Using Positive and Negative Peace Theory To Analyse the American "Culture Wars" During the Trump Era

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Abstract

This thesis proposes that Johan Galtung's theory of positive and negative peace will gain relevance and applicability in contexts of non-armed societal conflicts like the Trump-era culture wars when the theory is adapted to take into account not only dynamics such as violence, but also felt threat.

In this project, I reviewed the academic literature on culture war and sociopolitical polarization in the United States, as well as the literature on Galtung's theory. I then adapted positive and negative peace theory to take into account conflict dynamics rising from felt threat, which I argue makes Galtung's theory more applicable to conflicts where violence is invisible, contested or difficult to ascertain. I tested this version of Galtung's theory through 20 exploratory, qualitative interviews with American liberal and conservative partisans. These interviews resulted in a typology of various a) visions of positive and negative peace in the Trump-era culture wars, b) strategies partisans use to achieve them and c) preferences for specific types of peace. These results are discussed regarding their relevance to the field and their contribution to the academic literature.

Keywords: positive and negative peace, culture war, sociopolitical polarization, Donald Trump, peacebuilding.

Acknowledgements

Like any large project, this thesis would never have gotten off the ground without a team of people behind the researcher. Foremost among these is my supervisor, Enkelejda Sula Raxhimi, who suggested that I not settle for a theoretical thesis, but also try my hand at qualitative interviews. She was even busier than I was but nevertheless helped me complete the project on deadline. I am grateful for the support from all the professors I encountered during my time at Saint Paul University, who heroically made the transition online during the pandemic and embarked with us on what turned out to be an interesting experiment in online communication, exchange and learning. Most of all, I would like to thank the interviewees who took time to sit down with me and share not only their ideas about peace, but their stories, struggles and sometimes even tears – the culture wars in the United States have divided many communities and families, and I hope with this thesis to help address such divides.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to delays in the project, delays which were exacerbated by my involvement in peacebuilding projects in Russia and Ukraine prior to and following the full-scale invasion, which demanded much of my attention in 2022-2023. I am grateful to my supervisor, the academic advisor for graduate studies at Saint Paul University (who also endured my frequent questions) and other members of the faculty of conflict studies for their understanding and encouragement during this challenging time.

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Introduction

Context and research problem

Growing concern over a current wave of socio-cultural polarization dividing societies worldwide has highlighted the need to study the nature and impact of non-armed societal conflicts (Carothers and O'Donohue, 2019). These include disputes between polarised social groups that have not escalated to mass or systemic direct violence but are nevertheless thought to exacerbate trends such as mass unrest, outgroup hatred or the erosion of democratic norms seen as central to violence prevention (Ramsbotham et al., 2016; Turan, 2015). As a peacebuilder and dialogue facilitator working in contexts of armed as well as non-armed conflicts, I have long been interested in how tools and frameworks developed in the fields of peace and conflict studies (PACS) and peacebuilding, such as Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung's theory of positive and negative peace, may prove useful when working to understand and respond to non-armed, societal conflicts.

One example of this type of conflict are the so-called culture wars of the United States (Hunter, 1991). The term *culture war* refers to clusters of ideologically-driven societal conflicts, usually lacking instances of prolonged direct violence, over competing normative frameworks involving public ideals, values, morality and historical narratives. Of primary importance in the study of culture wars are the ways in which these frameworks are established, promoted or transmitted through social institutions or public discourse (Hunter, 2006; Jacoby, 2014; Hartman, 2019). In the United States, the term is especially associated with value-based conflicts between liberal and

conservative groups in the 1990s (Hunter, 1991), but it has also been used to describe similar societal disputes in the 1960s (Hartman, 2019) as well as those following the 2016 election of Donald Trump to the American presidency (Campbell and Manning, 2018; Abramowitz and McCoy, 2019; Jones, 2021).

Scholars have noted that America's culture wars have been both a result of and a reinforcer of acute sociopolitical polarization, particularly between groups identifying themselves using ideological markers like *liberal/progressive* and *conservative/traditional* or political affiliations like *Democrat* and *Republican* (Greene, 2004, p. 141; Mason, 2018; Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018b). Research suggests that as these binary categories have become more socially and politically salient, the number of political moderates have declined, intergroup dialogue has decreased and communication between these two groups becomes increasingly less common (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Cleven et al., 2018). In other words, "the other side becomes more 'other,' more alien, and understanding the other side is harder to imagine" (Cleven et al., 2018, p. 54).

The effects of this intensifying sociopolitical polarization in the United States are well documented. The likelihood that negative stereotypes are held by one side about the other has increased by 50 percent from the 1960s to the 2010s (Iyengar et al., 2012, p. 420). Heightened polarization has led partisans to express increased outgroup hostility, emotional volatility and bias against the other side (Mason, 2013). Additionally, political or ideological polarization among partisans can influence factors as varied as friendship, purchasing patterns, job hiring, salary negotiations, pre-COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and economic decision-making (Iyengar

and Krupenkin, 2018b). This polarization has also been linked with legislative stalemates in Washington D.C., a decreased willingness for political parties to be open to compromise and bipartisanship, greater difficulties with regards to living with increasingly diverse populations, higher degrees of self-censorship or withdrawal from politics, decreased intergroup trust and increased feelings of insecurity or threat (Cleven et al., 2018). Over the course of studying these and related factors, some researchers have gone so far as to posit that polarization along political and ideological lines has become, in the United States and certain other nations in the Global North, the "most significant fault line in the second decade of the 21st Century [...] not race, religion or economic status" (Iyengar et al., 2018, p. 2; Westwood et al., 2017).

