path, not just in San Francisco and Seattle, but in West Virginia and Oklahoma. If you feel that your city or town is safe, then there are only two explanations. Either you're wrong and have simply missed the telltale signs of woke ideology seeping into your community, or the leviathan has simply not had the time to come for your community yet. [...] The threat to America will spread until it either devours the whole country or is definitively stopped. (22-23)

Reader, make no mistake: they now view you as America's enemy. (50)

What does the term wokeness mean that Charlie Kirk is attacking so fiercely? Originally, it was closely tied to raising awareness about systemic racism, which was commonly experienced by black people in the USA, especially from the police and courts (Allen 4). For decades, it had almost exclusively been used among the black community, but starting in 2013, activists outside of the community increasingly used it too and attached additional meanings to it (6). Soon,

uttering the word carried the intention of highlighting all kinds of social grievances in American society, such as the discrimination against LGBTQ members (6). Left-leaning advocates of wokeness began to rebuke people for not being woke and judged the moral character of those who did not act accordingly (7). Conservatives first attacked wokeness on social media and then altered its meaning (7). In conservative circles today, ‘woke’ has mostly turned into a derogatory term that denotes a self-righteous moralizer who acts in intolerant and discriminatory ways while pretending to be tolerant, or it is employed as an all-encompassing slur cast at Democrats and people who associate with left-wing politics. Those who campaign publicly against wokeness contend that society ought to be colorblind, that is, race does not actually play a defining role in the USA’s supposedly meritocratic economic system (Asen 1032). At the same time, however, the policies endorsed by anti-woke conservatives usually entrench socio-economic inequalities in the USA (1031). Conservative agitators misuse wokeness as the ideal scapegoat for different problems in the USA, a typical strategy in right-wing populism (Wilson 11), to deflect from the causes of stark inequalities. Sometimes right-wing influencers are provided with stories where wokeness, in the original sense of the word, has crossed a line, and they are more than happy to use this transgression to criticize the overall morality of liberals, progressives, Democrats, or people who would identify as left-wing. For example, when Google released its new AI image-generating software Gemini in 2024, the company was faced with outrage and ridicule online since it was initially not possible to create an image of a white man with this program; instead, Gemini seemed to create colored people as well as white women by default (Douthat; Grant). Especially conservatives interpreted the incident as an example of anti-white racism, which would be caused by wokeness. Companies in general increasingly pay attention to culture debates that occur on social media (Hashmi et al.). Being perceived as too woke may result in boycotts by consumers, thereby lowering the volume of sales (154). Bud Light is a prime example in this regard, because in 2023 a partnership of the company with a trans activist led to outrage among conservatives online, who then started to boycott the beer brand, which led to a considerable decline in revenue (159). Some companies engage in “woke washing”, which means they pretend to be socially aware only to boost sales (155).

In the same vein, Democrats damaged their overall popularity by sometimes taking gender as a basis for decision-making when actually biological characteristics would appear to be more sensible, such as in allowing adult human males to compete in women’s sports that require physical strength (Homans). Conservatives online frequently discuss identity politics because they consider it an opportunity to discredit political adversaries. For example, a heated debate on social media about the question ‘What is a woman?’ ensued, most notably led by the

conservative influencer Matt Walsh, who even created a movie bearing this question as its title (*What is a Woman?*). To answer the question, liberals portrayed in the movie or liberals shown in videos uploaded by right-wing influencers would often answer with a focus on social gender, while conservatives would answer in relation to biological sex. Since sex and gender are not conceptually separated within the minds of many people, a confusion of the two terms occurs, for instance, when a person intends to talk about intersex people but actually uses the term non-binary. As long as liberals and conservatives do not mean the same when they utter the word ‘woman,’ discussions in this regard will inevitably reach a dead end.

Charlie Kirk proposes a large number of actions that conservatives can take to win against wokeness, for instance, legislative changes (Kirk, *Right Wing Revolution* 147), the boycott of public schools (275), or the pursuit of self-optimization (225). He is especially critical of universities in America since they are allegedly the most prolific propagators of woke ideology:

What we call woke was developed and nurtured in the universities, and to this day it is from those universities above all else that its tendrils spread. College students are told to take classes that promote a woke view of the world. Schools of education pump out woke teachers, who are more than ready to turn their high school, grade school, and even kindergarten classes into woke petri dishes. (209)

Do you give money to your alma mater? If so, why? For the vast majority of college graduates reading this book, your alma mater now hates you, your values, your children, and your God. Giving them money isn’t preserving anything. It’s making you a sucker. (59)

Kirk does not intend to find common ground with his enemies; he does not want to work together with them to set aside differences, nor is he willing to concede that liberals are sometimes right:

We should be confident that our worldview is correct. Even if we aren’t fully certain what is right in a given situation, we can definitely be certain that the left is wrong. So quite simply, stop giving them a pass. Chase a clear-cut, black-and-white, Luke Skywalker vs. Darth Vader attitude toward every issue possible. (67)

The last chapter of the book, “The Spiritual Dimension,” is probably the most significant one, and it might have been strategically placed at the end of the book in order to enhance its memorability. While religious references are scarce in chapters 1 through 20, this last chapter provides an ostensible panacea against wokeness in the form of Christianity. Kirk writes that wokeness “can only be beaten by another belief system. I believe that Christianity is that system” (284). For Kirk, the consequences of his claim are clear: “What about those of you who are not believers? Well, like I said, if you’re serious about opposing the poisonous woke threat

to civilization, I think that ought to change. But you shouldn't simply become a fake believer" (286).

Does that mean Charlie Kirk was a Christian nationalist? Kirk himself provides an answer in a debate with a college student that was uploaded to his official *YouTube* channel in April 2025: "I've never described myself as a Christian nationalist. So, I'm a Christian and a nationalist" (*Charlie Kirk: "Can you Be a Christian and a Nationalist?"*). Interestingly, Kirk does not say whether he *is* a Christian nationalist, but rather that he does not *describe himself* as a Christian nationalist. Regardless, Kirk seems to proudly identify himself with nationalism since he calls himself a nationalist. Given the negative connotations that nationalism usually carries in popular discourse, one could ask the question of why someone would publicly announce their affiliation with that ideology. However, nationalism does not necessarily have to be harmful, and patriotism should not always be viewed as inherently positive (Bitschnau and Mußotter 65, 70). In fact, the exact meaning of nationalism and its conceptual differences to patriotism have been debated by scholars for decades (Piwoni and Mußotter 916). Following Piwoni and Mußotter, and for the sake of conceptual clarity in this master's thesis, I define patriotism as the feeling of love for one's *country* and nationalism as the feeling that one's *nation* is superior to other nations (917). Thus, while the former expresses emotional attachment to a political entity that forms a demarcated part of planet Earth with its own distinct political system, the latter refers to the belief of belonging to a large group of culturally superior people who share similar cultural characteristics. Nationalism can serve as a potent source of motivation for nationalists in order to excel and outperform members of other nations, thereby potentially spurring growth and progress (Greenfeld 22-26). Since one's own level of perceived self-worth becomes entangled with the image of the whole nation, nationalism can help stabilize the unity of a country as well as that of the nation (21, 61). The U.S. American form of nationalism came to be known as American exceptionalism. This myth – as it is often called – is an integral part of the American civil religion, and it has typically been regarded as something positive by politicians and the general public alike (Tyrrell 46-52). The notion that the USA is exceptional gained traction during the presidency of Barack Obama, and Donald Trump successfully used American exceptionalism in the course of his election campaigns, in the form of his make-America-great-again rhetoric (O'Connor, Cox and Cooper 638-639).

Of course, nationalism, and American nationalism in particular, leads to negative outcomes if the sentiment culminates in a disregard for people who are not deemed to be members of the nation, especially if those who are declared outsiders happen to live in the same country. For

example, while today's Native Americans are citizens of the USA, in the minds of many Americans they are conceptually not included in the American nation (Bacon and Norton 322). Native Americans have been othered for centuries, and also many Native Americans themselves stress that their nation's distinct character is different from the generic American nation (323). As a consequence, white Americans marked Native Americans as inferior, dispossessed them of their lands, and diminished their capabilities for self-government (306-313). In recent years, conservatives have undertaken measures to further dismantle the political agency of Native Americans (325). So, what constitutes the American nation? Who are the 'real' Americans? As mentioned in the introduction, any American citizen who believes in the American Civil Religion might be included in the American nation (Bellah). It would, therefore, be a nation bound by political beliefs, values and rituals rather than ethnicity (46). However, recent history has shown right-wing conservatives also focus on race to assess Americanness.

In 2016, the American football player Colin Kaepernick refused to stand when the national anthem of the USA was played during a game; instead, he knelt down in order to raise awareness of systemic racism (Dickerson and Hodler 330). The act engendered a public outcry among conservatives, and members of the Alternative Right started a collective smear campaign on social media in order to disparage Kaepernick and to belittle his opinions (332). For instance, they disseminated ironic memes which carried the undertone that 'real' Americans are white because non-whites, such as Kaepernick or Barack Obama, would ostensibly not respect the USA (345, 351). Some even posted memes depicting Kaepernick as an Islamic terrorist (347). Following the controversy, American football teams were reluctant to offer Kaepernick a contract, preventing him from playing in the NFL again (351). One could argue that Kaepernick was just exercising his right to free speech, which is granted by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, but white conservatives 'un-americanized' him and some even jokingly demanded his deportation (345). The cause of right-wing anger surrounding this event might actually not have been that Kaepernick disrespected the national anthem or that it happened during an American football game. Rather, right-wing meme-creators and commentators online accused him of being a hypocrite because he was able to play in the NFL and become wealthy even though he is not white (340-342). The Alternative Right interpreted Kaepernick's decision as a sign of ingratitude towards a system that enabled him to become successful. Furthermore, their comments and memes implied that white men in general would uphold American society while people of color would be ungrateful and resentful.

Having examined what the terms nationalism and nation mean, we can return to Charlie Kirk's self-labeling as a nationalist. When he claims to be a nationalist, it becomes important to investigate who he would regard as part of the American nation and who would be deemed outsiders. This has serious implications as Charlie Kirk might not have cared for the USA as a whole but rather for a select group of people within the USA that he called the American nation. As mentioned above, Kirk maintained he is a Christian as well as a nationalist; in fact, he was widely known as one of the most influential representatives of Evangelicalism in the USA. This Christian denomination has gained notoriety over the years due to its followers' increased involvement in American politics. In 2024, Evangelicals accounted for around a quarter of the American population, and white Evangelicals are much more likely to approve of Donald Trump and his policies compared to other religious groups (Pew Research Center, "Religious Landscape Study"; Pew Research Center, "White evangelicals").

American Evangelicals are not a monolith; however, a number of core beliefs bind them together, such as the conviction that there is one God who manifests through the Trinity as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that God has granted his believers access into his kingdom through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross – who is God's manifestation in human form – so that humans, who are naturally undeserving and imperfect, can be saved from sin and spiritually united with God (Treier and Shin 14-16). Many Evangelicals interpret God's grace as a moral imperative to be grateful to him and to spread the Christian faith on Earth (16). Another significant feature of evangelicalism is the belief that the Bible contains the word of God and must ultimately be referred to when questions of faith arise (16). Every Evangelical is therefore called upon to seriously study the Bible and engage with God on a personal, individual basis; in other words, "evangelical theology has been both problematically individualistic and uniquely communal" (28).

The case of American Evangelicals is a particularly curious one. With the rise of neo-evangelicalism in the 20th century under pastor Billy Graham, Evangelicals have become increasingly political and are seeking societal change (12). European Christians look in bewilderment at Evangelical church services that are held by impeccably groomed men in suits, who are sometimes as revered as popstars and preach atop stages that resemble concert halls rather than churches. Racial aspects play a major role in the USA as well since tensions between white Evangelicals and black people are still simmering, even between black and white Evangelicals (Sharp 33). Evangelicals have also gained notoriety for their refusal to acknowledge scientific

findings that would run counter to the teachings of the Bible, most notably with regard to climate change or evolution (Defoe 34-35).

To sum up, Charlie Kirk was a nationalist and a proud Evangelical Christian. The Evangelical Community together with other Christian conservatives might have formed the ‘nation’ that he was loyal to. Still, this does not necessarily mean that he was a Christian nationalist. Consequently, I analyzed Charlie Kirk’s *YouTube* channel to ascertain whether he spreads Christian nationalist ideas in his videos.

5. *YouTube* analysis

I have spent countless hours consuming the video content of Charlie Kirk’s official channel on *YouTube*, and the *YouTube* algorithm has been made aware of that. Early on, other YouTubers that largely share Kirk’s worldview were suggested to me, such as Michael Knowles, Ben Shapiro, Candace Owens, George Janko, Jordan Peterson, and others. Being neither clearly left-wing nor right-wing, I consciously resisted against being pulled into the rabbit hole of conservative *YouTube* to maintain my critical thinking skills, and I can now understand why conservative influencers are so successful. Channels that are typically associated with the Democrats, such as The Daily Show or MSNBC, completely eluded me for quite a long time. Maybe they were not suggested to me at all, or maybe I subconsciously overlooked them due to confirmation bias. As for the videos of Charlie Kirk, the content is heavily biased in favor of Donald Trump and against anyone who opposes the 47th President of the United States. While criticism of the Republican Party is almost non-existent, people affiliated with the Democratic Party are usually the target of censure and ridicule. Kirk also sometimes appears in the videos of other conservative influencers, in order to reinforce a shared message, while disagreements among them seem inconsequential as they do not threaten the common cause.

During the analysis phase, I noticed several patterns permeating the majority of the videos. Firstly, and most expectedly, the analyzed set of videos depict Kirk as a winner, someone who never loses a single debate and generally occupies the intellectual and moral high ground. This is not surprising, given the fact that Kirk and his editors decide which videos to upload. It is imperative to watch and analyze the videos through that lens because the people he debates in the videos are not necessarily representative of the total share of debaters. Kirk provides us with a carefully moderated glimpse into his professional daily life that need not fully correspond with reality. He exhibits outstanding rhetorical skills, does not lose his composure under pressure and frequently supports his arguments with concrete numbers or quotes that make him appear knowledgeable and confident. By contrast, some of his opponents in the debates are

impolite (*Charlie Kirk*: “Oregon Weird Challenges Charlie Kirk”), appear non-educated in the fields that are being discussed (*Charlie Kirk*: “Woke Student Learns”), bring fourth arguments that are unpopular among Republicans and Democrats (*Charlie Kirk*: “College Kid Gives the Craziest Abortion Argument”) or avoid answering questions directly and comprehensibly (*Charlie Kirk*: “College Queer is all Talk”). In the most upvoted comments on the videos, uncivilized debating behavior is harshly condemned and takes precedence over policy whenever a debater is particularly impolite. Interestingly, those who respectfully debate and lay out sound arguments are typically praised for their behavior in the comments, even if they hold a worldview that does not align with that of Kirk’s MAGA audience (e.g., *Charlie Kirk*: “Charlie and Vivek Take on 2 Students”; “Judgment Day 2024”).

The second pattern that emerges is the narrow selection of topics that are addressed or discussed. Videos abound that feature the contentious issues of abortion, racism, immigration, and the optimal setup for the U.S. economy. By contrast, climate change, foreign policy, or the causes of rising inequality are relegated to a mere side note, if mentioned at all. Thirdly, the most surprising pattern is Donald Trump not being visually present. The 47th President is frequently talked about, but not a single clip of Trump was edited into any of the videos. Moreover, Kirk does not quote any statement Trump made in the days or weeks prior to uploading the videos. Conversely, Kamala Harris is harshly disparaged, for example, by means of commenting on how she behaved during an interview with CNN (*Charlie Kirk*: “Kamala’s Honeymoon”; “The Worst Interview Ever”). Kirk and his campaign managers probably envisioned it would be more successful to criticize the Democratic nominee than to promote the policies that Donald Trump had planned for his upcoming presidency. The results of my analysis are now presented in the following chapters.