These studies have been complemented by literature produced by think tanks, public intellectuals and journalists who have expressed concern with the impact of polarization, specifically during the years of the Trump administration. According to a study conducted jointly by the Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI) and *The Atlantic* (2019), not only do an increasing number of US citizens avoid people who hold different political stances, almost 1 in 5 respondents react to such encounters negatively. What's more, the PRRI study reported that 45 percent of couples identifying as Democrats and 35 percent identifying as Republicans would disapprove if their children married across political lines (PRRI, 2019), a trend confirmed by the academic literature (Iyengar et al., 2018). Peacebuilding scholars and practitioners have long identified such trends as signs indicating the dehumanisation of salient outgroups, which can lead to conflict and, in some cases, potentially to widespread direct violence (Ramsbotham et al., 2016; Rupar et al., 2022). Corroborating academic claims of the culture wars' new salience, reports released by the Pew Research Center (Gramlich, 2017; Schaeffer, 2020) have suggested that more Americans

claim that partisan conflicts are stronger than conflicts based on other societally contentious markers such as race, gender or class, a divide that grew even more pronounced over the final two years of the Trump presidency.

While much attention in the sociological and political science literature has been paid to the effects of conflicts resulting from American sociopolitical polarization, less attention is paid to this context within the fields of peacebuilding and PACS (Schirch, 2021; Burgess et al., 2022; Menkel-Meadow, 2022). This amounts to a gap in how related theories and tools from a multidisciplinary perspective are understood and applied in such contexts, one that I claim extends to Galtung's theory of positive and negative peace.

In the scholarly literature on peacebuilding and violent conflict, Galtung's theory draws a distinction between *negative peace*, the absence of violence, and *positive peace*, the presence of factors that lead to peaceful, thriving societies (Galtung, 1969, 2013). Both effectively describe a desired end state to a conflict, which I refer to in this project as a *vision of peace*. His theory has since gone on to greatly influence peacebuilding and PACS as a whole (Sharp, 2020). When applied to the field, it has been used to (a) classify potential end states to a given conflict, such as ceasefires or societal reconciliation, which have been described as examples of negative and positive peace respectively (Clark, 2009; Ramsbotham et al., 2016), (b) distinguish types of interventions aimed at generating a particular type of peace (Roberts, 2008; Christie et al., 2008; Standish et al., 2022) or (c) better understand how types of peace interact with and impact other social phenomena, such as pandemic preparedness or the coordination of international peace interventions (Richmond, 2015; Syropoulos et al., 2021).

However, while these three main uses may all be observed in contexts of armed conflict, only the third has been applied in the academic literature to non-armed societal conflicts like those in the United States (Institute for Economics and Peace [IEP], 2022). This amounts to an inconsistent application of Galtung's theory to this type of conflict, which represents a lack of attention paid to culture war-type conflicts within the fields of PACS and peacebuilding.

For these reasons, I identified (a) the divisive effects of culture wars and increased socio-political polarization in the United States during the Trump Administration and (b) gaps in the application of tools and frameworks from the fields of conflict resolution and peacebuilding to such conflicts as two research problems that I sought to address in this master's level thesis.

The aims of this project

To address these issues, I sought in this thesis to examine how, on a theoretical level, Galtung's theory of positive and negative peace might be adapted to better address non-armed societal conflicts like the American culture wars during the Trump era; following this I explored what insights the theory could generate when directly applied in this context. I did so by first reviewing the academic literature on culture war and sociopolitical polarization – these two branches of literature were used primarily to familiarise readers with the context of the conflict in question (and not to provide a theoretical lens through which to analyse the results of this thesis). I then reviewed the literature on positive and negative peace and outlined an expansion to the theory that not only takes into account dynamics of violence, which Galtung (1969, 2013) typically frames as a root cause of conflict, but also those of perceived threat, which I argue

better facilitates the application of Galtung's theory to contexts like culture war. This represents the core of my thesis and forms the theoretical framework through which I interpreted the results of 20 semi-structured, exploratory interviews.

I conducted these interviews with American citizens spread across the conservative-liberal spectrum, using this expanded version of Galtung's theory to explore and analyse (a) how participants understood positive and negative peace during the Trump-era culture wars, (b) the strategies they used to work towards a specific vision of peace and (c) respondents' preferences for one or the other type of peace. While a sample size of 20 interviews may not provide a comprehensive answer to these three points, I aimed to conduct a preliminary exploration of positive and negative peace theory's relevance in this context and see what potential insights such an exploratory approach could produce.

Analysing the data produced by these interviews, I sought to find patterns that I could use to build a typology of these visions, strategies and preferences for peace described by participants.. After doing so, I suggest ways how a preliminary typology such as this could be applied in the field, what it may contribute to the academic literature, and what further steps can be taken to further develop similar tools. These findings, although exploratory as they are, indicate that Galtung's theory allows for greater comprehension of culture war dynamics during the Trump era and provide a basis upon which to conduct further research into the theory's use on the ground.

Project relevance

Given the central place positive and negative peace theory in PACS and peacebuilding, particularly with its track record as an effective tool for conducting conflict analysis and planning interventions in contexts of armed conflict (Christie et al., 2008; Ramsbotham et al., 2016; IEP, 2022), increased attention to how Galtung's theory can be used in contexts of culture war may open new avenues to understand and respond to this type of dispute. Practitioners, researchers and policy makers may also be interested in how peacebuilding tools can be used to address non-armed societal conflicts, which are increasingly framed not merely as a prior phase to violent conflict, but as an independent phenomenon with its own traits, dynamics and trajectories (Turan, 2015).

I originally chose to apply Galtung's theory to the Trump-era American culture wars due to the increased attention this conflict received following a surge in American sociopolitical polarization that was attributed in some academic and popular literature to the election of Trump to the presidency (Pew Research Center, 2016a; Campbell and Manning, 2018; Abramowitz, 2021). As the Trump era concluded relatively recently, with Trump having left office in early 2021, I had hoped with this project to contribute to emerging efforts to understand this deeply divisive period in American sociopolitical life. However, during the research process I encountered a robust literature confirming that intensifying polarization and culture war dynamics predated the Trump presidency, but were certainly exacerbated by it (Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2018; Rozado, 2022).

As I locate the American culture wars within a context of increasing ideological polarization globally (Carothers and O'Donohue, 2019), I hope that the results generated by this project may be of use to comparative research conducted elsewhere, particularly in my home country of Canada, where similar polarization dynamics have already been observed (Merkeley, 2023).

Project structure

The thesis is composed of five chapters. The first details the methodological approaches and methods applied to the theoretical and qualitative aspects of this project. In the second and third chapters, a review of the academic literature on culture war and sociopolitical polarization respectively, paints a picture of the context to which I applied Galtung's theory. The fourth chapter presents the literature on positive and negative peace and proposes an expansion of Galtung's theory that I argue facilitates its application to the Trump-era culture wars. The fifth chapter presents the findings of the 20 semi-structured, exploratory interviews conducted in late 2022 and early 2023. The findings explore how respondents described (a) the visions of positive and negative peace they encountered in the culture wars, (b) the strategies used to achieve them and (c) their preferences for one or the other type of peace. This was followed by a discussion of how these findings may be applied in the field, as well as what they contribute to the literature. Lastly, the conclusion addresses the limitations of this project and points toward areas for future research.

Chapter One: Methodology

Research approach

In this project, I used a qualitative research approach to test my hypothesis and address the research questions. The thesis can be divided into three parts, each with a different methodological approach. First, I reviewed the existing academic literature and created an outline of the conflict context, which led to the writing of the two chapters on culture war and sociopolitical polarization in the United States. I opted to review these two branches of literature as the former gives an overview of the conflict context, especially regarding the groups involved, what they fight over, and various actors' self-described motivations, while the latter explores well-documented social and psychological phenomena that underlie and exacerbate the conflict dynamics in question. Combined, both chapters provide the situational context necessary to engage with the topic under study.

Second, I provided a theoretical discussion of Galtung's theory of positive and negative peace, which amounts to a review of the relevant literature, with particular attention paid to the evolution of this theory, how it was applied in different contexts and in what ways various scholars and practitioners expanded on Galtung's original idea. I then outlined how this theory allows for discussion of visions of peace and the strategies used to achieve them, as well as outlined various preferences for either type of peace present in the academic literature. I then outline limitations in Galtung's theory and present my own expansion that accounts not only for conflict dynamics rising from instances of violence but also those of felt threat. As compared to the chapters on culture war and sociopolitical polarization, which describe the conflict context,

this chapter outlines a theoretical framework which I applied in the final section of the thesis in order to arrange, discuss and explore the potential implications of my results.

Third, I conducted 20 in-depth, semi-structured and exploratory interviews with individuals defined as strong and weak partisans on the political right and left, categories that were drawn from the discussion of conflict-affected actors in chapter two. On the basis of interviewee responses, I arranged the results into a typology of (a) six unique types of negative peace and four types of positive peace that participants observed during the Trump era culture wars; (b) nine types of strategies that work towards negative peace and nine strategies that work towards positive peace; and (c) six sets of reasons for preferring negative peace and three for positive peace. I then highlight certain dynamics that emerged in the data and discuss their implications for the field. While the results of these interviews remain exploratory in nature and thus cannot speak conclusively about the groups in question, they nevertheless put into practice the theoretical framework discussed prior in the thesis. I intend on continuing to refine these categories and insights, and I hope they will contribute to the beginnings of a framework that could assist researchers, practitioners or policy makers to use Galtung's theory as a tool to better understand and respond to non-armed societal conflicts like American culture wars.