6. Spreading nationalistic ideas instead of patriotism

The strength of the union within the USA is influenced by identities and a certain sense of belonging. Patriotism, with its focus on a political system within a country’s borders can unite people that differ in many aspects, for example appearance, language or attitudes. But, if an increasing number of Americans pledge allegiance to a distinct people group instead of the country, social cohesion between these groups can erode. As mentioned above, Christian nationalism is one such way of conceptualizing the world which furthers the disunion of the USA by categorizing U.S. citizens as ‘real’ or ‘not real’ Americans, merely based on their worldview. Similarly, Charlie Kirk elevates the nation above the country, that is, he prefers nationalism to patriotism. More precisely, Kirk argues that the American nation is a Christian nation. In one

video that I investigated closely, Kirk is involved in a panel discussion with Cliffe Knechtle and Stuart Knechtle, two evangelical pastors who align ideologically with Kirk (*Charlie Kirk: “What Keeps Gen-Z Away From Christ?”*). Kirk and the Knechtles seem to be intimately acquainted with one another. In a different video that was published six months later, Kirk calls them “my friends” and the thumbnail of that video lauds them as “The greatest-of-all-time Campus Crusaders for Christ” (*Charlie Kirk: “The GOAT campus crusaders”*). At around min 23:20 of the first of the two videos, the three men are asked a question by an audience member who wants to know whether the USA was founded on Christian principles because he had heard his friends argue that it was not. To this, Kirk gives a lengthy response, which addresses different themes and arguments. The pace with which he delivers his arguments is truly remarkable. The extensive verbatim quotes below are all from the same 6-minute monologue and should illustrate his rhetorical prowess. The different parts of his response are discussed below, starting with the first few sentences that form a coherent whole:

So first of all, remember that we were a collection of states and colonies and you need to read the state constitutions before anything else. Nine out of 13 of the original states required you to be a Bible believing Christian to serve in government. At the time of the founding. [...] Actually 13 out of 13 required a declaration of faith. Nine out of 13 required you to be a Protestant except Maryland which was Catholic, which still required a declaration of faith. In almost every single of the original state constitutions, Pennsylvania included, they had ‘I profess Lord and Jesus Christ as my Lord and savior’ in the original state constitutions. So, remember we were a collection of states before that. [min 24:15]

Kirk lays out his argument by first establishing the presupposition that the political and religious circumstances within the individual colonies before and during the time of the Founding are especially worthy of attention. The additional arguments that he brings forth are all based on that presupposition, and so they would be rendered inconsequential if the presupposition itself is refuted. This is typical of religious reasoning. In the last few years, I have devoted a considerable amount of time to understanding the arguments of the religious right, and I have noticed that many of their claims are based on other claims which are contested as well.

Therefore, the truly important question here at hand is whether the founding documents represent a break with the past, thereby marking a new beginning, or if they are the logical conclusion of the events that happened before and during the Founding. Andrew Seidel reminds us that the original colonies were still part of the British Empire (92). Before jointly forming the USA, they were British colonies that happened to be situated on the American continent. As such, they were subject to King George III and British colonial law (91). The Declaration of Independence severed these political ties in 1776 and uses language that points towards a fresh start.

It describes British colonial rule as “absolute Despotism” as well as “absolute Tyranny” and lists the alleged transgressions of the British King couched in highly dramatic language, such as in “He has plundered our seas, ravaged our Coasts, burnt our towns, and destroyed the lives of our people” (National Archives). There is even a reference to “our Brittish brethren,” who are connected to the American colonists by “common kindred,” but shared ancestry does not prevent the colonists from pursuing their own separate course in history (ibid.). Lastly, the declaration calls upon the colonies to “alter their former Systems of Government” and declares the independence of the newly established 13 American states from Great Britain (ibid.). Thus, the Declaration of Independence heralds the beginning of a completely new era.

The founding of the USA took a long time and tremendous effort. It was not completed before the Constitution of the United States of America came into effect in 1789, 14 years after the start of the Revolution and 13 years after the Declaration of Independence (Encyclopaedia Britannica 53-54). The process of legally unifying the country was marked by discussions, experiments and setbacks. For example, the Articles of Confederation – the first constitution of the USA, which was in effect from 1781 until 1789 and preceded the current constitution – proved to be insufficient, and the creation of a new constitution was necessary (43-44).

To summarize, Kirk’s reasoning is flawed for several reasons: On the one hand, the original state constitutions, which Charlie Kirk is referring to, are typically not considered to be founding documents of the USA. Moreover, the number of state constitutions mandating religious tests steadily decreased since the founding era, and only few that do so today remain (Vestal 62). On the other hand, and most importantly, the Constitution of the United States of America does not refer to the Christian God at all, except for indicating the year the document was signed (Founding Fathers 60). One does not need to closely study the original state constitutions to determine whether the USA was founded on Christian principles. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, which symbolically and legally bound the new states together, are much more important.

Secondly, 55 out of 56 original signers of the declaration were Bible believing church attending Christians. [min 24:54]

This number is most certainly an exaggeration. During the middle of the 18th century, the American intelligentsia and the most prestigious universities were influenced by Deism, a novel belief, which was neither atheistic nor Christian in nature (Holmes 44-45, 50). Deists believed in an omnipotent deity that created the universe together with its natural laws, but this God would not interfere in the affairs of human beings (44). As a result, deists rejected every Biblical story

that cannot be reconciled with the laws of nature or human reason, such as the virgin birth of Jesus or that Jesus rose from the dead (46-47). To be fair, most Americans, including many signers of the declaration, held orthodox Christian beliefs during the time of the Founding, but some of the signers were most definitely deists, such as Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson (51). Of those founding fathers who did not sign the declaration, George Washington, James Madison and James Monroe can also be regarded as deists (51).

You asked about common law. So, common law is inherited from Blackstone, who was Christian. Common law is an outgrowth of the Scriptures. So let's go to three principles of common law: presumption of innocence, due process and jury of your peers. All three are biblical principles. And all wrapped into the ultimate biblical principle that you shall not favor justice if you are richer or poor, which is in Leviticus 19, right before the most famous part of Leviticus 19, which is that you should love your neighbor as yourself. But before that is that in the administration of justice you shall not favor the rich or the poor, which is the idea of blind justice. We get that in the West, which is incorporated also in the New Testament ideal. Neither slave nor Greek nor Jew, you're all one in Jesus Christ, which is where you get the idea of human equality. These are all biblical ideas. They're not Enlightenment ideas, which is they kind of get conflated at the time. [min 24:59]

First, it seems necessary to explain what common law denotes. Readers from continental Europe are familiar with civil law systems, which are based on pre-written legal codes that judges interpret and apply when deciding court cases. In contrast, in a common law system, judges frequently need to look at previous court rulings that dealt with issues similar to the current one and take the rulings on those cases from the past as their basis. Common law does have codified rules and regulations, but the legal code is not as comprehensive and detailed as in civil law systems. Consequently, common law grants judges more power and sometimes they even become part of the legislature, having the ability to make new binding laws until the decisions are overturned. The legal system in the USA is largely characterized by common law, as is the case in the United Kingdom and other former British colonies (The Robbins Collection 1-5).

Charlie Kirk mentions William Blackstone, an 18th century legal scholar, who is famous for his seminal work *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, in which he systematically explains English common law (Dickinson 714). Blackstone was a devout Christian (Prest 213), his *Commentaries* were extensively discussed during the American Revolution (Dickinson 721), and the principles of common law that he comprehensibly set down greatly facilitated legal proceedings in the nascent USA (725). However, common law is not 'inherited' from Blackstone, and it is also not an 'outgrowth' of the Biblical scriptures. Common law developed over centuries under the influence of already existing law systems – for example Roman Law as well as Biblical laws – but also court decisions from the past, traditions, decisions made by presiding

monarchs, and the lived realities of society at a certain time (718-719). Common law, therefore, already existed before Blackstone wrote about it, and the Bible only represented one of many shaping factors. As for human equality, the Bible with its enormous collection of texts can be used quite effectively to support even contradicting opinions. Kirk cites the Bible passages above correctly, which is irrelevant because there are several other passages that clearly advocate for the rule of human kings who are ordained by God and are thus superior, in other words not equal, to their subjects (Seidel 58-62).

But more importantly than that, they say that God was only mentioned four times in the Declaration of Independence. Well, that's a big deal. Okay. Laws of nature and nature's God. The last paragraph, the declaration reads as a prayer. It says we appeal to the supreme Judge of the universe. Who's the judge of the universe? Jesus Christ, as it says in Revelation that Jesus will judge the earth on his throne. So, in the declaration they were praying to Christ our Lord as a prayer, very specifically. [min 25:44]

The passage Kirk refers to is not 'a big deal.' It is telling that Jesus Christ, Lord, the unmodified word 'God' or any other Christian terminology was avoided by the authors of the Declaration. The four phrases 'Nature's God,' 'Creator,' 'Supreme Judge of the world' and 'divine Providence' (National Archives), which might hint at a Christian God, are actually characteristic of deism (Holmes 47). If the founding fathers had overwhelmingly been Bible-believing, church-attending Christians, they would have probably displayed their beliefs more clearly in the Declaration of Independence.

Thirdly as I said on stage yesterday, Deuteronomy was by far the most quoted book, religious or non-religious, in the time of the founding when they were putting together the Constitution. More than John Locke, more than Montesquieu, more than Blackstone. So the book of Deuteronomy, which talked about laws, customs, traditions. It was Moses' farewell address as he's, you know, about to say goodbye, say hey, good luck in Canaan, guys. Here's how you should set up your form of government. [min 26:11]

With this statement, Charlie Kirk might be referring to a famous study conducted by Donald Lutz in 1984. Lutz investigated which authors likely influenced the American society during the time of the founding from 1760 to 1805 by closely reading and analyzing political texts from that era which were available to the general public (191). To this end, Lutz counted how often the texts cited or referred to specific authors or books (191). On the surface, the findings support Kirk's claim about the predominance of Deuteronomy, as it was indeed the most frequently cited book; however, the majority of references to this book of the Bible appeared in sermons that were printed and disseminated (192). More prominent texts, on the other hand, such as the Federalist Papers, whose aim it was to convince New Yorkers to ratify the newly devised Constitution of the United States of America, heavily relied on Enlightenment thinkers,

especially Montesquieu (195). Following the outbreak of the revolution, the Bible's impact on political thought generally declined significantly, which is reflected in a secular Constitution and the Federalist Papers.

But finally, and most importantly, let's look at actually what the founders said. John Adams famously said the Constitution was only written for a moral and religious people. It was wholly inadequate for the people of any other. The body politic of America was so Christian and was so Protestant that our form and structure of government was built for the people that believed in Christ our Lord. One of the reasons we're living through a constitutional crisis is that we no longer have a Christian nation, but we have a Christian form of government and they're incompatible. So you cannot have liberty if you do not have a Christian population. [min 26:34]

The Founding Fathers were faced with the notoriously difficult task of establishing a new country, all the while keeping in mind that an ill-devised union could quickly fall apart. On the one hand, they had to ensure that authoritarian rule would not prevail – as had been the case many times in the history of humanity, which meant founding a country on novel principles – on the other hand, they had to tailor the new political structures to the people living in that new country. The ordinary American of the Founding era adhered to the Christian faith, and also many Founding Fathers held orthodox Christian beliefs, but the most significant of those statesmen, such as John Adams, Thomas Jefferson or George Washington did not (Holmes 51). In the video excerpt above, John Adams is indeed quoted correctly by Charlie Kirk; however, the motives of Adams were completely different. This Founding Father was worried that the complete absence of religion in the American society would lead to immoral behavior by the masses (Seidel 46). Adams considered religions, not just Christianity, to be a tool for keeping societies stable because ordinary people would be too self-interested and, for the most part, unable to think and act morally based on their own reflections and education (46-48). America might have been a Christian nation at the time of the Founding, but the established political structures rather bore the mark of the Age of Reason.

Charlie Kirk's second claim that only a Christian society would be able to guarantee liberty is refuted by current statistics. According to the Human Freedom Index, several countries who are able to provide high levels of liberty in different areas are known for having populations which are largely non-religious, such as Finland, Sweden or Estonia (Vásquez et al. 5). A Christian population is therefore not a prerequisite for a free society.

[...] So then they'll go to the First Amendment [...] two parts of the First Amendment which get conflated. First of all, the separation of church and state is not in the U.S. Constitution. That is a single letter that Thomas Jefferson wrote in 1807 to the Danbury Baptist Convention in Massachusetts assuring them that the government would not come after the church. Okay? Which is the opposite of what they would say.

However, that was then resurrected by the Warren Court and the Burger court in the 60s where they said, hey, you know, all of a sudden we're now going to make this as if it's in the Constitution. It does say in the Constitution two things, which is the establishment clause and the free expression clause. The establishment clause is that Congress shall make no law prohibiting the free exercise thereof. What they were most worried about was a Presbyterian or a Anglican or a Quaker type religion taking over the federal government. Instead, it was that there is not going to be a state-run religion or a state-run government. [min 27:10]

Charlie Kirk is right in that the separation of church and state is not explicitly mentioned in the U.S. Constitution. Regarding religion, the First Amendment reads “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof” (Founding Fathers 64). This equivocal wording led to arguments over the true meaning of the Constitution, which are continuing until today (Murray 15), for this reason the historical context is crucial to better understand the issue. Christians were not a monolith in 18th century America and different states were characterized by specific Christian denominations (10). Virginia, for example, was Anglican in nature, Maryland was known for its Catholic population and Pennsylvania was home to many Quakers (10). Against this backdrop, at least some of the Founding Fathers, above all Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, knew perfectly well what the First Amendment was intended for. These two politicians were the most influential figures concerning the creation of the Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause inherent in the First Amendment (14), which Charlie Kirk mistakenly calls the ‘free expression clause.’ Both clauses are primarily aimed at guaranteeing religious liberty because, firstly, every individual should enjoy the right to believe in and express what they regard as true, and secondly, no religious group should become too dominant so that it can force its worldview onto the people (12). At the same time, the First Amendment’s purpose was to protect the plurality of Christian denominations that were present in 18th-century America by preventing one denomination from becoming too powerful by means of merging with the federal government (16). So, at the very least, Charlie Kirk is right that the Founding Fathers were worried about the unchecked dominance of an individual religious group.

The separation of church and state might not be explicitly stated in the Constitution, but the First Amendment implicitly signals a secular country. To dispel doubts, the true intention of the Founding Fathers is clarified by Thomas Jefferson’s letter that Charlie Kirk alludes to, though it was actually written in 1802, not 1807, and addressed to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut (Dawson 680), not the Danbury Baptist Convention in Massachusetts. It is noteworthy that Kirk weaves this letter into his string of arguments but at the same time fails to mention that Jefferson describes the First Amendment’s purpose in the letter as “building a wall

of separation between Church and State” (680). In the second half of the 20th century, the First Amendment indeed garnered a new wave of attention, but although Charlie Kirk claims that this happened in the 60s, it was the Supreme Court case *Everson v. Board of Education* in 1947 which started the debates (Murray 140). The presiding chief justice of that case cited Jefferson’s wall of separation to support his verdict (140). Kirk actually refers to the 1971 case *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, in which Chief Justice Warren Burger rejected the notion of an unbreachable wall between church and state, on the grounds that this would not be possible in practice, but he still spoke of a “barrier” (141). Further discussions about the character of American politics as it relates to religion ensued, and now in the 21st century, the Supreme Court does acknowledge the separation of church and state in principle; however, enforcing an insurmountable wall is not feasible, not least due to the Christian background of large parts of the American society, and also because a strict wall might favor non-religion over religion and so could endanger religious liberty (141-145).

Did you know that one of the first acts of Congress was taxpayer-funded Bible printing and distribution? Did you know that there were church services held in the Supreme Court building as late as the Jackson presidency in the 1820s? [min 27:58]

Concerning the first of these two claims, Charlie Kirk most definitely refers to an American version of the Bible that was printed and distributed by Robert Aitken in 1782. It is true that Congress officially allowed Aitken to publish and sell his edition of the Bible because of the scarcity of Bibles during the American Revolution (Harris and Kidd 33). However, Aitken did not receive any funds from Congress to realize his project (33), which contradicts Kirk’s statement. As for church services in the Supreme Court Building, Charlie Kirk might actually mean the Supreme Court as a political institution, which is not fixed to a location, because the renowned Supreme Court Building was not constructed before 1935 (Supreme Court Historical Society). Starting in 1790, the Supreme Court justices first convened in New York, then moved to Philadelphia, and in 1801 they moved to the Capitol Building, where they decided cases until the opening of the Supreme Court Building (Supreme Court Historical Society). At the time of the Founding, church services were commonly held in the Capitol and also in the Supreme Court Chamber of the Capitol (Library of Congress); however, whether this practice continued in the Supreme Court until the 1820s cannot be verified from the available sources.

[...] And finally, and this is the kicker, if the founding fathers were not Bible-believing church-attending Christians, why did they put Leviticus on Liberty Bell? Not John, not Psalms, not Proverbs, not Genesis, Leviticus. Most Americans can't spell Leviticus. Leviticus 25:19. Proclaim liberty throughout the land of which you are in. [min 28:49]

The Liberty Bell is a large bell of symbolic importance located in Philadelphia. Many people believe it was rung when the Declaration of Independence was solemnly proclaimed on July 4, 1776, and while that might have been the case, the significance it holds today was probably ascribed to it a century later (Callahan 62). Regarding its inscription, Charlie Kirk's explanation deviates from the facts. Firstly, the bell's outer surface actually quotes parts of Leviticus 25:10, "proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof" (75). Secondly, the Founding Fathers were not involved in the making of the famous bell. It was manufactured in 1751, 25 years before the British colonies in America declared their independence (60). Isaac Norris, who was a local Pennsylvania politician and not a Founding Father, is commonly credited with proposing this passage from the Old Testament (62). But even if the Founding Fathers had decided on the design of the bell, Kirk's argument would still be weak. At the time of the Founding, large parts of the American population were, as I have explained above, deeply religious. It would have been a clever strategic move of the Founding Fathers to justify secession from Britain with a quote from the Bible in order to gain the consent of the people.