Research questions and hypotheses

The main research question: what new insights and affordances can be generated by using positive and negative peace theory to analyse non-armed societal conflicts like American culture wars during the Trump era?

While designing this project's research approach, I hoped to answer this question by addressing various sub-questions, including: (a) how could Galtung's original theory be adapted to increase its applicability when analysing the Trump-era culture wars, and non-armed societal conflicts more generally? (b) What types of positive or negative peace did they identify during the Trump era? (c) What strategies did they see as contributing to various types of peace? (d) What were respondent preferences for one or the other type of peace? These sub-questions were used to develop an interview guide composed of six questions, which is included in Appendix A.

I postulated that positive and negative peace theory would prove useful for analysing and designing interventions in response to culture war after adapting the theory so that its traditional focus on *violence* would be broadened to include a focus on *felt threat*, a shift which will be discussed at length in chapter five. I also hypothesised that analysing the culture wars through this lens would result in a typology of visions of peace, along with related strategies and motivations for pursuing them.

Participant recruitment and categorization

In order to answer these questions and test the hypotheses, I initially limited my potential recruitment pool to those who were involved in various political, societal or cultural activities during the Trump era, which includes not only the years of the Trump administration, but also the lead-up to the 2016 election following Trump's declaration to seek the Republican candidacy (2015-2021).

Originally, I planned only to interview liberal and conservative activists for this project. Following Webster (2018), I defined activists as individuals who engage in activities such as attending rallies, speaking about politics, displaying signs or stickers supporting their preferred party, causes or candidates, working (officially or as a volunteer) to forward a social or political cause, donating or organising donations for specific causes, contacting officials, signing petitions and others. Over the course of the interview process, however, I decided to open up the participant pool to include non-activist respondents to further diversify my results.

My work as a peacebuilding practitioner in North America has given me access to communities across the political spectrum from which I recruited participants. The initial interviewees were recruited using three strategies: (a) recommendations from a pool of activist and partisan contacts in my possession, (b) an open call within social media communities (Facebook, Telegram, WhatsApp) frequented by liberals or conservatives, and (c) cold emails to representatives of partisan organisations whose contact information were publicly available. Organisations and groups contacted include members of the Beautiful/Anonymous podcast Facebook group, Dappled Things Magazine, campus branches of organisations like Our Revolution and Turning Point USA as well as the International Student Festival in Trondheim (ISFiT) 2023, which hosted a project bringing together young American partisans for dialogue.

Once these first exploratory interviews were collected, other participants were identified and recruited using the snowball technique, which allowed me to randomly recruit new participants from within the social circles of previous interviewees. This allowed me, once I made initial

inroads into liberal and conservative communities online, to find new recruits among my target audiences.

I interviewed 20 people across the conservative-liberal spectrum, taking care to include responses equally from both sides. My initial plan was to simply recruit 10 liberal and 10 conservative interviewees and classify their responses as such. However, while conducting research for the literature review, I encountered various sub-groups among the liberals and conservatives interviewed – positions identified by the interviewees themselves – that responded very differently to culture war dynamics. These self-identification brought a lot of richness and nuance compared to the relatively rigid categories provided by the theoretical framework. These sub-groups could be considered along two additional axes: (a) partisan strength (weak, moderate, strong or strongest partisan) and (b) whether liberals expressed views associated with *woke liberal politics*, which are discussed in chapter two. Additionally, one right-leaning libertarian (see discussion in chapter two) participant was included among the conservative respondent pool. Again, I would like to point out the fact that these subcategories emerged through my analysis of participant self-identification in response to the first question of the interview guide I used to conduct the interviews (see Appendix A), which asked respondents to position themselves regarding the Trump-era culture wars.

To that end, I included these subcategories in Figure 1 below, alongside the broader liberal and conservative categories that originally informed my research design. I note them not because participant numbers within each subcategory are large enough to prove representative of these groups, but to express nuances found in the data that generated insights that I will explore in my

analysis chapter. These nuances may also prove a useful base upon which to plan future research. Furthermore, respondents stated that the acknowledgement of these subcategories facilitated a greater sense of trust and comfort with the research process, as they allowed for greater self-expression and reflection of nuance.

Liberal				**Conservative**	
Weak Liberals			2	Weak Conservatives	3
				Right-Leaning Libertarian	1
Moderate Woke Liberals	3	Moderate Non-Woke Liberals	1	Moderate Conservatives	3
Strong Woke Liberals	2	Strong Non-Woke Liberals	1	Strong Conservatives	2
Strongest Liberal			1	Strongest Conservative	1
Total			10	**Total**	10

Fig 1. Participant Breakdown by Ideological Categorization

The results of the interviews will be presented with respect to the various groups mentioned in Fig. 1, which will be key to the discussion presented in chapter five. Additional information on participant demographics can be found in Appendix B.

Data collection and analysis

To conduct these exploratory interviews, I used a questionnaire (included in Appendix A) as a guide, which formed the basis of 20 open-ended – though still semi-structured – in-depth, exploratory interviews in which I gathered data on how liberal and conservative communities framed positive and negative peace in the context of the Trump-era American culture wars. I aimed for a duration of 60 minutes per interview but, given the exploratory nature of these sessions, some participants opted for interviews of up to two hours. This was dependent on

participant availability and willingness to discuss these issues at length. I conducted all the interviews myself. Every participant was required to give written consent to being interviewed, as defined in the consent form approved by the university's Ethics Committee (included in Appendix C). All participants gave their consent to participate.

The questionnaire was composed of six questions and was preceded by a short introduction in which I described the project's aims as well as the definition of key terms such as "vision of peace," "positive peace" and "negative peace." The description of these terms is based on the theoretical work presented in chapter four of this thesis. Participants were then asked to confirm their comprehension of the distinction between positive and negative peace by listing examples.

The first question asked participants to position themselves on the conservative-liberal spectrum with regards to the Trump-era culture wars. The second, third and fourth questions asked them to identify (a) their preferred vision of peace, (b) their preferred strategies for achieving it and (c) their motivations for working towards preferred visions of peace. The fifth question asked participants to identify whether they perceived the election of Trump to the American presidency as having influenced their answers to the previous three questions[1]. The final question had participants describe whether they perceived any particular vision of peace, or strategy used to achieve it, as potentially unsafe, problematic, illegitimate or threatening to them or their community.

[1] This reflected the project's initial focus on Trump's impact on polarization and culture war. While the data generated by this question proved interesting, the amount of data generated by the other questions precluded the exploration of this data within the limited scope of a master's-level thesis.

Given the reality of a global pandemic, all the interviews were conducted via Zoom. All interviews but two were recorded in accordance with participant consent. I took extensive notes during the interviews, which formed the basis for transcripts that were then analysed by myself according to four overarching themes: (a) how the interviewees positioned themselves in the culture war, (b) the instances of positive and negative peace they observed in the context of the Trump-era culture wars, (c) strategies they deemed conducive to building positive or negative peace respectively and (d) respondent reasons for preferring either vision of peace. This led to the primary output of my research: a typology of (a) visions of positive and negative peace identified by participants, (b) various groupings of strategies thought to work towards them and (c) diverse categories of preferences for one or the other type of peace. These results are followed by a discussion of their relevance, how they can be applied to the field and what contribution they make to the literature.

Limits of this study

While these 20 exploratory interviewees provided a diverse and wide-ranging dataset, there are two influential groups that did not contribute data to the project: (a) the *alt-right* as well as explicitly *anti-immigration Republicans*, and (b) *far-left anarchist* or *anti-fascist ("antifa")* groups. While I hold that the current participant pool nevertheless provided enough data to begin addressing my research questions, this project holds no pretensions on providing insights into how strong or even extreme partisans would formulate visions of peace, related peacebuilding strategies as well as their preferences regarding both. Further work will need to be conducted to add the responses of highly polarised, even extreme, partisans.

Additionally, in this thesis I sought to learn more about how different groups present their visions, preferences and strategies of positive and negative peace. Therefore, I did not seek to confirm whether specific strategies indeed contribute to visions of peace in the ways that participants affirmed they did. Also, my ambition with this project was not to evaluate the success of such approaches, but instead better understand how participants perceive and conceive what peace looks like and how to build it. Furthermore, this project relies on respondent self-reports concerning preferences for peace and related strategies, and makes no claim to empirically confirm whether ingroup behaviour corresponds to the narratives shared by participants.

There are a number of other relevant academic spheres relevant to the American culture wars that were not surveyed by this project. For example, the literature on *intergroup contact* explores the circumstances under which ingroups and outgroups seek to create or minimise distance from each other, which may have substantial implications for understanding dynamics like willingness to engage in dialogue or preferences for positive and negative peace (Dixon et al., 2010; Wojcieszak and Warner 2020; Amsalem et al., 2022).

The main output of this thesis project is twofold: (a) a theoretical explanation and justification of my adaptation of positive and negative peace and (b) a typology of participant visions of peace, strategies used to work towards visions of peace and preferences for a particular vision, assembled from my interviews describing. The 20 exploratory interviews conducted are, as their name suggests, exploratory rather than conclusive in nature, and the typology generated is meant to provide an example of the data that could be generated by practitioners who apply Galtung's

theory in the field. I hope with this initial typology to contribute to a discussion about the different visions of peace that can emerge in a given context, as well as how they interact with each other. I expect that this typology will likely develop over time as I continue to refine it following the completion of this project.

This means, however, that this project is not structured in a way to make conclusive claims concerning the proportion of liberals, conservatives and the sub-groups that make up each group that support specific visions of positive and negative peace. Creating quantitative data concerning large-group preferences for visions of peace and their corresponding strategy would require a separate and differently-structured project.