Charlie Kirk defends the notion that America was founded on Christian principles, but he does not provide sound arguments. Instead, he employs a rhetorical strategy which relies on impressing and overwhelming his audience. He mentions a great number of details – reflected in his quoting concrete numbers, years, names, and Bible passages – speaks confidently, and rapidly utters one argument after another. Only a careful investigation of each claim can lift the veil he places on his listeners that obscures the perception of what truly happened during the Founding Era. In contrast to what he wants to make his audience believe, the state constitutions are not as important as the federal Constitution, more than one Founding Father held deistic beliefs, common law does not directly evolve from the Bible but rather the Bible can be considered to be one of many sources, the Declaration of Independence does not allude to the Christian God, Enlightenment thinkers did have tremendous influence on the Founders, a free society is possible even if the population is largely non-religious, Supreme Court Justice Warren Burger was not the first chief justice to affirm the separation of church and state, Congress did not fund the printing of Robert Aitken's Bible but rather merely endorsed it, and the Founding Fathers did not choose the inscription that would later adorn Liberty Bell. Every statement of Charlie Kirk contains a kernel of truth; nothing is completely contrived; however, he bends the truth in a way to buttress his claim that America was founded on Christian principles.

Whether he believes his own claims or carefully plants historical inaccuracies among his followers to advance his agenda is difficult to tell. He does not seem to value logical stringency,

as long as his remarks cause the desired effects. This is evidenced by a different video that was uploaded to his channel five days after the one I analyzed above. It is a five-and-a-half-minute excerpt of the longer video in which Kirk and the Knechtles have their podium discussion. This time, the caption of the video reads “FULL VIRAL CLIP – America is a Christian Nation!” (*Charlie Kirk: “FULL VIRAL CLIP”*), even though Kirk explains his views on the founding of the USA, not the current character of its society. The thumbnail of the video encapsulates all the claims he makes in that short period of time (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Thumbnail of the video *Charlie Kirk: “FULL VIRAL CLIP – America is a Christian Nation!”*

It shows Kirk in the front and a wooden cross in the background, which rests atop the American flag. The cross symbolizes Christianity, so the image conveys different ideas. The first idea is that the USA is Christian in nature because the flag and the cross belong together. The second idea is that Christians dominate, or should dominate, the USA because the cross is in a higher position compared to the flag. It could also mean that Kirk regards Christianity as more important than the USA. Surprisingly, the title of the video, declaring the American nation as Christian, and at least one of this statements in the video actually contradict each other. He says “We no longer have a Christian nation, but we have a Christian form of government, and they're incompatible” (*Charlie Kirk: “FULL VIRAL CLIP”*). If Charlie Kirk is not held accountable by his supporters for spreading historical inaccuracies, then such contradictions as the one above will not matter and thus will go unnoticed.

7. Creating a sharp distinction between good vs. bad people, between “us” vs. “them”

Christian nationalism is the American manifestation of right-wing populism, and as such it employs rhetorical strategies typical of every right-wing populist movement around the world (Wodak 2). The common denominator is the attempt to arouse fear among the people so that they start to believe something is fundamentally wrong in current society (2). Then, a distinct group of people is blamed to be responsible for having caused the societal ills which are befalling the country, for example foreigners (4). It has been a successful tactic, unfortunately, to win votes without having to propose substantive policies in the run-up to an election since the ultimate solution is supposedly to prevent others from winning. In the USA, slandering the political opponent works particularly well because party identification is high and polarization between Republicans and Democrats has increased over the last decades (Iyengar and Westwood 690-691). Many people, whether they are Republicans or Democrats, elevate their own party to unreasonable levels while the other party is outright rejected (690). Feelings can take precedence over logic, not least because demonizing the political opponent does not incur social punishments (692). Those who openly vilify racial minorities are more likely to be rebuked by both Democrats and Republicans than those who denigrate the other party (705).

In the videos I analyzed Charlie Kirk creates an ingroup and an outgroup by routinely criticizing or even demonizing some groups of people while praising others. The ones he casts as enemies in his narrative are listed below.

The Woke

Anything that is apparently woke, for instance woke students or woke policies, is portrayed in a bad light. In one video, Charlie Kirk discusses with a college student whether systemic racism exists, which Kirk denies (*Charlie Kirk: “Woke Student Learns”*). The full title of the video reads “Woke Student Learns Her Ideology is Racist” even though Kirk does not accuse her of being racist in the video, and the student does not accept Kirk’s viewpoint at the end of the video, which contradicts the notion that she ‘has learned’ something. Rather, the debate goes back and forth touching on a range of different topics, and it is difficult to judge whether an argument has reached a conclusion before the discussion already pivots to a different topic. Compared to the student, Kirk appears to be more informed, more composed and more polite. The arguments that are presented are not that important for the message to take effect. The consumer of this video will remember that Kirk has won the debate, and the caption summarizes

it as follows: Woke people are racist. The term ‘woke’ is effectively devalued, and the top two *YouTube* comments add insult to injury (Figure 2).

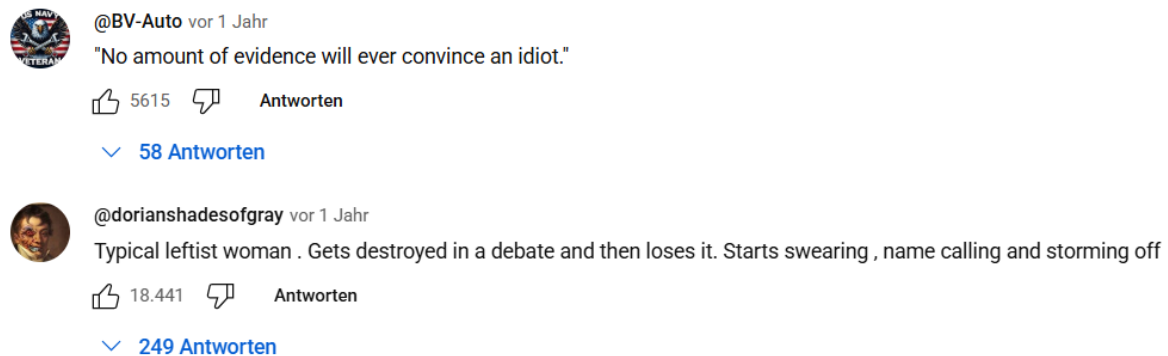


Figure 2: Comments directed towards a student that Charlie Kirk debates with (Charlie Kirk: "Woke Student Learns")

The first commenter states that it is futile to argue with people who are stupid. He refers to the college student with this comment, and instead of arguing against what she said, he devalues her character and her arguments completely by using an insult. The second comment showcases how Charlie Kirk’s audience perceives women with a left-wing slant. They are seen as self-righteous and emotional. Another interesting detail is that the commenter chose the absolutist phrase ‘gets destroyed’, which is indicative of black-and-white thinking.

In another video that is more than 40 minutes long, Kirk together with Vivek Ramaswamy debate several college students on a multitude of topics (*Charlie Kirk: “Charlie Kirk and Vivek Ramaswamy”*). The full title of the video refers to the students as the “woke mob,” as if they were criminals or like a violent crowd marching with torches and pitchforks. In these instances, the term ‘woke’ is devoid of real meaning and solely functions as a slur. Yet another video features a student who laments that she failed a course because she had told her professor that she does not claim a pronoun (*Charlie Kirk: “Pissed Off Gen X Student”*). To that Kirk responds “You should not comply to their tyrannical woke orthodoxy,” which means the transgressions of a professor are connected to wokeism, even though race is not involved, to further imbue the term ‘woke’ with negativity.

Kamala Harris

It should come as no surprise that Charlie Kirk targets the presidential candidate of the Democratic party for the 2024 Elections. There are several videos which are directly dedicated to her, and while sincere praise for Kamala Harris is non-existent, she is portrayed as an insecure, insidious villain whose election would doom the United States. Charlie Kirk voices his contempt for her through name-calling and labeling, for example:

- “incompetent California communist” (*Charlie Kirk*: “President Kamala Fears”)
- “Kamala Harris and her regime” (*Charlie Kirk*: “President Kamala Fears”)
- “the current kleptocrats of Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer and Kamala Harris and Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren and Cory Booker” (*Charlie Kirk*: “President Kamala Fears”)
- “This is by far the most radical person to ever become Vice President of the United States” (*Charlie Kirk*: “President Kamala Fears”)
- “Kamala Harris is the perfect gaslighting candidate” (*Charlie Kirk*: “You Are Being Gaslit”)
- “Kamala Harris is a cackling fool” (*Charlie Kirk*: “You Are Being Gaslit”)
- “She is part of the cabal” (*Charlie Kirk*: “You Are Being Gaslit”)
- “Commie Kammie” (*Charlie Kirk*: “The Commie Kammie Switcheroo”)
- “Kamala Harris is a low confidence woman” (*Charlie Kirk*: “Kamala Harris is an Insecure Imposter”)
- “She’s incredibly insecure” (*Charlie Kirk*: “Kamala Harris is an Insecure Imposter”)
- “She’s a terrible manager” (*Charlie Kirk*: “Kamala Harris is an Insecure Imposter”)
- “She doesn’t have any sort of deep confidence in her capacity” (*Charlie Kirk*: “Kamala Harris is an Insecure Imposter”)
- “Kamala is a bad candidate and a bad politician” (*Charlie Kirk*: “Kamala’s Honeymoon”)
- “She’s going to be this weird empty suit that they’re trying to install in the White House” (*Charlie Kirk*: “Kamala’s Honeymoon”)

Joe Biden

The 46th U.S. president only appears in one of the videos I analyzed. It is a reaction by Charlie Kirk to an interview in which Joe Biden famously called Trump supporters “garbage” (*Washington Post*; *Charlie Kirk*: “Trump Takes out the Trash”). Joe Biden’s remark was a serious blunder, and Kirk takes the opportunity to remind his audience that Joe Biden has insulted millions of Americans. Charlie Kirk might not have perceived Biden as a threat to his ambitions, so he spent more time on tainting the reputation of Kamala Harris and Tim Walz.

Democrats

Charlie Kirk undoubtedly supports the Republican Party, and since the only other serious contender in America’s de-facto two-party system is the Democratic Party, it seems only natural

that they are the target of constant verbal attacks by right-wing conservatives. But not only are Democrats the antithesis to Republicans, they are portrayed as being directly opposed to Christianity. In one video, Charlie Kirk declares “You cannot say you believe in biblical principles and vote for the principles of the Democrat party. They are incongruent. They do not fit” (*Charlie Kirk: “You Cannot be a Christian and Vote Democrat”*). His *YouTube* audience largely agrees, as is evidenced by the comment below which received the most upvotes (Figure 3).



Figure 3: A person comments on the supposed incompatibility between the Democratic Party and Christianity (*Charlie Kirk: "You Cannot be a Christian and Vote Democrat"*)

The commenter refers to the fact that many LGBTQ organizations support the Palestinians and oppose the state of Israel, such as Queers for Palestine, even though queer people face discrimination in Gaza and the West Bank (Kirkpatrick 32). From the perspective of Charlie Kirk’s audience on *YouTube*, Christian Democrats as well as queer people who support Palestine are considered as hypocrites and ignorant. The analogy used here in the comment is emblematic of black-and-white thinking and fosters the us-vs-them mentality.

In addition to supposedly being godless, the Democratic party is described as a power-seeking machine that would use repressive tactics against the masses to reach its goals. Kirk seems convinced that the Democratic Party secretly conspires together with other people in power against ordinary citizens, or that it is actually used as a puppet by an obscure cabal. At a campaign event in Arizona, Charlie Kirk delivered an energetic speech which represents a textbook example of populist rhetoric (*Charlie Kirk: “My Full Speech”*). To him, the 2024 Presidential Election is not merely a political battle between two parties, it is rather an existential struggle between the ‘new Democrat party’ and those who have decided to resist it. Kirk proclaims:

And this movement, this movement is not about Republican or Democrat, this movement is not about conservative or liberal. [...] This movement is about the citizens versus the oligarchs. This movement is about we, the people, versus the ruling class. This movement is about America versus the globalists. This movement is about all of us against them. [...] How many former Democrats do we have here tonight? [...] You are all welcome in this movement because the New Democrat Party is not about what they used to stand for. The New Democrat Party is about power. The New Democrat Party does not love the country. [...] They say disagreement is not allowed. They don’t believe

in free speech. They don't believe in the free discourse of ideas. (*Charlie Kirk: "My Full Speech"*)

Tim Walz

If the Democrats had won the presidential election of 2024, Tim Walz would be serving as vice president of the USA. Consequently, Charlie Kirk harshly criticizes Walz in three of the videos that I analyzed. Kirk's verbal attacks question Walz's moral integrity and depict him as an imposter. In one single video, he calls Walz an "obnoxious social studies teacher," "dangerously liberal," "creepy," "a far left-wing Democrat," "a Minnesota Marxist" and "a communist" (*Charlie Kirk: "Everything You Need to Know"*). Apart from name-calling, Charlie Kirk lambasts Tim Walz for his reaction to the protests in Minneapolis which ensued after George Floyd's murder in 2020. When said protests became increasingly violent and gave way to looting and arson, the mayor of Minneapolis called on Walz to deploy the national guard since local police were not able to get the situation under control (Smith). Walz gave the order on the next day in the afternoon, for which he was repeatedly criticized in 2024, shortly before the election, because an earlier deployment might have mitigated the damage (Smith).

In one of the other videos, Charlie Kirk casts Tim Walz as a coward who allegedly left his fellow soldiers shortly before being deployed to Iraq in 2005 (*Charlie Kirk: "Tim Walz Abandoned His Brothers"*). Kirk tells his audience that Walz served as a high-ranking service member of the Minnesota Army National Guard, but as soon as Walz's unit was called upon to serve in war, he chose to retire and instead pursue a career in politics. Kirk says, "This here is one of the most disgusting, repulsive and reprehensible examples of abandoning one's unit, of turning back on country and instead for own personal comfort and gain and safety, that we have ever seen in politics" (*Charlie Kirk: "Tim Walz Abandoned His Brothers"*). Walz indeed retired from the Army even though he knew that his unit would potentially be sent to Iraq; however, the official deployment order was issued two months after his retirement (LaPorta). Furthermore, Walz had officially applied to run for Congress one month before his unit was notified that they would likely be sent to Iraq in the future (LaPorta). That Walz, a senior non-commissioned officer who had been serving for 24 years at the time, decided to leave the Army during the war with Iraq was bad timing but not as bad as Charlie Kirk makes it appear. Kirk takes this episode of Walz's life and magnifies the severity of Walz's decision.

Communists, socialists and Marxists

In many of the videos, Democrats or anyone who aligns with non-conservative politics are frequently called communists, socialists or Marxists. What these concepts mean will be explicated

in a later chapter. Charlie Kirk leverages the deep-seated animus that Christian nationalists harbor towards socialists and anything that is related to socialism (Gorski and Perry 42). Socialist regimes, especially the Soviet Union, are routinely brought up and likened to the current Democratic Party. Kirk, intentionally or not, puts socialists and left-wing capitalists into the same category, whereby he makes it difficult for his audience to discern the differences between socialist ideas and those of social democrats. In one video, Charlie Kirk has invited a guest, James Lindsey, to his *The Charlie Kirk Show*, and together they draw parallels between the Soviet Union and the Democratic Party (*Charlie Kirk: "The Communists Aren't Gone"*).