Ethical considerations

The Trump-era culture wars have been described as an environment in which there was a high likelihood that partisans viewed political opponents and ideological outgroup members as enemies and would treat interactions as potential moments of threat (Mason, 2018; Aikin and Talisse, 2020). It has been noted within the field of PACS that such dynamics can prompt actors to feel unsafe and potentially trigger patterns of self-defence and hostile behaviour towards perceived sources of threat, especially when said threat is thought to challenge one's sense of collective identity and belonging (Rothman and Olsen, 2001; Saguy and Reifen-Tagar, 2022).

In such cases, it was paramount to develop a comfortable, positive atmosphere during interviews so that these instances of data collection would not trigger perceptions of threat or that I, the interviewer, sought to delegitimize participant discourses, narratives or worldviews. In highly polarised and volatile situations, these perceptions can be triggered even by well-intentioned but

improperly phrased questions. Some conflict-affected communities who experienced the Trump-era culture wars may perceive particular discourses as attempts to marginalise their identities or experiences, or they may even perceive that researchers, and the social sciences generally, promote biases against certain political communities and thus may not be invested in presenting their experiences accurately (Duarte et al., 2015; Haidt, 2012, 2016; Grossman and Hopkins, 2016). This could have led to a refusal to participate in the project entirely, and I sought to avoid generating these impressions over the course of this project. This is why I developed an interview guide using neutral language and why I have privileged an exploratory format allowing participants to frame their culture war-related activities, as well as their own identity markers, in a language that resonated with them. Conducting interviews with sensitivity to these dynamics was of the utmost importance not only for data collection, but also for building relationships with polarised communities in a time of anxiety, thus mitigating the potential emergence of tensions or perceived threats over the course of the interview process.

Another area of ethical concern highlighted by some participants involved whether taking a balanced, value-neutral approach to the study of culture war would legitimise opposing positions, strategies or visions of peace. These participants expressed concerns that this would result in the moral equation of each side's use of similar tactics, especially in contexts where power was seen by participants as imbalanced or conflict dynamics asymmetrical. Using my discretion and experience as a peacebuilder within the North American context, I responded to such questions in a variety of ways: (a) assuring that the description of strategies would not amount to moral equation, (b) discussing with participants the role of making legitimate moral claims vs. learning to understand conflict dynamics, as well as the benefits of either approach and how they could

support each other, (c) outlining the ways in which peacebuilding has historically responded to claims of problematic neutrality and (d) genuinely sharing my own motivations behind the project and expressing, when appropriate, my own convictions, my positionality as well as my doubts.

In addition, other ethical guidelines were implemented, such as a full disclaimer as to the purposes of the project as well as the collection of informed consent by means of a consent form sent to participants prior to the interviews. The consent form was vetted by the university's Ethics Committee and is included in Appendix C. Participants were informed about data conservation practices, including the storage of recordings, signed consent forms and interview transcripts on an encrypted key available only to myself and my academic supervisor, Dr. Enkelejda Sula-Raxhimi.

Following the completion of the thesis, and upon my return to Ottawa, Canada, the original copy of this data will be kept at the Saint Paul University campus during the full period of retention. Original and analysed data will be held there for five years, after which the data will be destroyed in a shredder (for paper copies) or permanently deleted (for digital data). Participants were also informed of their freedom to rescind their consent to participate at any time or could refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. If they chose to withdraw at any point in time, all the data gathered up to that moment (i.e., correspondence with myself, video recording and transcript of the interview) would be deleted. In cases where the participants indicated a desire to know the results of the project, I committed to send both a summary of my results as well as the final thesis project when completed.

Chapter Two: The Culture Wars During the Trump Era

The culture war thesis

The term culture war entered the academic lexicon with James Hunter's book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Control the Family, Art, Education, Law and Politics* (1991). While the term had been used loosely in the United States prior to Hunter's work (Washington Palladium, 1906; Oakland Tribune, 1942), he was the first sociologist to conduct a rigorous exploration, in the American context, of what he identified as "political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding… [aimed at] the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over others" (Hunter, 1991, p. 42). These conflicts, which he called "culture wars," had a number of unique features that distinguished them from other kinds of protracted disputes.

First, these conflicts were fought less over resources or political power than the dominance of competing normative frameworks involving public ideas, values, morality and historical narratives. They were over how people should live their lives, and thus concerned private and public morality as well as what was to be deemed socially acceptable. Key to this claim was that American culture had undergone a "realignment" that led to the development of two "sides" which vied in the 1990s for moral control (Hunter, 2006, p. 13). One side, the *traditionalists*, or conservatives, were thought to answer moral questions through appeals to objective, transcendent values, often religious ones. The other side were the *progressives*, or liberals, who framed moral decision-making as within the realm of subjective experience. Key to this conflict was that the values underlying the positions held on each side were seen as *non-negotiable*,

incentivizing a struggle in the public sphere over which values were to dominate over the other (Hunter, 2006).