Illegal immigrants

A recurrent theme in the videos is the migration of foreigners to the USA via the Southern border. There are five videos in particular, in which Charlie Kirk repeats several key messages regarding this issue:

- “Charlie Kirk Buries Confused College Kid in 10 Feet of Facts”
- “Charlie And Vivek Tackle the Open Border Crisis With Kamala Voter”
- “Charlie Kirk Downloadeds [sic] the App to "Break into America"
- “Charlie Kirk Crushes The Lies About Open Border Migration”
- "That's A Bunch BS!" Charlie Kirk DEBUNKS Race Lies”

The first message is that foreigners can come to the USA, but only if they do so legally. According to Charlie Kirk, everyone who has entered the country without having undergone the official immigration process should be deported immediately. Kirk frequently contrasts those who have filed the necessary paperwork for migrating into America with those who cross the Southern border without permission and thus “cut in line” (e.g. *Charlie Kirk: "That's A Bunch BS!"*). Secondly, Kirk argues that criminal gangs are getting into the country by mingling with other migrants coming from the south. He mentions Venezuelan gangs, especially Tren de Aragua, who have taken over apartment complexes in the city of Aurora, Colorado. It is indeed true that this gang operated in Aurora, as reported by *CBS News*, and they terrorized other migrants in three apartment complexes (*CBS News*). The local police seem to have dealt with the gang, and the apartments are empty at the time of writing (*CBS News*). The third message is that Democrats allegedly treat illegal immigrants favorably at the expense of actual U.S. citizens. Repeatedly, Kirk is clearly upset about illegal immigrants receiving overly generous benefits from the government, such as free phones or being offered rooms in luxury hotels. However, the first of the two examples is misleading. The agency Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) routinely gives phones to immigrants who do not possess phones of their own in order to track them (Shoichet, Flores and Nieves). These phones only enable their users to use a pre-

installed app by the agency, which should facilitate the immigration process, but the ability to access other websites and apps as well as making phone calls has been disabled (Shoichet, Flores and Nieves). Kirk's remark about the hotels stems from an episode of New York City's recent history. Starting in 2022, the city's authorities saw large numbers of migrants coming from the South. In their effort to provide every migrant with accommodation, they, among other measures, signed contracts with more than 100 hotels, some of which had four stars (Ferré-Sadurní). The hotels were funded with taxpayer money, and some migrants even received housekeeping or other amenities typical of hotels, which sparked outrage among Republicans (Ferré-Sadurní). American cities which give refuge to migrants are commonly governed by Democrats, but there are two politicians that Charlie Kirk singles out and consistently blames for mass migration: Joe Biden and Kamala Harris. Throughout the videos, they are made responsible for facilitating the influx of undocumented immigrants into America.

Honorable mentions

In addition to the examples that I have presented above, Charlie Kirk targets further people, organizations or ways of thinking about the world.

- The media

Kirk starts one of the videos with the words: "The media, who are the enemy of the American people, are refusing to cover the details of how egregious this is" (*Charlie Kirk: "Tim Walz Abandoned His Brothers"*).

- Atheists

For one video, the words 'Atheist', 'Holocaust', and 'evil' are juxtaposed in the title and thumbnail so that they form a connotative field (*Charlie Kirk: "College Atheist"*).

- The left

Charlie Kirk sums up his opinion of the left as follows: "If you complain more than you produce, you are typically on the left, and if you produce more than you complain, you are typically on the right" (*Charlie Kirk: "My Snowflake Melting Speech"*). The title of the same video calls people who are associated with left-wing ideas "snowflakes", which means they are characterized as ungrateful and querulous.

- Barack and Michelle Obama

Kirk accuses Michelle Obama of using her rhetorical prowess to solely entrance Democratic voters while glossing over the actual lack of substantive content in her words (*Charlie Kirk: "My Reaction"*). He also insinuates that Barack Obama does not love America (*Charlie Kirk: "This Conversation"*).

- Non-voters

Understandably, Charlie Kirk tries to garner as much support for Donald Trump as possible, even if that means shaming Americans who do not cast their ballot as losers (*Charlie Kirk: "If You Refuse to Vote, You're a Loser"*) In Figure 4 we see the thumbnail of a video in which he rebukes Trump supporters who do not vote, because every vote counts. The image depicts Kirk disapprovingly looking at a man who symbolizes the non-voter. A large yellow L is superimposed on him, signifying that he is a loser, and three people point at him to denounce his decision.



Figure 4: Thumbnail of a video, in which Charlie Kirk shames non-voters (*Charlie Kirk: "If You Refuse to Vote"*)

Now that I have described the outgroup in the narrative of Charlie Kirk, in other words who ‘they’ are, it is important to highlight those who belong to the ‘us’ category. The first group of people with similar traits that Charlie Kirk approves of is simply comprised of those who are against the proclaimed ‘them’. A common adversary can serve as a powerful driver for unifying a community, and the comments sections below the videos on his channel hint at the veracity of the old proverb ‘the enemy of my enemy is my friend’. Kirk’s audience almost always agrees with his opinions, as is expressed in the comments, and whenever he criticizes a member of ‘them’, the top comments frequently add a further layer of criticism or even insults. Apart from that, praise is reserved for individual politicians of the Republican Party, most notably Donald Trump, who will be discussed in a different chapter. Interestingly, praise for the accomplishments of individuals features much less prominently than criticism for the grievances that ‘they’ are allegedly responsible for. In addition, those who are part of the ‘us’ category are never

portrayed in a bad light, as if they were infallible. Below are the personalities that Kirk lavishes with compliments and positive coverage.

JD Vance

Three videos are dedicated specifically to Vice President JD Vance, who would later win the election together with Donald Trump. In the first video, Charlie Kirk admires Vance for his rhetorical skills that he showcased during interviews with three major news networks, and, at the same time, he disparages Kamala Harris for not engaging in any interviews since her nomination, which she later caught up on (*Charlie Kirk: “JD Vance Goes Scorched Earth”*). The second video features a commentary by Charlie Kirk on a recent debate between JD Vance and Tim Walz (*Charlie Kirk: “What You May Have Missed”*). Kirk especially highlights one quote made by Vance in the debate: “A lot of those same economists attack Donald Trump’s plans, and they have PhDs, but they don’t have common sense, and they don’t have wisdom”, which means Vance calls the credibility of renowned educational institutions into question (*Charlie Kirk: “What You May Have Missed”*). Charlie Kirk elaborates on that quote and stresses the importance of using that type of rhetoric for reaching the working class. The third video shows a 40-minute Q&A event organized by Turning Point USA, in which Vance lays out his intended policies for the future (*Charlie Kirk: “JD Vance Answers the Questions”*). Below is a summary of what he promises the audience of the event:

- The end of wars that the USA fights abroad
- A sharp reduction of the number of immigrants coming into the country together with more deportations
- The Trump administration would make housing more affordable by building more homes, reducing the number of immigrants and changing the tax code.
- Tax cuts, reduced regulations and more corporate investments
- A reduction in inflation by first lowering fuel prices by means of increased extraction of fossil fuels
- The creation of incentives for companies so that they do not move factories abroad, especially through tariffs
- A reduction in crime rates that would result from a reduction in immigration
- Vance would prevent a war in East Asia by sending more weapons to Taiwan as a deterrent, while sending fewer to Ukraine.
- Fixing America’s budget deficit by cutting unnecessary spending

RFK Jr

Another political figure that receives special attention on this *YouTube* channel is Robert F. Kennedy Jr., nephew of John F. Kennedy. He had been a Democrat until he decided to run for President as an independent in 2023, and some weeks before the election, RFK Jr. publicly endorsed Donald Trump for the presidency. Trump rewarded RFK Jr. for his support by appointing him U.S. secretary of health. I have encountered three videos on Charlie Kirk's channel that are directly related to this idiosyncratic member of the Kennedy family:

- “My Instant Reaction to RFK Jr Joining the Trump Train”
- “The RFK Effect”
- “RFK Jr. Sets the Record Straight on what MAGA Really Means”

The message in these videos is similar. Charlie Kirk praises RFK Jr. as a great individual with integrity, who will further spur the Trump campaign. Kirk highlights Kennedy's background and his split with the Democratic Party, and he claims that Democrats have become corrupt, hostile towards opinions that would threaten the party line, and power hungry, which is why those like RFK Jr. would leave the party. Kirk commends Kennedy's skepticism of established institutions, such as the FDA or the CIA, and for his self-proclaimed mission to improve the health of ordinary Americans.

Tulsi Gabbard

Similar to RFK Jr., Tulsi Gabbard used to be a member of the Democratic Party but joined the Trump campaign before the 2024 Presidential Election. In one video, Charlie Kirk invites Gabbard onto his show and gives her the opportunity to explain why she left the Democrats and decided to support Trump (*Charlie Kirk: “Tulsi Gabbard Joins Team America”*). The 15-minute-long clip is devoid of any real policy discussions; instead, it starts with an adulation of the new Republican Party by Gabbard, which would bring about “peace, freedom, and prosperity” (*Charlie Kirk: “Tulsi Gabbard Joins Team America”*). On the other hand, Gabbard uses dramatic rhetoric to disparage Democrats, for example:

- “She [Kamala Harris] has led an increasingly tyrannical government that undermines our fundamental rights and freedoms at every turn”.
- “They [Democrats] have led this brazen mission of political retaliation”.
- “They are an increasingly tyrannical government, one that has us embroiled in multiple wars around the world and closer to the brink of nuclear war than ever before. And one that has over the last three and a half years caused incredible economic hardship for the American people”.

- “The Democrat Party has become the party of the elite, the party of woke warmongers, the party that stands for more power. They will choose power over freedom and liberty every single day”.
- “And that's the opportunity that President Trump is going to have on this debate stage on September tenth is to expose Kamala Harris’s lies, her hypocrisy and the fact that she is truly a phony politician in the worst sense of the word, and she only cares about herself and her own power”.

For her efforts and her worldview, Charlie Kirk calls her “Wonder Woman” and a “member of the Justice League, otherwise known as the Avengers” (*Charlie Kirk: “Tulsi Gabbard Joins Team America”*). Kirk does not create this moniker out of thin air. He simply alludes to social media memes that hail famous Trump supporters as superheroes, who would fight evil on behalf of American patriots. Figure 5 shows Donald Trump as Captain America, who is surrounded by his supporters Tulsi Gabbard, JD Vance, Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy. Together they are called ‘TEAM UNITY’, a reference to their supposed internal cohesion.



Figure 5: Some of Trump's entourage depicted as the Avengers (*Charlie Kirk: "Tulsi Gabbard Joins Team America"*)

Another video features Charlie Kirk together with Tulsi Gabbard who are debating college students on one of their college campus events (*Charlie Kirk: “Charlie and Tulsi”*). Gabbard appears composed, compassionate and well-spoken; however, she is not challenged by any student. Instead, she answers questions to clarify her worldview, puts blame on Democrats and

gives emotional support. Most students in the crowd are wearing a MAGA hat, and there seems to be general agreement that Trump should receive people's votes in the upcoming election.

Tucker Carlson

Tucker Carlson is an infamous and puzzling personality who became famous during his years on Fox News, where he hosted one of the network's most successful shows: *Tucker Carlson Tonight*. He does not work for Fox News anymore but continues to spread his political commentary through his social media channels. In my Bachelor's paper *Carlson, Hannity and Ingraham* (Fank), I show that Tucker Carlson cannot be trusted at all since he willfully engages in propagandistic methods when he comments on the news. He is not a reliable journalist, and while he identifies as a conservative, his genuine values are difficult to pin down. Carlson's dubious reputation did not deter Charlie Kirk from inviting him onto his show. In one video, Kirk provides Carlson with the opportunity to present his view of the world and Western society in particular (*Charlie Kirk: "Tucker Carlson"*). Carlson covers a range of different topics, and his almost 1-hour quasi-monologue – during which Kirk agrees most of the time with what is being said – encapsulates the supposed gradual downfall of Western civilization that started with the end of World War II. Fortunately, from the perspective of Carlson, there is a savior figure, embodied by Donald Trump, who would restore order again. Charlie Kirk seems to respect Tucker Carlson and shares his views because another video on Kirk's channel is an un-commented version of Carlson's speech at one of Trump's campaign rallies (*Charlie Kirk: "Dad's Home"*). In his speech, Carlson accuses 'them' of mistreating Trump, of ostracizing Trump supporters and of incessant lying. He even likens the Democratic Party to the Soviets. Then he draws an analogy in which children and teenagers would naturally misbehave until "Dad comes home" who would spank his insubordinate offspring because Dad loves them and needs to discipline them (*Charlie Kirk: "Dad's Home"*). Trump is not overtly mentioned in the analogy, but the crowd erupts in cheers once "Dad" is mentioned.

Vivek Ramaswamy

This Republican gained recognition during the election campaigns for the 2024 Presidential Election, first because he initially ran for President himself, and second because he later endorsed Donald Trump. He is depicted in Figure 5 above on the very right next to Elon Musk. Ramaswamy is the central focus of a 43-minute video on Charlie Kirk's channel, in which he debates college students together with Kirk at the University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (*Charlie Kirk: "Charlie Kirk and Vivek Ramaswamy"*). Aside from his preferred policies for the future that he lays out for the audience – which align with those of Charlie Kirk and Donald

Trump – Ramaswamy’s rhetorical skills stand out. He listens carefully, speaks empathetically and clearly and tries to find common ground with those who disagree with him. Based on how he conducts himself, he makes it difficult for the debaters to antagonize him and prevents debates from getting heated and emotion driven. In doing so, he manages to overshadow actual policies with his rhetoric and leaves an impression on Charlie Kirk’s audience, as can be seen in the top comments (Figure 6):

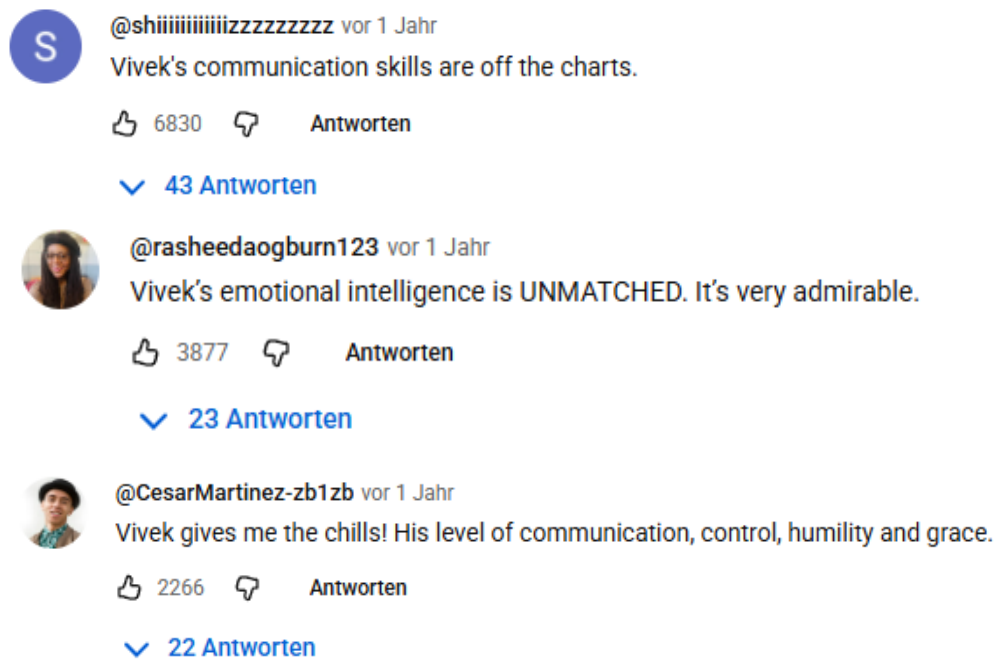


Figure 6: Postings in the comments section that admire Vivek Ramaswamy (Charlie Kirk: "Charlie Kirk and Vivek Ramaswamy")

Honorable Mentions

- **Elon Musk**
Charlie Kirk admires Musk for being an entrepreneur instead of a bureaucrat and commends him for facilitating free speech on X (*Charlie Kirk*: "Elon Musk purchased Twitter and liberated it").
- **The Hodge Twins**
These twins are black conservatives who are in line with Charlie Kirk on the argument that Democrats' focus on race actually divides the country (*Charlie Kirk*: "The Hodge Twins").
- **Masculine Men**
Kirk comments on an advertisement published by the Democratic Party that encourages men to be "man enough" to support women in general and Kamala Harris in particular (*Charlie Kirk*: "Kamala Activates Her Black King"). The advertisement feels incredibly

patronizing, and Kirk eagerly spins the message around as follows: “No real man can or should vote for Kamala Harris. She hates you; her agenda will belittle you, will disempower you” (*Charlie Kirk: “Kamala Activates Her Black King”*).

- Abraham Eyre

Charlie Kirk invites this young man onto the show, who habitually spreads animus online against left-wing politics to a very small viewership (*Charlie Kirk: “Charlie and Abraham”*). Kirk probably wanted to provide a platform for an upcoming right-wing agitator, who would help discredit political opponents.

It seems important to me to sum up this chapter by repeating an observation that I have pointed out earlier. Those who are deemed ‘good’ by Charlie Kirk are always praised but never criticized, whereas those who are deemed ‘bad’ are always criticized but never praised. Members of the in-group are glorified while members of the out-group are vilified, belittled and ridiculed. This strategy is the hallmark of propaganda and is bound to further fuel division inside the American society. Liberals must be criticized for the mistakes they have made, but the same standard must also be applied to conservatives. Only rarely does Kirk admit that Republicans erred in the past, but at the same time he stresses that Trump, the embodiment of the new Republican Party, would do things differently. No one in American politics is an impeccable beacon of morality, and while I do not expect Kirk to comment neutrally on politics – since his conservative worldview clearly matches with the Republican Party – his complete and utter loyalty to Trump’s team, which is displayed on his channel, seems insincere and opportunistic. Kirk also attempts to defend Trump himself every time he is challenged. How he does that will be discussed in chapter 11.

7.1. We are not racist, woke people are

In this extra chapter I describe a curious type of the us-vs-them dynamic that is clearly distinct from the examples above. Andrew Whitehead argues that Christian nationalism and racism are inseparable, which is why he insists on calling this cultural framework white Christian nationalism (Whitehead 29). In my analysis, I have found countless examples of Charlie Kirk antagonizing the ‘Other,’ but not a single remark that struck me as clearly racist. Multiple times he is accused of being racist or spreading racism; however, Kirk always defends himself and in turn calls his political and ideological opponents racist. This is no coincidence. Kirk employs a relatively recent strategy that has become popular among Republicans and conservatives. Before I closely examine Charlie Kirk’s utterances from the videos, it is important to consider that Democrats and Republicans are strongly polarized concerning racism. Overt racism is generally

frowned upon in the USA, but the extent of discrimination is a matter of heated debates. Progressives frequently assert that the U.S. society is systemically racist, that is, people of color are disadvantaged in most areas of life by the deliberate or unintentional actions of white people (Bonilla-Silva, “What Makes Systemic Racism Systemic” 519). On the other hand, conservatives do not deny that racism still exists in America, but they fully reject the notion that it is deeply entrenched in society (Bonilla-Silva, “Racism Without Racists” 53; Horwitz, Spencer and Schnabel 592). Below are the four typical objections by conservatives against the claim that systemic racism exists:

- America used to be much more racist, e.g. during the Jim Crow era. Racism is not that big of an issue anymore (57).
- People of color are not poorer because of their skin color; their cultures foster attitudes and practices that are detrimental to success, such as not valuing education enough (56).
- One reason for black-only neighborhoods or white-only schools is that people have the natural preference to connect with others who look similar to themselves (56).
- Affirmative-action programs privilege people of color and discriminate against white people, which means that affirmative action itself is racist (56).

In the videos, Charlie Kirk reiterates three of those four conservative talking points. Firstly, he agrees that systemic racism used to be part of the U.S. legal system in the form of Jim Crow laws, but the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s abolished those laws and practices, so racism is not a pervasive part of the societal system anymore (*Charlie Kirk: “This is What Your Children Become”*). Next, Kirk strongly criticizes scholars espousing Critical Race Theory on the grounds that they advocate for the positive discrimination of black people, which in turn negatively discriminates white people, for example when people of color receive preferential treatment through affirmative action programs (*Charlie Kirk: “My Greatest Mic Drop Moment”*). As always, his audience agrees with Kirk on his rejection of affirmative action, as is evidenced by the comments (Figure 7). The first commenter shifts the blame back by complaining that affirmative action is part of a system that discriminates against white people. The second commenter argues that affirmative action devalues people of color because it foregrounds race instead of academic achievements.

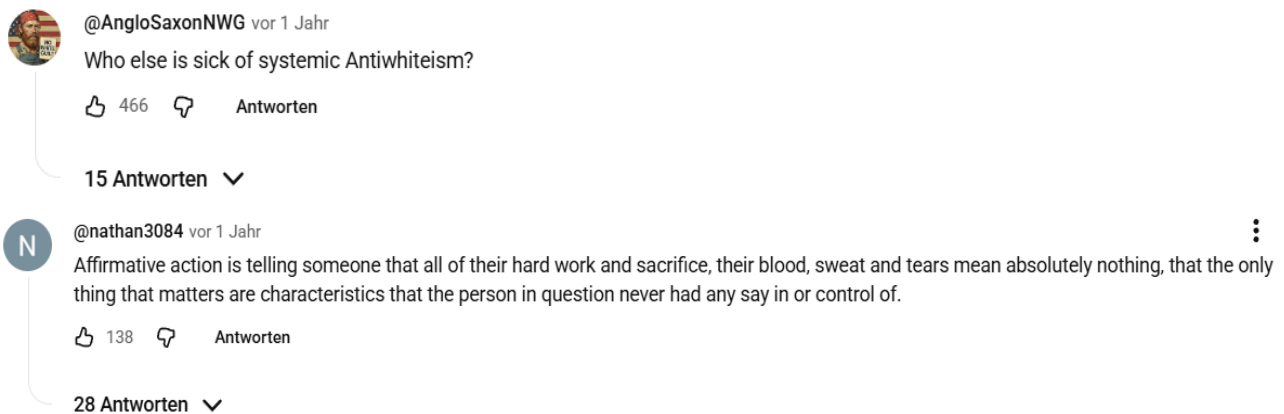


Figure 7: Affirmative action is criticized in the comments section (Charlie Kirk: "High School Girl Nukes Affirmative Action")

Thirdly, his most contentious claims revolve around the culture of people groups. Multiple times, he argues that black communities are poorer on average than white people due to their culture and lack of personal responsibility. Kirk affirms that his emphasis on culture is different from racism. He says, "I don't believe skin color means anything towards your value or to who you are as a human being. I care about your character, your code of conduct and your soul, not your skin color" (*Charlie Kirk: "My Greatest Mic Drop Moment"*). Kirk names Supreme Court Judge Clarence Thomas as an example of a positive black role model and reviles famous black rappers who sing about promiscuity and immoral behavior (*Charlie Kirk: "This is What Your Children Become"*). In addition, he claims the most important reason why black people are economically disadvantaged is the high rate of single-parent families among black communities (*Charlie Kirk: "My Greatest Mic Drop Moment"; "Charlie Kirk Destroys Institutional Racism"; "This is What Your Children Become"*). He blames biological fathers for shirking their responsibility and leaving their partner with whom they have a child. The argument that poverty among black communities is attributable to the family structure has existed for at least a century (Baker and O'Connell 1344). Numerous studies have shown that, on average, single-parent families face greater economic hardship than married-parent families (1342). However, white people seem to benefit considerably more from two-parent households than black people do (1360).

To further dispel accusations of racism, Kirk invites two black men onto his show, The Hodge Twins, and complains together with them about the Democratic Party's fixation on race as a strategy to win elections (*Charlie Kirk: "The Hodge Twins"*). In conclusion, Charlie Kirk is never conspicuously racist. Left-leaning people would argue he engages in "color-blind racism" (Bonilla-Silva, "Racism Without Racists"). To most of his audience, Kirk gives the impression of not being racist at all.

8. Literal belief in the Bible

Christian nationalists often cite the Bible to reinforce their arguments. They do so because many of them believe the Bible is the literal word of God, and thus they maintain that common wisdom should be derived from Bible passages (Whitehead and Perry 12-13). However, Christian nationalists seem to value some parts of scripture as more sacred than others since they engage in cherry picking those passages that suit their nationalist agenda while omitting others (Whitehead 172). Does Charlie Kirk also take the Bible literally? The clips I analyzed imply that is the case. In one video, he talks to Jack Hibbs, a pastor and author, whom Kirk showers with verbal affection (*Charlie Kirk: "Jack Hibbs"*). The main message of their conversation is that Christians must vote for Donald Trump so that Christian America can be saved. Hibbs uses several Bible passages to justify his arguments, and Kirk utters words of agreement multiple times during the video. Most importantly, Hibbs says that "We should get back to obedience to the Bible," to which Kirk responds, "I love that, Jack" (*Charlie Kirk: "Jack Hibbs"*). In another video, a college student wants to know Charlie Kirk's stance on creation vs. evolution to which he responds with "I am a strict creationist" (*Charlie Kirk: "I Help College Students"*). Kirk acknowledges that species can adapt to their environment, but he refuses to believe that species can change to such an extent that they evolve into new species. First, he attempts to refute evolution by way of logic, but it seems that he fundamentally misunderstands the concept of probability. He says "It's hard to believe all that is an act of the dice. And that is what evolution contests. [...] It would be like rolling snake-eyes 23 billion times in a row" (*Charlie Kirk: "I help College Students"*). What Kirk seems to believe is that within the paradigm of evolution, natural selection would always lead to the exact same results that we can observe at the present moment; for example, that the process of evolution would always guarantee that humans would emerge with the exact same characteristics that they have today. This is a logical fallacy. If our planet's history had been slightly different, humans might not have evolved to their current form, or maybe humans might not have started to exist at all. Evolution is also not just pure randomness. While it is true that individuals of a species develop new traits owing to random mutations in their genetic code, these traits will only be passed on to future generations of that species if the individual successfully procreates (Holmes 44-46). Naturally, if such a mutation provides an advantage in a given environment and therefore increases the chances of successfully producing offspring, that trait will be present in an increasing number of descendants who will also pass on the trait to the next generations (46). Over a time span that is often too long for humans to imagine, the resulting adaptations might be numerous enough so that individuals of a species have changed to such an extent that they do not resemble their original ancestors

and thus form a new species distinct from the one they have evolved from (61). The creation of new species is facilitated if a subgroup of a species stops breeding with all the other groups of that species, especially brought about by isolation (60-62). For example, Australia's unique wildlife is a result of its isolated location on this planet. If Charlie Kirk believes that the Earth is only a couple of thousand years old – as is the case with many creationists (Brenan) – then it is understandable that he is reluctant to factor in time spans of millions of years.

Kirk's second argument against evolution is firmly rooted in the Bible. He says, "I believe what the scriptures say, which is that God created the Earth and then God created Man" (*Charlie Kirk: "I Help College Students"*). This right-wing Evangelical creationist might not believe in everything that the Bible contends; however, at the very least he firmly places his faith in the creation story of the book of Genesis. Without going into too much detail, the story immediately raises suspicion since it is irreconcilable with almost all paleontological findings. If God had created all known species on the fifth and sixth day of his one-week effort, according to Gen 1.1 (*Die Bibel*), then we would expect to find fossils of dinosaurs and human remains of the same time period. Further, stating that our species and planet we live on had been created within one week would either imply that humans have been around for billions of years or that the Earth is only a couple thousand to some million years old. Anthropologists and geologists would react to these propositions with bewilderment. Even Bible scholars commonly agree that the story of creation is pure fiction and merely part of ancient Israelite mythology (Barton 82).

9. Good Christians are characterized by strong faith, not charity

Christians, across different denominations, are first and foremost followers of Jesus Christ. They believe that Christ is the human embodiment of God, who came to the Earth and saved us all from eternal sin through his death and resurrection. God's sacrifice in human form is generally considered to be the ultimate act of love because he willingly suffered as Jesus Christ for the sins of humanity so that we are granted the opportunity to be united with God in spirit. This vicarious redemption marks the beginning of a new covenant between God and humans (*Die Bibel*, Luke 22.19-20). The new covenant is accompanied by a new commandment, "Love one another! Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another" (*Die Bibel*, John 13.34). According to the book of Hebrews, chapter 8, the new covenant replaces the old covenant, so Christians are no longer bound by the laws that the ancient Israelites were commanded to follow (*Die Bibel*). Owing to the Bible's expansive nature, further interpretations of God's will vary between Christian denominations, but loving God and loving your neighbor are the two most important commandments among all mainstream Christians (*Die Bibel*, Mat. 22.37-39).

Christian nationalists, on the other hand, seem to neglect one of the most basic tenets of Christian theology, as they downplay the role of loving your neighbor (Whitehead 13). Their actions and statements are indicative of their complete disregard for select people groups even though they publicly glorify God and know the Bible quite well. Charlie Kirk might also omit this crucial commandment of Christianity when he talks about the characteristics of a good Christian.

Firstly, Kirk is convinced that Christians should support Donald Trump, which he reiterates in multiple videos, such as in “I think we as Christians should get on our hands and knees and thank God that we have a fighter that is willing to actually go to DC and fight for us against that very regime” (*Charlie Kirk: “I Get Anti-Trumper”*). He also argues that Christians should seek peace, and he proclaims, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (*Charlie Kirk: “I Get Anti-Trumper”*). Next, Kirk urges Christians to follow the Ten Commandments because doing so would make society “flourish” and refraining from it would make society “collapse” (*Charlie Kirk: “My Snowflake Melting Speech”*). He also extols the virtue of gratitude, which in turn would be a prerequisite for wanting to do hard work instead of ingratitude that would engender laziness (*Charlie Kirk: “My Snowflake Melting Speech”*). Lastly, and most important of all, people, particularly Christians of course, should believe in God and remember to humble themselves before him (*Charlie Kirk: “My Snowflake Melting Speech”*). In conclusion, Charlie Kirk does not use the word love when talking about the traits of good Christians, nor does he directly call upon his fellow Christians to help people in need – often considered a logical consequence of loving your neighbor – but he espouses values and actions that would make the world a better place from his point of view, thereby helping society in general. Kirk’s public theology focuses on God, Donald Trump as an exemplary leader who would fight for God, and that people must assume responsibility for their own life. For him, loving your neighbor might mean doing no harm rather than lending active support.

9.1.Extra category: Abortion

Apart from the Christian virtues above that Charlie Kirk espouses, he stresses multiple times that true Christians must stand against abortion. He cares deeply about this issue and dedicates several videos to it on his channel. With his worldview, he is in line with most Christian nationalists, as there is a strong correlation between people who are convinced that America is a Christian nation and the rejection of abortion under almost all circumstances (Whitehead and Perry 75). This outspoken Evangelical is very clear and direct on this topic when he admonishes his fellow Christians, “If you will not vote to end abortion, stop telling me you’re a Christian all

the time. Start acting and voting like you are a Christian!” (*Charlie Kirk: “You Cannot Be a Christian and Vote Democrat”*). In the same video, he reminds his audience that the Bible and its biblical principles tell followers of Christ to “love the unborn” (*Charlie Kirk: “You Cannot Be a Christian and Vote Democrat”*). He does not provide a biblical quote to underpin his argument, probably because the matter is not as clear as he portrays it to be. According to the Bible, Jesus never spoke about abortion, nor did Paul the Apostle write any textual reference to it (Castuera 129). The Old Testament also does not outlaw abortion or condemn the practice (128). The conclusion that abortion would be morally reprehensible can only be reached by the interpretation of Bible passages and the extrapolation of their supposed meanings to the issue of abortion. In fact, for centuries, abortion was not regarded as an important issue within the different denominations of the Church, and although some Christians were strongly against it, official Church doctrine allowed it for a long time (122). This changed in the middle of the 19th century, when the Catholic Church officially declared abortion a crime on the grounds that life would start at conception and thus abortion is equal to murder (180). Protestants in the USA did not follow suit, and when abortion was legalized nationwide in 1973, through a Supreme Court decision in the case *Roe vs. Wade*, Evangelicals’ reactions to it ranged from rejection to support, but many were just indifferent towards it (211). In the following decades, the issue slowly became increasingly politicized and developed into a marker of polarization between liberals and conservatives or Democrats and Republicans (212).

In one of the videos, Charlie Kirk describes abortion as “human beings that are alive that are being killed” (*Charlie Kirk: “Charlie Kirk Nukes Abortion Argument”*). It follows that he equates abortion with murder, and he calls abortion, together with trans policies, “the massacring of children” (*Charlie Kirk: “You Cannot Be a Christian and Vote Democrat”*). To him, it does not matter whether the conversation revolves around humans who have been born or fetuses still in the womb. As is expected, this staunch pro-life advocate uses the issue of abortion in his campaign to garner support for Trump and to damage the efforts of the Democratic Party. He praises Trump for nominating three Supreme Court Justices in his first term who later overturned *Roe vs. Wade*, thereby granting each U.S. state the ability to individually pass legislation concerning abortion rights (*Charlie Kirk: “Real Life Story”*). Some states immediately reacted by banning abortions completely or by restricting access to legal abortions (Whittum and Rapkin 322). On the other hand, Kirk disparages Minnesota’s governor Tim Walz for having “the most radical abortion laws in the country” (*Charlie Kirk: “Everything You Need to Know”*), and warns that “Kamala Harris will nationalize *Roe vs. Wade*, which would overturn ten pro-life laws that have gone into effect in ten states” (*Charlie Kirk: “Real Life Story”*). It is difficult

to tell whether Charlie Kirk truly wants to ban abortion because of his Christian beliefs or if the constant discussion of this issue serves as a political marketing ploy to help Trump win more votes.