Second, the controversial topics that fueled the 1990s culture wars were clustered into two overarching camps which, like the groups that held them, were subject to periodic realignment. These topics included moral questions such as abortion and homosexuality, historical questions such as the writing of history textbooks, religious questions such as school prayer and the separation of church and state, scientific questions of evolution and intelligence testing, cultural questions like the Western literary canon or foreign policy questions like the US role in Israel-Palestine (Hartman, 2019). Liberal and conservative groups had diverging approaches to these matters that developed into competing packages of moral answers to complex issues. Hunter (2006) noted that, in the past, such value-based conflicts were more likely to occur between religious traditions (i.e., Catholics vs. Protestants vs. Jews), but argued that a cultural realignment united the traditional members of these religions against progressives and their allies.

Third, culture wars are typically devoid of prolonged direct violence – there may indeed be instances of direct violence, but these are not usually systemic in nature (Hunter, 1991; Hartman, 2019). *Direct violence* is a term popularised by Johan Galtung that refers to physical attack, as compared to less visible conceptions of violence like what he calls “structural” or “cultural violence” (Galtung, 1969, p. 171; 1991). This will be further discussed in chapter four.

Fourth, of primary importance in the study of culture wars are the ways in which moral and value-based frameworks are established, promoted or transmitted through social institutions. These include schools, churches and unions, as well as spaces of public discourse like the media, popular culture and the arts (Hunter, 1991). Hunter claimed that these conflicts were not merely a matter of ideology, but were played out on the level of symbols, narratives, national myths and public conversations, and so each camp sought control of the institutions that shaped and maintained public culture (Hunter, 2006). Thus, a victory in the culture war could result in shifts in media narratives, changes in school curriculums, boycotts of films or books, shifts in perceptions of acceptable behaviour, legislative regulations of cultural organisations, new voting patterns or, ultimately, the public acceptance of values (Tessler, 2015; Hartman, 2019). This was thought to happen through large-scale mobilisation of polarised constituents (Barker et al., 2008, p. 310; Layman and Green, 2006), with or without the assistance of *moral entrepreneurs* (Cohen, 1973), which are prominent figures that seek to influence the moral decision-making processes of large communities. Hunter himself thought that polarised "culture warriors" only made up about 5-8 percent of the US population, but that their commitment to the cause enabled them to generate resources and organise in ways that belied their relatively small numbers (Hunter, 2006, p. 28).

A key question within culture war discourse was whether such disputes could lead to armed conflict. The literature on this question reflects mixed opinions. Hunter himself warned of this possibility in a book explicitly titled *Before the Shooting Begins* (1994), in which he claimed that while culture wars do not necessarily lead to armed conflict, competitive group-based armed conflicts are nevertheless often preceded by a culture war. Others have also deemed culture wars

a “form of fighting before the fighting begins,” one that would need to be addressed to avert potential tragedy (Rieff, 2006, p. 34). Some work has emphasised the ways violent, culture war-style metaphors in the media that describe outgroup members as enemies may encourage individuals with higher propensities to commit violence (“trait aggression”) to act on their impulses (Kalmoe, 2014, p. 548). But while such dynamics have indeed led to armed conflict abroad (Carothers and O’Donohue, 2019), there is no consensus over why this has not occurred yet in the United States and whether that country’s institutions are strong enough to withstand such impulses or, alternatively, are eroding to a dangerous extent (Kalmoe and Mason, 2018; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Westwood et al., 2022).

The evolution of culture war discourse

Though Hunter originally formulated the culture war thesis within a specific academic context, the term soon took a life of its own. On August 17th, 1992, talk show host and Republican presidential hopeful Pat Buchanan made his now famous “culture war speech” at the Republican National Convention, where he claimed: “There is a religious war going on in this country. It is a cultural war, as critical to the kind of nation we shall be as was the Cold War itself, for this war is for the soul of America” (Buchanan, 1992).

Following this, the term culture war entered the public consciousness as a colloquial way to describe struggles over abortion, school prayer, gay marriage and other controversial issues (Hartman, 2019). The term was especially used in socially conservative, evangelical circles where figures like Jerry Falwell linked increasing support for liberal values to conservative Christian persecution, contributing to the mobilisation of what is now called the Religious Right,

and potentially to Republican electoral successes in the mid-90s (Wolfe, 2006; Layman et al., 2006). This led to some backlash against the term itself, especially in liberal circles that associated the phrase with conservative activist strategies (Hartman, 2019). To this day, some left-leaning and liberal sources continue to view culture war discourse as primarily a conservative phenomenon rather than a bipartisan discussion of societal dynamics (Muste, 2014; Cammaerts, 2022).

That said, Hunter's original understanding of culture war is not without critics. The most prominent challengers of Hunter's ideas were Fiorina et al., who in their book *Culture War? The Myth of a Polarised America* (2004) claimed that the United States as a whole was far from polarised, not as susceptible to mobilisation along culture war issues and that these moral debates amounted to an inconsequential, if noisy, chapter in American cultural life that would recede with time. Some critics took a middle ground, such as Wolfe (2006), who claimed that the culture war existed but that it was "fought by partisans and ideologically inclined pundits [and did] not extend very deep into American opinion" (p. 42), with notable exceptions like abortion and gay marriage. Still other criticisms claimed that the term culture war itself was vague and imprecise (Bain, 2010, p. 3) or that it sensationalised societal conflicts by using metaphors derived from armed conflict, which was thought to be inappropriate (Muste, 2014, p. 439).