10. Warning about the potential downfall of Christian America

Many Christian nationalists paint a gloomy picture of America's future in the case that their enemies maintain power and dictate how society ought to be. Liberalism and wokeness are considered signs of moral decay, and Christian nationalists exercise their self-imposed duty of fighting against these evils in an act of glorification of Jesus Christ before his much-awaited Second Coming (Whitehead and Perry 14). Current societal changes are thus described in apocalyptic, black-and-white, good-vs-evil terms, which convey a sense of distress and urgency. In addition, vulgar and war-like language is commonplace while sugarcoating problems that beset Western society is avoided in order to cut right to the core of what is important at the present moment. To give an example, in one of the videos Charlie Kirk is asked bluntly, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how fucked are we as a country?", upon which Kirk gently rebukes the person for using such coarse language, but then he responds, "11" (*Charlie Kirk: "Charlie Kirk Highlight Reel"*). Armageddon is nigh if right-wing conservatives are to be believed in the weeks before an important election. The ultimate antagonist in this end-of-times fight is nothing less than the devil himself, or rather the personification of the devil on Earth. Kirk warns his viewers that Kamala Harris "is more ambitious than Lucifer" and that "we are now in a political trench fight for the future of our civilization" (*Charlie Kirk: "She is more Ambitious"*). The thumbnails for his videos are thoughtfully designed by his editors to subconsciously convey to the audience who they are dealing with in the election (see Figure 8).



Figure 8: Kamala Harris depicted as a threat to America (Charlie Kirk: "Kamala Harris Lets Slip Her Secret Agenda")

In Figure 8 above we can see a visibly afraid Charlie Kirk looking at an edited image of Kamala Harris. The Democratic Presidential nominee is depicted as evil with her black hair, black eye-liner, deeply black clothes and a malicious, haunting gaze while standing before a background that is reminiscent of misty nights out of an eerie Victorian novel. It is not just that enemies have increased their efforts to destroy Western society, Kirk finds faults within those who appear to do good but actually and unintentionally contribute to society's downfall. He clearly singles out the non-believers as well as moderate believers, those who have decided that God does not take precedence anymore. For example, he laments, "My belief system is that the death of the ethical, monotheistic God, which I believe is the God of the Bible [...] is also the death of the West" (*Charlie Kirk: "My Snowflake Melting Speech"*). His spiritual mentor, Jack Hibbs, who I mentioned earlier and who is in general agreement with his protégé, even goes a step further by saying, "We've got to equip our people for the darkest age that this world and that this nation has ever seen" (*Charlie Kirk: "Jack Hibbs Rains Hell"*). It is unsettling that such a prominent pastor either showcases an utter lack of historical knowledge, harbors an unhealthy level of devastating pessimism, or actually knows, by some source that eludes the rest of humanity, that future events are about to happen whose gravity will exceed the two World Wars, the Bubonic Plague, or the Toba catastrophe. Another possibility is that Jack Hibbs wants to induce fear and discomfort in his audience so that they more readily vote for Trump. This remark supports Charlie Kirk's core argument that Western civilization will be worse off if people do not believe in the God of the Bible. Phil Zuckerman investigated numerous studies on the effects of religiosity on societal and individual well-being. Regarding the latter, the studies yielded mixed results but indicate that religious people tend to feel a stronger sense of meaning,

they can cope better with the death of loved ones and fear their own death less, and their trust in God helps them to be more resilient in times of strife (Zuckerman 956). On the other hand, and this directly contradicts Kirk's argument, rising numbers of irreligiosity and secularism correlate with higher societal well-being (959). On average, people living in secular countries are happier, wealthier, more educated and more peaceful (959). According to the World Happiness Report, the happiest countries in 2024 were Finland, Denmark and Iceland (Helliwell et al. 17). These three countries experience decreasing levels of religiosity while showing no signs of imminent collapse. I would be amiss to mention that socialist dictatorships are one prominent type of secular societies which are associated with high levels of dissatisfaction, repression and violence (11). In this special case religion is replaced by an ideology that shares many traits with organized religions. The low levels of societal well-being in socialist systems are not attributable to irreligiosity but rather to those systems being repressive regimes (11). To sum up, the statistics do not indicate that Christian societies are generally inferior. They do show, however, that societies can prosper even if the population is largely non-religious.

Why then can right-wing parties use the narrative of societal upheaval so successfully in secular countries and emphasize Christian roots? Out of the many reasons, the most important one might be Western societies' attitudes and responses towards Muslims. As mentioned before, a willingness to vote for Donald Trump highly correlated with Christian nationalism and islamophobia in the 2016 election (Whitehead, Perry, and Baker 166). In Europe, the influx of refugees from Muslim-majority countries has led to concerns about the future composition of European societies. Muslims in Europe are much more religious on average than their Christian counterparts, and they also hold more fundamentalist views (Koopmans 2). In addition, while islamophobia in Europe is a well-researched phenomenon (Bayrakli and Hafez), hostility towards the West is pronounced among European Muslims, which Koopmans calls "Occidentophobia" (Koopmans 3). Europeans are also aware that Muslim-majority countries generally fare poorly in terms of well-being, as evidenced by the World Happiness Report (Helliwell et al. 17-19).

It seems reasonable, therefore, that secular societies want to defend their high standard of living against the influence of Islam, and right-wing parties invoke Europe's Christian roots in order to fight religion with religion. However, the data indicate that secularism likely contributes more to forming a prosperous society – but not if that results in a socialist dictatorship! – than having a majority of either religious Christians or religious Muslims. Charlie Kirk thinks that a society without God would collapse. In actual fact, modern societies might prosper despite

religion, not because of it. At the same time, we must be cautious of ideologies that do not allow dissent and act as quasi-religions.

11. Donald Trump as the savior of Christian America

Christian nationalists support Donald Trump more than any other candidate. This deep affection can be confusing at first glance because other Republicans are considerably more religious, he betrayed his wife with a porn star, and his record of lies is unprecedented. In addition, in one famous interview, Trump refused to name his favorite Bible verse even though it is supposedly his favorite book (*Kris Griffiths*: “Donald Trump unable”). Philip Gorski argues that there are four principles that bind Christian nationalists to Trump (Gorski: “Why evangelicals voted for Trump”). Firstly, Trump is able to exploit the deep-seated racism harbored by Christian nationalists (343-344). Secondly, Trump’s slogan to Make America Great Again speaks to Christians in the USA who are afraid of losing the status that they have enjoyed for centuries in America. Thirdly, he has convinced Christian nationalists that he would be the only person capable of winning in the approaching social apocalypse (345), and lastly, some Christian nationalists genuinely believe that Trump was sent by God to fulfill his divine will on Earth (347).

From the research I have done, I have come to believe that Charlie Kirk also considers Trump to be sent by God for a purpose. Kirk is challenged by multiple people in the videos on the grounds that Trump would be unfit to rule the USA due to his character. He does not deny that Trump frequently acts in a way that contradicts Christ-like behavior. In fact, Trump’s flawed character is in line with the personality traits of famous heroes of the Old Testament. In one video, Kirk employs this defense when he responds to the question of a college student (*Charlie Kirk*: “Oregon Brings Mostly Peaceful Lies”). I have decided to provide the exact words of his short monologue because it encapsulates all aspects of this defense strategy that he also uses in other videos (e.g. *Charlie Kirk*: “I Convinced a DNC Attendee”; “I Get Anti-Trumper”).

We all fall short of the glory of God. And throughout the Bible people who are sinners, such as I mentioned King David, who did a lot worse things than Donald Trump [...] He literally not only committed adultery. He got the person he committed adultery with, Batsheba’s husband, sent him to the front line and got him murdered and killed so that he can continue to commit adultery. [...] We have Samson [...] When God came upon Samson he was in a bed with prostitutes and was in the hall of faith in the book of Hebrews. We are not electing Donald Trump as a pastor of this country. We elect him as a president. And we also see what he does. And this is a very important moral question. Let’s say I grant you that Donald Trump embodies some of the sins that you and I both don’t like. Is it matter more what he’s done in his personal life, or does it matter more, for example, when you invade a sovereign country like Iraq and commit war crimes against millions of people?” (*Charlie Kirk*: “Oregon Brings Mostly Peaceful Lies”)

If one follows Charlie Kirk's logic, Trump's scandals should all be excused because he is similar to King David and Samson, and he manages to bring about policies that Kirk approves of. Not only that, but Kirk also condones adultery, prostitution, and having people killed to satisfy one's own desires as long as the person responsible for these actions passes laws that Kirk likes. The argument of this faithful Evangelical rests on the unfounded belief that the Bible is to be trusted, but the story of Samson alone raises considerable doubts. Samson appears in the book of Judges in chapters 14-16 (*Die Bibel*). Kirk claims, "When God came upon Samson, he was in a bed with prostitutes" (*Charlie Kirk: "Oregon Brings Mostly Peaceful Lies"*), which is very misleading. The rationale behind this claim is that Samson was a morally bad person who was then still used by God so that he could redeem himself and serve society. It is in line with the famous story of Saul, who first persecuted Christians but then turned Christian himself so that he would become the most important apostle. Charlie Kirk tries to excuse Trump's past and present behavior with this strategy.

However, Samson's purpose and fate were predetermined by God even before his birth (*Die Bibel*, Judges 13). According to the book of Judges 13.1, God used the ancient Philistines to rule over the ancient Israelites so that they would be punished for their insubordination. During that time, if one believes the Bible, everything on Earth revolved around the Israelites and their relationship to God; other peoples were unimportant and only tools. But the Israelites frequently rebelled against their God, and so he habitually let other civilizations – such as the Philistines, the Persians, or the Babylonians – rule over them to mete out punishment. Samson was born for the sole purpose of defeating the Philistines and liberating the Israelites (13.5). To that end, he married a Philistine woman, following God's plan, but different arguments and events between Samson and his in-laws extremely enraged him. First, he beat 30 men to death in Ashkelon (14.19), then he crushed the bones of a group of Philistines (15.8). He was able to do so because God acted through him, providing him with superhuman strength (14.19). Upon this, the Philistines wanted to take revenge (15.10), but Samson took a donkey's jawbone and used it to beat 1,000 men to death (15.15). After all these atrocities, he slept with a prostitute in the city of Gaza (16.1), which Charlie Kirk is referring to. Later in the story, the Philistines managed to gouge out Samson's eyes (16.21), and they captured him. He was brought to a building to be presented in front of more than 3,000 Philistines together with Philistine noblemen, but with the power of God, he tore down the walls of the building and killed everyone inside and on top of it (16.25-31). Samson waged war and killed people by the thousands, at the behest of God. It is unbelievable and irrational that the same God would later proceed to preach universal love. God in this story is a callous warmonger, who is completely indifferent to a whole people group

that he himself created. Samson, on the other hand, is a killing machine who goes berserk as soon as he feels resentment. It is interesting that Charlie Kirk would worship such a cruel God and would think that likening Trump to Samson would vindicate Trump.

Apart from the King-David-Samson-Defense, Kirk often lists Trump's accomplishments of his first presidential term to show what his second term would bring. Firstly, Trump is described as a "peace president" because he did not start any new conventional wars and because Russia did not openly invade any new country during his presidency (*Charlie Kirk: "Socialist Hippie"*). While this is true, Trump oversaw the continuation of ongoing wars and did not end any wars while he served as the 45th president. He authorized the assassination of the Iranian general Qasem Soleimani (Galbraith 313), recognized Jerusalem as the capital city of Israel, which made peace between Israelis and Palestinians more unlikely (Yavuz and Okur 207, 218), and he authorized thousands of airstrikes in Afghanistan and the Middle East (U.S. Air Force). Moreover, at the beginning of his second term, Trump decided to rename the Department of Defense the Department of War (*BBC: "Trump"*), thereby indicating that peace would not be his priority.

Charlie Kirk also frequently invokes Trump's economic achievements, such as in "The four years of the world view of Donald Trump was that everyone was getting richer, borders were secure, wages were going up, economy was better" (*Charlie Kirk: "I Convinced a DNC Attendee"*). It is true that Trump's first term was marked by solid economic growth, stable inflation rates, low unemployment, and increasing real wages (Shahini and Shahini 7-9). On the other hand, U.S. government debt also increased, and the gap between the rich and the poor regarding income and wealth widened tremendously (Shahini and Shahini 11; Riddell 7-9). Trump's economic record is decent, also owing to the fact that he was mostly unburdened by the economic calamities that Joe Biden's administration had to address, such as a COVID pandemic in full swing, Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine and soaring worldwide inflation rates. An analysis of Trump's second term will help determine whether his policies really benefited the U.S. economy, or if luck was on his side during 2017-2019. Interestingly, Charlie Kirk shows that his veneration for Trump is not unlimited because he would have liked Trump to act differently in three key areas: Kirk does not approve of Trump's deficit spending which increased U.S. debt, he does not approve of some people that Trump appointed to his cabinet, and Kirk would have liked fewer restrictions during the pandemic (*Charlie Kirk: "You Can't Afford Groceries"*). At the same time, Kirk is certain that Trump will do better in his second term with reference to fiscal policy and personnel choices. He finds it difficult to explain why that would be

the case, showcasing great faith in Trump. Then he openly voices his reverence with “You’re not going to convince me of negative Trump stuff” (*Charlie Kirk: “You Can’t Afford Groceries”*).

The world has changed since 2021, so the new Trump administration is facing new challenges distinct from the period before COVID and Russia transformed world politics. Several times throughout the videos, Kirk proclaims the policies that Trump has in mind which would fix America’s problems: increased drilling for oil to lower energy prices, tough measures to secure the Southern border, heightened efforts to end wars around the world, facilitating homeownership, and, most of all, economic policies that would lead to a booming economy (*Charlie Kirk: “What is Project 2025?”*; *“I Convinced a DNC Attendee”*). In conclusion, Kirk holds the Christian nationalist view that Trump will save Christian America. He is not the Messiah himself, which Kirk clearly states in one video (*Charlie Kirk: “America is Better Without Religion?”*), but he is a fighter for God similar to the heroes of the Old Testament, who will vanquish the devil-like Democrats and put the USA back on track again.

12.Promoting the free market since it rewards the virtuous

Christian nationalists are in favor of the free market and abhor socialism (Gorski and Perry 40). They reject most government interventions in the economy and promote individualism (39). From the perspective of Christian nationalists, their greatest enemies are socialists, who are perceived as more threatening than Muslims, non-believers or foreigners (42). This significant correlation between holding Christian nationalist ideals and hatred towards socialism is especially pronounced among white Christian nationalists (39).

The videos that I analyzed regularly address economic policies and economic systems in general. Charlie Kirk frequently talks about his views and clearly identifies as a proponent of the free market with minimal government intervention. He admires the “beauty of free-market capitalism” and explains how “the invisible hand” makes it possible that supermarkets are fully stocked (*Charlie Kirk: “If You Think Food is Expensive”*). He also lauds Milton Friedman, a well-known economist and advocate for the free market, as the “greatest economist of the 20th century” (*Charlie Kirk: “You Can’t Afford Groceries”*). Kirk holds the conservative view that people are responsible for themselves and that being poor is a choice rather than bad luck or dependent on external circumstances (*Charlie Kirk: “Charlie and Vivek Explain”*). It follows naturally that Kirk rejects high tax rates since he prefers a small government, which should not interfere in the markets. He is of the opinion that taxing companies basically means to “forcibly take money away from an efficient part of our country and [...] transfer it to an inefficient,

bloated, corrupt part of our country, the government” (*Charlie Kirk: “Charlie Kirk Exposes the Disaster”*). The top comments of that video are completely in line with Kirk’s reasoning.

In another video, Kirk is asked whether rich people, of which he is one, should pay more taxes, to which he responds:

Kirk: It’s easy to pick on people like me. One day I’m paying fifty percent. Soon it will be sixty percent, then it will be seventy percent. And then they’ll come for you. Because eventually I’m gonna run out of money, and you can laugh and chuckle. But eventually they’re gonna come for the working class and the middle class.

Speaker 2: They’ve already come for the working class.

Kirk: Yeah, because the reservoir is getting dry. (*Charlie Kirk: “Socialist Hippie”*)

Charlie Kirk argues that raising tax rates would lead to further tax hikes that would eventually squeeze rich people up to a point where they would have lost most of their money. As a result, the government would have to turn to the middle and working class and raise their tax rates on the grounds that not enough tax revenue could be generated from the rich. Obviously, this argument is preposterous. The rich will not be rendered poor by taxing them more. Also, they are far from being overtaxed, which is illustrated by the growing number of billionaires.

At the same time, Kirk advocates implementing tariffs, a type of tax. He argues that tariffs should not be considered taxes because the price would not get passed on to the consumer (*Charlie Kirk: “Pro Heroin Libertarian”*). In addition, he claims that companies can simply steer clear of tariffs if they decide to produce their goods in the USA, so a tariff would incentivize companies to build factories in America rather than moving production facilities abroad (*Charlie Kirk: “Pro Heroin Libertarian”*). Kirk not only tries to alleviate people’s worries when he is asked whether tariffs would lead to higher inflation, but he also makes the bold claim that, even though Trump enacted tariffs in his first term, prices actually decreased (*Charlie Kirk: “Judgment Day of 2024”*). This is wrong since inflation averaged around 2% during Trump’s first presidency (Srinivasan 2025). Prices rose only moderately at a rate that is desirable for sound economic development; however, a decrease in prices would be expressed in negative inflation rates.

Charlie Kirk and his editors frequently use defamation to win debates about the economy. They label people holding opposing views with epithets that clearly mark them as inferior, dubious, or ignorant. One video, in which Kirk debates a college student on the role of the government, is called “Socialist Hippie Gets SLAPPED With Facts.” The student never openly identifies as a socialist hippie. He might have been called a socialist by Kirk because he is in favor of free

tertiary education, he wants to raise taxes for billionaires, and he talks about the benefits of government programs. He does not mention the nationalization of private companies, so he might also be called a social democrat, but, as I will show below, the term socialism is quite ambiguous in the US. Next, he might have been called a hippie since he has long hair. It is likely that this label also serves to denigrate the young man, thereby devaluing all of his arguments at once. Lastly, the “Gets SLAPPED” indicates that Charlie Kirk won the debate, while the college student did not stand a chance. The capital letters that are used for the word “slapped” should further signify that Kirk was vastly better in the debate than his verbal opponent.

Not only are laypeople denigrated using the socialist specter, but political opponents are also called socialists or communists. This name-calling might be a conscious strategy to reject any ideas which propose regulating the free market. Sometimes discussions about the economy are destined to fail because Kirk and his interlocutors do not agree on what socialism constitutes. In one video, a student thinks that most of Europe is governed by socialist governments, which Charlie Kirk disagrees with, while Kirk considers Venezuela to be a socialist country, which the student disagrees with (*Charlie Kirk: “Woke Student”*). Kirk seems to use the terms communism and socialism largely as synonyms, but the former conveys more evil than the latter. In one video that I analyzed, Kirk warns that “Kamala the Commie” would exploit the fears of Americans to start a communist revolution (*Charlie Kirk: “Kamala the Commie”*). He utters these aggressive remarks as a reaction to Kamala Harris’s proposal to forbid price gouging in supermarkets (*BBC: “Harris’s price gouging plan”*). Price gouging is the practice of increasing the price of an item to a level that is unjustifiable and exploitative. In a different video, Kirk and his guest liken several policies of Democrats to what happened in the Soviet Union, and the Democrats are called communists (*Charlie Kirk: “The Communists Aren’t Gone”*). Because of the controversies that revolve around communism and socialism and the animus that Charlie Kirk harbors towards these two concepts, it seems necessary to explain what they mean and what their differences are.

Communism

In everyday language the nature of communism is tied to what self-proclaimed communist parties or communist governments did in the past. As such, communism is typically considered to be something negative because the communist revolutions of the 20th century, for example in Russia or China, paved the way for brutal dictatorships. To Karl Marx, communism actually meant the complete opposite. He envisioned communism as a societal state, in which people would be free and prosper (Rockmore 8). Thus, communism would be something to strive for,

a goal that should be aspired to. Marx does not specify how a communist society would function, but he states that in communism every person's needs would be met (61), people would cooperate (59), and the means of production would be owned by society instead of by private individuals (17). However, such a utopian society has never existed in human history and probably never will (234). This also means that there have never been truly communist countries, and, in all likelihood, there will never be a truly communist country.

Socialism

In the USA, socialism is an obscure and ambiguous term. One author explains that in an economic continuum, in which communism and capitalism form both extremes, socialism would be right in the middle of that continuum, being equally far away from communism and capitalism (Marson 1). Another author writes that socialism is an intellectual tool that can be used to critique capitalism and envision a just world (Coburn 1). Yet another author describes socialism as a society where humans can flourish because workers have the power to decide over their own lives and people can reach their natural potential (Lebowitz 27-31). An article by Roemer (572) further illustrates this problematic ambiguity since he discusses different types of socialism. He states that both social democracy and the totalitarian system of the Soviet Union are "socialist variants" which are to be placed on opposing ends of the socialism continuum (572). But to most Europeans, social democracy and socialism are clearly separated. Social democrats accept capitalism and implement policies to correct market failure, while socialists reject capitalism. Conflating social democracy with socialism sounds nonsensical. It is thus no wonder that right-wing conservatives in the USA can use the term socialism as a slur so effectively. It is difficult to defend against a verbal attack if the slur is that ambiguous.

Charlie Kirk is, without a doubt, a strong proponent of the free market. He wants the government to play only a minimal role, he attributes poverty to the decisions people make for themselves, he is a staunch critic of policies whose aim is to correct market failure, and he is prone to attack supporters of market regulation or welfare programs by labeling them communists or socialists. In terms of the economy, he is completely in line with Christian nationalists.

13. Stoking fears and calling for violence

Andrew Whitehead warns that Christian nationalism does not preach love, which is the core principle of Christianity (12). Christian nationalists use fear and violence so that they can maintain their elevated status in American society (13-16). The ultimate goal is to achieve and conserve power within the rapidly changing United States (17). Charlie Kirk was a rich white

Christian man and, therefore, enjoyed a range of privileges that he sought to defend. The wealthy in America have disproportionately benefited from the economic system for decades and are eager to defend their position in the hierarchy. Evoking fear is a time-tested tactic to influence constituents and to distract from the causes of social problems. Kirk conspicuously uses this strategy in his videos, as is evidenced by several examples.

In August 2024, stock markets worldwide saw a correction in prices by several percent (Jolly and Wearden). Important indices, such as the Dow Jones and the Nikkei 225, experienced considerable losses, and worries about the state of the world economy spread (Jolly and Wearden). Fortunately, share prices soon recovered, and the specter of a financial crisis vanished. Charlie Kirk, however, took advantage of this one-off event to stoke existential dread among his *YouTube* followers. One video is dedicated to the market dip of early August 2024, and Kirk puts the blame for everything on Kamala Harris (*Charlie Kirk: “President Kamala”*). Here are some quotes from that video, which illustrate the sensationalism and urgency that Kirk conveys:

It’s been two weeks since Kamala Harris has become the presumptive nominee, and today markets are reacting directly to Kamala Harris. [...] When people lose confidence, a bloodbath ensues. [...] I encourage all of you, do not look at your portfolio today. That is all brought to you by Kamala Harris. [...] She is in charge of this market collapse. [...] This is just the beginning. This is the beginning of a market correction which only could be called the Kamala Crash. [...] The U.S. Dollar is collapsing around the world. [...] Many of you are significantly poorer than you were last night, but we are on the precipice of something far, far worse. And it’s all a byproduct of Kamala Harris and her regime. [...] If we are to give Kamala Harris four more years of this, we will enter an economic nightmare, an economic nuclear catastrophe. (*Charlie Kirk: “President Kamala”*)

Charlie Kirk magnifies the severity of this market correction using hyperbole, for example “a bloodbath ensues”, “The U.S. Dollar is collapsing”, “economic nightmare” or “economic catastrophe”. He catastrophizes to alter his audience’s perception of the event and makes the unfounded claim that Kamala Harris would be responsible for it. Kirk even employs mnemonic devices that his audience can effortlessly remember, such as “Kamala + Economy = Kamala Crash” (*Charlie Kirk: “President Kamala”*). A Venn diagram should make it easier to remember this simple equation he has created (see Figure 9). The screenshot of this video shows him holding a pen which he integrates in his gestures, and, for a short time, he acts as if he were a teacher who explains the foundations of economics to his audience. Contrary to what he claims,

this short-lived market correction was not caused by the nomination of Kamala Harris but by rising interest rates in Japan and a modestly rising unemployment rate in the USA (Cooper). The purpose of this Venn diagram is not to simplify complex cause-and-effect relationships of the economy. Instead, it should help inculcate the idea in Charlie Kirk's audience that the election of Kamala Harris as President would be bad for the economy.

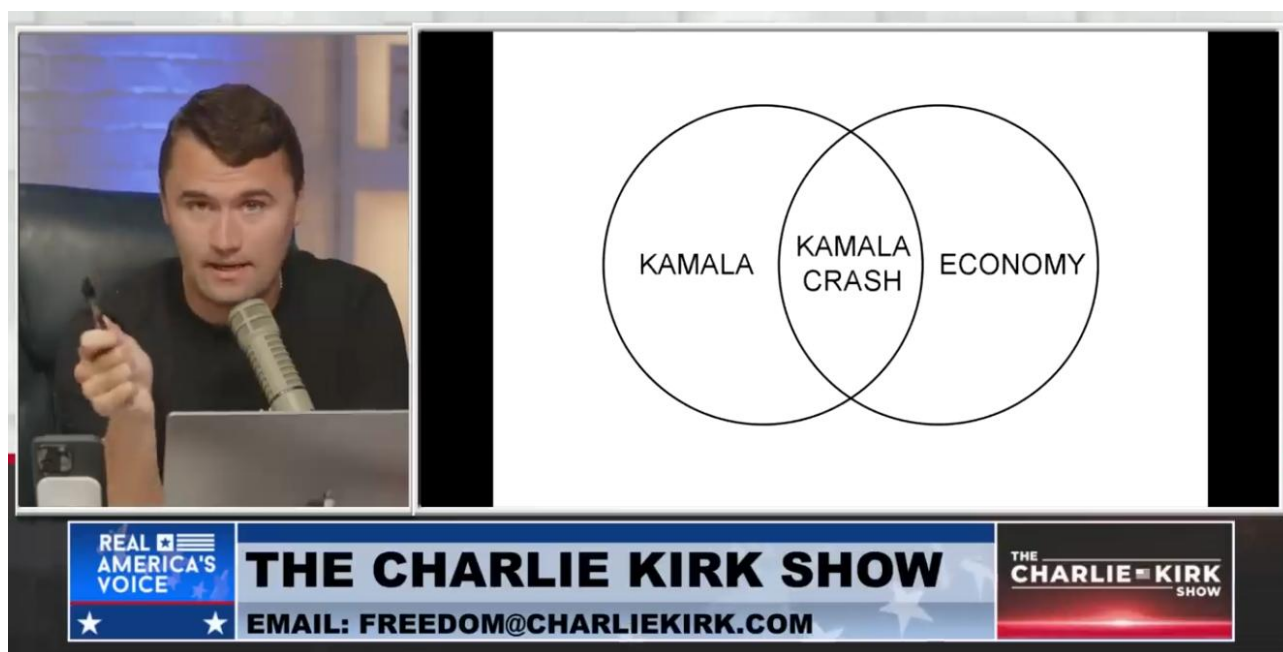


Figure 9: Kirk uses visuals to warn of Kamala Harris (Charlie Kirk: "President Kamala")

Not only the economy but also food security would be in danger if Kamala Harris were to be elected president, according to Kirk. As mentioned above, the greatest threat to Christian nationalists is communists and socialists, so Charlie Kirk paints a gloomy picture of socialist rule in the USA under Harris. In one of the videos, Kirk says that “she wants to take us to the Soviet grocery stores” in part because she plans “totalitarian communist price controls” (*Charlie Kirk: “Food Lines Will Come”*). Again, his editors use images to convey the core message that voting for Democrats would lead to restricted access to food. One thumbnail shows a laughing Kamala Harris next to a concerned-looking Charlie Kirk, who points to his viewers with his index finger, and the warning “YOU WILL STARVE” is superimposed on the image (see Figure 10) (*Charlie Kirk: “Kamala the Commie”*). Kamala Harris’s joyful facial expression in this image conveys two messages. First, the intended goal might be to portray her as an insincere or insecure politician who would laugh away serious problems. Second, some viewers might even get the impression that Kamala Harris delights in threatening food security.



Figure 10: Kirk uses drastic language to vilify Kamala Harris (Charlie Kirk: "Kamala the Commie")

As for the topic of violence, my analysis yielded a very interesting finding. In none of the videos, Charlie Kirk calls for violent measures or urges his followers to be violent. Quite the contrary, he accuses his political opponents of allowing violence, for example, Democratic governor Tim Walz, who did not do enough to curb violence in Minneapolis in 2020 (*Charlie Kirk: "Everything You Need to Know"*). Conversely, Kirk distracts from conservative aggression. With reference to the January 6 Capitol riots of 2021, Kirk claims that most of the people there were peaceful, that "there was only forty or fifty violent people out of 3,000 people on the day of January 6," and that "a Trump supporter was murdered, Trump supporters didn't kill anyone" (*Charlie Kirk: "Was January 6 Trump's Fault?"*). In another video, Kirk downplays the violence and shifts blame by mentioning "grandmas that went into the Capitol on January 6 and took selfie videos are in federal prison" (*Charlie Kirk: "You Can't Afford Groceries"*). While it is true that a Trump supporter was killed by a police officer on that day, rioters seriously injured another officer, who died the next day (Cameron). In addition, fifty violent people would not have been sufficient to storm the Capitol by force and injure around 150 police officers (Cameron). Kirk does not openly defend violence. Instead, he accuses left-leaning people of making conservatives appear more violent than they are. In turn, he accuses Democrats of being the true instigators of violence. Donald Trump is even portrayed as the antithesis of violence. Kirk proclaims, "Blessed are the peace makers" (*Charlie Kirk: "I Get Anti-Trumper"*) and calls Trump a "Peace President" because he did not start a new war during his first four years in office, unlike other presidents (*Charlie Kirk: "Socialist Hippie"*). In conclusion, Kirk calls for peace, localizes the source of violence within the Democratic Party, denies that followers of

Trump promote violence, warns that Democratic rule would lead to a grim future, and praises Donald Trump as the epitome of peace.

14. Promoting authoritarianism

Democratic processes have a long and respectable history in the United States of America. Since the first presidential election in 1789, no president has come to power through a coup d'état, and the right to vote was gradually granted to an increasing number of people groups, including women and minorities. Both Republicans and Democrats have generally been in favor of democratic elections within the USA, especially during the Cold War, when free elections served to differentiate the Western system from the Soviet system. In light of recent demographic changes, the legitimacy and merit of a democratic system are called into question by Christian nationalists. White Christians used to form the majority of people in the USA, but their numbers have decreased (Gorski and Perry 117). As a result, Christian nationalists fear that a system in which the majority rules would weaken their influence in American society, so they embrace political processes that are more authoritarian and undemocratic (117). At first glance, Charlie Kirk seems to be a staunch proponent of democracy. As mentioned above, he calls upon his followers to vote for Donald Trump and does not openly endorse actions typical of authoritarians, such as the use of force to quell dissent. Kirk also defends the electoral college system by which U.S. presidents are elected every four years (*Charlie Kirk: "Snobby Commie"*). On the other hand, he does not denounce the January 6 riots or Trump's claim that the 2020 Presidential Election was stolen. He might therefore be in favor of democratic elections as long as they serve his goals, but not if political opponents win. One central claim of Kirk further complicates the picture. In three different videos he outright rejects "democracies" and even contends that the USA is not and should not be a democracy (*Charlie Kirk: "Myth: The USA is a Democracy"*). Instead, he often asserts that the USA is a constitutional republic. People in the comments agree with Kirk, as can be seen in Figure 11 (*Charlie Kirk: "Snobby Commie"*). Judging by the language the first commenter uses, he seems to be absolutely convinced that the USA is not a democracy. He also devalues the woman who debates Charlie Kirk in the video with the words "She doesn't even know", thereby emphasizing her supposed ignorance. The second commenter criticizes majority rule in democratic systems, because to him the majority would abuse their power to the detriment of the minority.

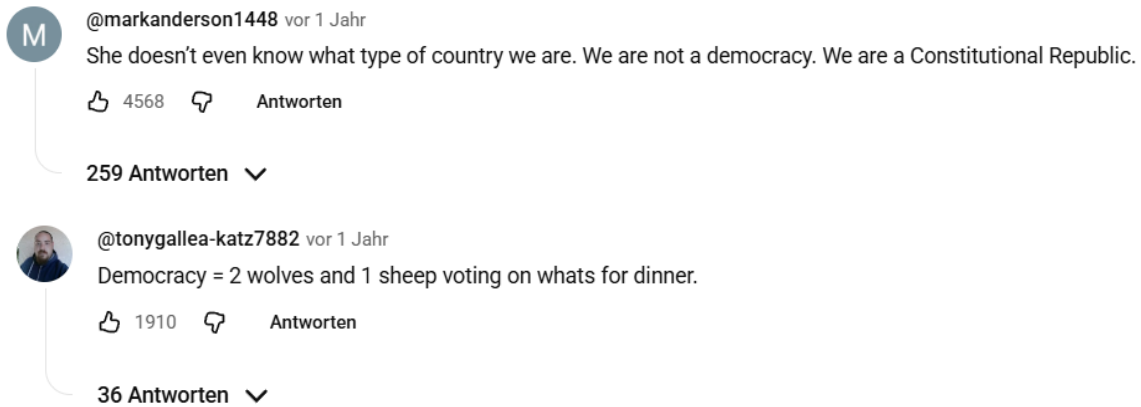


Figure 11: Charlie Kirk's audience would agree that the USA is not a democracy (Charlie Kirk: "Snobby Commie")

It is necessary now to explain the exact meanings of democracy and republic to understand why Charlie Kirk considers it so important to distinguish between the two. Firstly, the two terms do not seem to bear the same meanings in different languages, which makes it even more difficult for non-natives of English to understand U.S. politics. In the German-speaking countries, the word 'Republik' denotes a political system in which the head of state is not a monarch who ascends by succeeding a royal family member but rather a person who is elected by the citizens or a group of elites (Parlament Österreich; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung). Further, 'Demokratie' means that ultimate power rests with the people, who express their will through elections (Parlament Österreich; Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung). In this sense, republics can be democratic or not; for example, Austria is a democratic republic and Cuba a socialist republic.

In the USA, the terms republic and democracy are commonly used interchangeably to describe a political system in which supreme power rests with the people because at the time of the Founding of the USA it was thought that the rule of the people would not be possible in monarchies (Merriam Webster; congress.gov). However, also during that period the exact meanings of these two words were not universally agreed on. James Madison, one of the founding fathers, rejected democracy as a system for the fledgling United States because it would not work for such a large country (Allen 19). His criticism was actually aimed at direct democracies, where the citizens would vote on every decision directly (19). By contrast, Alexander Hamilton, another founding father, supported the establishment of a representative democracy, which would still bestow sovereignty upon the citizens, but their will would be carried out by elected officials (20). This is the system that is in place today. When someone mentions the word democracy, it is therefore of utmost importance to clarify whether one refers to a direct democracy or a representative democracy. The USA can be described as a constitutional republic, but also as a representative democracy. Unfortunately, Democrats and Republicans argue over this topic

because they talk about two different concepts. When they say the word democracy, Democrats usually mean a representative democracy, and Republicans mean a direct democracy. Just as with disagreements about the terms gender and woke, constructive discussions are thus doomed to fail.

Charlie Kirk displays a narrow understanding of democracy in the videos. This quote elucidates what he thinks a democracy constitutes:

So, a democracy is simple majoritarianism. So, let me give you an example: In a democracy by up or down vote you could say I wanna enslave Black people. A constitutional republic says: No, you're gonna have to go through a process to do that. [...] The Founding Fathers knew [the will of the people] could almost assuredly be wrong, right? So, the system of a republic vs. a democracy is it has to be slow and arduous and intentional because it has a preference on liberty, not on free stuff. [...] If it was just a democracy it would be an up or down vote on every single person and that's it. (*Charlie Kirk: "Toxic Liberal"*)

Kirk goes on to talk about the ancient Athenian system and defends the electoral college and state laws since they also give less populous U.S. states a voice (*Charlie Kirk: "Toxic Liberal"*). He therefore argues against direct democracies and the centralization of power, but not against representative democracies. In another video, he states, "We are not a democracy. A democracy inherently means the centralization of power. A constitutional republic respects the decentralization of power" (*Charlie Kirk: "Myth The USA is a Democracy"*). Then he goes on to explain why a direct democracy would not work in the USA. The reaction of the audience is fascinating when he says, "We are not a democracy." Half of them immediately start clapping and chanting "Yeah!" (*Charlie Kirk: "Myth The USA is a Democracy"*). Charlie Kirk and his followers might be intrigued to learn that Austria proudly calls itself both a democracy and a republic even though it operates based on a strong constitution and partly decentralizes power to its nine provinces. Even former U.S. presidents held democratic systems in high regard. In his famous 1988 State of the Union Address, Ronald Reagan promoted the spread of democracy around the world (Ronald Reagan Presidential Library). In a 2004 speech in Turkey, George W. Bush extols the values of democracy (U.S. Department of State). Both were Republican presidents. Joe Biden even employed the word democracy eleven times in his inaugural address when he was sworn in as the 46th president of the United States (Rattner).

A genuine misunderstanding by Charlie Kirk appears unlikely. His disregard for the term democracy is probably a strategy to discredit the Democratic Party. In the same vein, Kirk's vocal affirmation that the USA is a constitutional republic might stem from the fact that he supports the Republican Party. A more dangerous hidden agenda might also be at play. If Charlie Kirk

and his team succeed in giving the words ‘democracy’ and ‘democratic’ a universally negative connotation, they will find it easier to denounce democratic processes and thus pave the way for more authoritarian rule in the USA.

15. Conclusion

The results of my analysis enable me to answer all of my research questions.

Question 1. Based on the classifications of Gorski and Perry, Whitehead, and Whitehead and Perry, which characteristics of Christian nationalism are promoted by Charlie Kirk on *YouTube* and which are rejected?

Hypothesis 1: In the selected *YouTube* videos, Charlie Kirk supports every principle indicative of Christian nationalism.

In the videos, Charlie Kirk promotes almost all of the characteristics of Christian nationalism. He

- affirms that the USA is a Christian nation even though the USA is not a nation state,
- employs an us-vs-them strategy,
- takes the Bible literally,
- warns his audience that Democrats and ‘the woke’ would destroy Christian America,
- vigorously defends Trump’s transgressions and likens him to Biblical figures,
- abhors ideas aimed at regulating the free market,
- and tries to invoke fear in his audience.

Regarding his Christian faith, Kirk requires more of his fellow believers than just fidelity to God. From his perspective, the characteristics that good Christians should strive for are adherence to the Ten Commandments, peace, humility, gratitude, and support for Trump. He never talks about helping others in need; instead, a Christian should take responsibility for oneself and not harm others. Notably, Kirk does not call for violence, as would otherwise be expected by Christian nationalists. On the contrary, he condemns those who are violent and downplays the violence committed by Trump supporters. Nevertheless, there is significant overlap between what Charlie Kirk says in his videos and the characteristics of Christian nationalism. He can therefore be classified as a Christian nationalist.

2. Which of the statements uttered by Charlie Kirk in the *YouTube* videos that are analyzed are untrue or misleading?

Many of Charlie Kirk's statements are misleading, exaggerated, and refer to the future or to hypothetical situations. When he utters something that is untrue, it is difficult to spot because the inaccuracies are part of a bigger argument that is based on facts. Sometimes he plays with the meanings of words because defending his opinions is easier if it is not entirely clear what he means in detail. He uses detailed information, for example, concrete numbers, Bible verses, or highly specific concepts to convince his audience and those who debate him. Those details might not always be true, but as soon as they have achieved the goal of helping to win a debate, the details are forgotten, and the general message remains. Of course, he also utters many true statements. He is not an obvious liar, like Donald Trump. Kirk might actually believe what he says and happens to confuse the details, when he puts forth his arguments. For the sake of clarity, here is again a selection of misleading or untrue statements of Kirk that have been discussed in the master's thesis:

- “You cannot have liberty if you do not have a Christian population”.
- “55 out of 56 original signers of the declaration were Bible believing church attending Christians”.
- “It’s hard to believe all that is an act of the dice. And that is what evolution contests. [...] It would be like rolling snake-eyes 23 billion times in a row”.
- Abortion means “human beings that are alive that are being killed”.
- He describes Donald Trump as the “peace president”.
- If we started raising taxes on rich people, then tax rates would become higher and higher until rich people would have no money that could be taxed.
- Under a hypothetical President Kamala Harris “You will starve”.
- The USA is not a democracy.

3. To what degree does Charlie Kirk's audience agree with his views, as expressed in the *YouTube* comments?

H2: Charlie Kirk's views are generally endorsed by the top comments accompanying his *YouTube* videos.

Hypothesis 2 is clearly correct, but I did not expect this extremely high level of agreement between Charlie Kirk and those who commented on his videos. The top comments are always in line with the opinions of Charlie Kirk. Discussions are rare, and there is only one video, under which some expressed doubts about Kirk's worldview, which is the one about evolution. (*Charlie Kirk*: “I Help College Students”). I do not know whether his audience is that

homogeneous in terms of their worldview or if unwanted comments are deleted by Charlie Kirk's editors.

16. Charlie Kirk's legacy

Charlie Kirk had tremendous political influence, so news outlets around the world reported his sudden passing. The memorial service dedicated to him was held in a large stadium in Arizona, where Christian bands praised Jesus Christ, and politicians, as well as people close to him, gave their eulogies. During the event JD Vance said, "He was a critical part of getting Donald Trump elected as president, getting me elected as Vice President" (*Charlie Kirk: "LIVE NOW: Building A Legacy"*). Donald Trump concluded the event with his 40-minute eulogy, in which he called him "a martyr for American freedom," "a great American hero," and "a juggernaut of American politics" (*Charlie Kirk: "LIVE NOW: Building A Legacy"*). Erika Kirk, his widow, also commemorated him and announced that she succeeded her husband as CEO of Turning Point USA. However, Charlie's death did not strengthen the political right's union. Some now suspect that Erika Kirk was merely acting during her eulogy and hiding her true feelings. One of the most famous conservative commentators online, Candace Owens, became one of the staunchest critics of those who inherited Charlie Kirk's legacy and accused them of having ulterior motives and profiting off his death. Charlie Kirk's *YouTube* channel was inherited by Andrew Kolvet and Blake Neff, two longtime confidants of Kirk, and it is still running at the time of writing. At the beginning, the audience supported the continuation of the channel so that Charlie Kirk's legacy would live on, but over time, criticism, disagreements, or even outrage directed at the two have been increasing in the comments section (Figure 12).



Figure 12: Some people are not happy that Kirk's channel is still running (*Charlie Kirk: "Is Joe Kent"*)

Kolvett and Neff are called “traitors” in one comment, and another viewer accuses them of spreading their own ideas in the name of Charlie Kirk. Many more seem to share this sentiment because viewer numbers are dwindling.

Charlie Kirk’s most significant achievement, which continues to have an impact today, is helping Donald Trump get elected President of the United States. But some critical promises he made during his campaigning effort do not comport with the policies of Trump’s second presidency. More than once, he called Donald Trump a “peace president” and promised no new wars under his leadership (*Charlie Kirk*: “Socialist Hippie”; “I Get Anti-Trumper”). By contrast, the United States Department of Defense was renamed as the United States Department of War. Trump threatened to take over Greenland and Cuba by force, had the Venezuelan president kidnapped by means of a military intervention, and, most consequential of all, started a war against Iran together with Israel. In hindsight, it sounds unbelievable that Charlie Kirk wrote the following lines about Trump, which are part of his book *The MAGA Doctrine* from the year 2020:

Trump resists constant calls for more military interventions around the world. (33)

The MAGA Doctrine, far from urging belligerence against other nations, recommends recognizing the limitations of our knowledge of other cultures and thus refraining from trying to control them. (47)

They can’t admit we have one of the most peace-loving presidents in recent American history on our side now. (82)

The willingness of, for example, generations of the elite to fight those devastating wars over oil-rich regions is a perverse side effect of the mingling of private interests and public power. (100)

If he [Trump] were enamored of power or attention for its own sake, rather than justice, wouldn’t he delight in declaring more wars? (124)

Charlie Kirk either completely misjudged Trump’s true character and intentions or was deceived himself. Worse, Kirk might even have known that what he was writing was wrong, but he did it anyway to garner support for Trump. Apart from heralding the “peace president,” Charlie Kirk also promised that Trump would fight for Christians and God in America. Trump, on the other hand, does not seem to perceive himself as a tool used for God’s will but rather believes he IS God. In April 2026, the President posted an AI-generated image on Truth Social depicting himself as Jesus Christ (Figure 13). The image shows Trump wearing a white tunic and a red cloak. Light emanates from his hands, and he has placed one hand on an elderly person who seems to be lying on his sickbed. The scene is reminiscent of the Biblical stories in which Jesus Christ heals the sick through the laying on of hands. On the left a woman is praying, and in the

background angelic beings are descending from heaven. The image also establishes a clear connection between Christianity and the USA. In addition to all the religious symbols, there are the American flag, the Statue of Liberty, the Lincoln Memorial, a man wearing a military uniform, and eagles as well as fighter jets are flying around.



Figure 13: The AI image that Trump posted of himself on Truth Social (Debusmann)

Charlie Kirk was an exceptional conservative influencer. He had an impact on millions of people, was a convincing debater, and did not shy away from using slander and half-truths to achieve his aims. His efforts and unconditional loyalty to Donald Trump helped the Republican Party to assume power once more. He was revered by Trump supporters, reviled by many others, and further divided the American public with his content online. The organizations and online channels he created still affect the political climate in the USA, but he left behind a tainted legacy. Due to his influence, Charlie Kirk was needlessly murdered. Political violence should never be the solution, even if disagreements abound, as violence only generates further violence.

This master's thesis provided only a glimpse of Christian nationalism online. Further studies could explore Charlie Kirk's social media presence on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X. It

would also be interesting to more thoroughly analyze the changes that his *YouTube* account underwent after his passing. Andrew Kolvet and Blake Neff, the current hosts of his channel, may spread ideas that Kirk would have disagreed with. Other conservative influencers are also worthy of academic attention as they attract millions of subscribers and leave their mark on American politics, for example Tucker Carlson, Candace Owens, or Benny Johnson. They, too, could be propagating Christian nationalism. Lastly, the rhetoric of Christian nationalists and conservatives may have changed after Donald Trump was elected President for the second time. Political influencers may have been more vocal about Christian nationalism before the election to mobilize support for Donald Trump.

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Use of Artificial Intelligence

For this master’s thesis, I used the program ChatGPT as a thesaurus and sometimes as a style assistant. Almost all expressions and formulations are my own. The content and the arguments in this thesis originated in my brain, and ideas that are not mine are marked with in-text citations. ChatGPT also helped me to find specialized sources more quickly, which I needed to fact-check some of Charlie Kirk’s statements.

Abstract

Christian nationalism exerts profound influence on American politics. Its proponents believe the USA was founded on Christian principles, Christians should be dominant in society, and only Christians can be true Americans. In accordance with Donald Trump's rise to power, Christian nationalism has increased in strength as well, and to the followers of this ideology, the struggle for supremacy takes precedence over loving your neighbor. Christian nationalism is right-wing in nature, goes beyond conservatism and is propagated through populist strategies to an already polarized American society. This master's thesis demonstrates how Charlie Kirk, who had been one of the most successful Trump supporters before he was assassinated, spread Christian nationalist ideas on his official *YouTube* channel. I analyzed the verbal and non-verbal content of 122 videos that were uploaded in the run-up to the United States Presidential Election of 2024 to determine whether Charlie Kirk promotes a worldview which is in line with Christian nationalism. I also fact-checked many of his contentious remarks and investigated the level of agreement between Charlie Kirk and his audience through an examination of the *YouTube* comments. The results show that he advocates almost all of the principles of Christian nationalism, he employs populist strategies to advance his agenda, and, in terms of worldview, the comments section is strikingly homogeneous.

Zusammenfassung

Der christliche Nationalismus übt einen tiefgreifenden Einfluss auf die amerikanische Politik aus. Seine Anhänger sind der Ansicht, dass die USA auf christlichen Prinzipien gegründet wurden, Christen in der Gesellschaft dominieren sollten und nur Christen wahre Amerikaner sein können. Parallel zum politischen Aufstieg Donald Trumps gewann auch der christliche Nationalismus zunehmend an Stärke und für die Anhänger dieser Ideologie hat der Kampf um Vorherrschaft Vorrang vor dem Gebot der Nächstenliebe. Der christliche Nationalismus ist verbunden mit rechter Politik, geht über den Konservatismus hinaus und wird mithilfe populistischer Strategien in einer bereits polarisierten amerikanischen Gesellschaft verbreitet.

Diese Masterarbeit zeigt, wie Charlie Kirk, der vor seiner Ermordung zu den erfolgreichsten Unterstützern Donald Trumps gehörte, christlich-nationalistische Ideen auf seinem offiziellen YouTube-Kanal verbreitet hat. Zu diesem Zweck habe ich den verbalen und non-verbalen Inhalt von 122 Videos, die im Vorfeld der Präsidentschaftswahl in den USA im Jahr 2024 hochgeladen wurden, untersucht, um festzustellen, ob Charlie Kirk ein Weltbild propagiert, das mit dem christlichen Nationalismus vereinbar ist. Darüber hinaus habe ich viele seiner Aussagen auf ihren Wahrheitsgehalt überprüft und ich habe anhand der YouTube-Kommentare den Grad der Übereinstimmung zwischen Charlie Kirk und seinem Publikum untersucht. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass er nahezu alle Prinzipien des christlichen Nationalismus vertritt, populistische Strategien einsetzt, um seine Agenda voranzutreiben, und dass der Kommentarbereich hinsichtlich des vertretenen Weltbildes auffallend homogen ist.