Regardless, the term remained a fixture in public discourse and evolved into a catch-all for disputes between societal factions over controversial social practices (Bain, 2010). It soon was used to describe Western influence in Arab countries (Wise, 2005), American trends in French film (Grantham, 2000) or moral issues in countries like Israel (Ben-Porat and Feniger, 2012),

Australia (Busbridge et al., 2020), Indonesia (Welker, 2021) or Poland (Bobrowicz and Nowak, 2021).

Debates on the term shifted in the 2000s from whether the culture wars existed into whether the culture wars *still* existed (Fiorina et al., 2004; Hunter, 2006; Wolfe, 2006), as public controversies over issues like the Western canon or school prayer faded from popular view, leaving only seemingly evergreen issues like abortion and especially gay rights on the table (Hartman, 2019). While potential reasons for this shift are currently understudied, some academic work suggests that this may be due to the shift of public attention to the War on Terror in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in New York, with issues like foreign policy and Islamophobia becoming increasingly salient (Giroux, 2005). Others claimed that liberals declared a "truce" and moved more to the political centre (Wolfe, 2006, p. 57), though this is contested by work theorising that, while conservatives "won" the struggle for public office and policy in the early 2000s, they nevertheless "lost" with regards to representation in popular culture, the dissemination of ingroup moral norms and influence on the social sciences (Himmelfarb, 2006, p. 75; Hartman, 2019).

This dynamic has been labelled a central paradox in the study of culture war in the United States: "America has moved to the right politically and at the same time it has moved to the left culturally" (Wolfe, 2006, p. 55)[2]. This led many conservatives to feel marginalised even following the election of George W. Bush to the presidency (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016). This state of affairs was particularly felt by social conservatives, for whom religious and cultural questions, like school prayer or the definition of marriage, were far more important than control

[2] See chapter four for more on this paradox in the literature on sociopolitical polarization.

of the White House, leaving many feeling marginalised or left behind even in an ostensibly Republican political climate (Dreher, 2017, 2020).

"The great awokening": Attitudes towards discrimination in the 2010s

While a number of scholars noted that many of the cultural tensions associated with the culture wars in the 1990s became less salient in the 2000s (Wolfe, 2006; George, 2009; Jacoby, 2014; Hartman, 2019), a relatively new discourse consolidated in the public sphere during the early 2010s that pushed for a mass shift in public values, dividing public intellectuals along different lines than the culture wars of the previous decades. This discourse would come to be referred to by the term *woke* in popular and academic literature (al-Gharbi, 2018; Yglesias, 2019; Morgan, 2020; Rozado, 2022).

While the term woke originated among African Americans in the first half of the 20th century to denote awareness of racial injustice, the current popular understanding of the word refers to a general awareness of social injustice and oppression, particularly against groups that experienced historical marginalisation along lines like race, gender or sexual identity (Morgan, 2020; Atkins, 2023). Another idea associated with woke discourse, one that echoes Hunter's (2006) culture war thesis, is that oppression manifests itself not only in political or economic contexts, but also on a symbolic and cultural level (Sobande, 2020; Kaufmann, 2022). In other words, marginalisation was thought to be produced through cultural norms and practices, potentially necessitating a systemic shift in mainstream values if overlooked or otherwise invisible experiences of discrimination or marginalisation are to be redressed (Atkins, 2023). To separate proponents of woke discourses from other liberals, I will use the term *woke liberal*[3] in this thesis. I use the term

[3] For the purposes of simplicity, I have opted to use the word *liberal* throughout instead of *progressive*.

woke in a value-neutral way, notwithstanding a tendency within some conservative circles to use the term as a pejorative (Cammaerts, 2022, p. 735).

Discourses surrounding woke values have offered definitions of violence that not only included direct violence, but also indirect or invisible societal factors that were thought to produce unequal outcomes for members of historically marginalised populations, resulting in a range of phenomena called "structural," "systemic" or "institutional" racism (Odoms-Young and Bruce, 2018), sexism (Homan, 2019) or homophobia (Sell and Krims, 2021). Within this paradigm, instances of verbal or written interaction (*speech-acts*) that were seen to lead to negative consequences for such groups were often described as a form of violence (Shafer, 2022, p. 156). Silence in the face of perceived oppression was also framed as actively harmful, a notion encapsulated in the popular protest phrase "silence is violence" (Pillay, 2016, p. 157). This was often underlied by a structural approach to harm claiming that certain discourses or cultural practices could reproduce and reinforce unequal power relations in society and thus required redressing (Garlitz and Zompetti, 2021).

Another significant notion associated with woke discourse was the thought that certain culturally liberal practices poorly serviced underprivileged groups and needed to be rethought, or even potentially discarded (Kaufmann, 2022). An example of an especially contested liberal notion was the primacy of free speech and the open marketplace of ideas. In the traditional, liberal perspective exemplified by philosopher John Stuart Mill, human progress is facilitated by the interaction of competing ideas, the civil treatment of ideological opponents, a neutral or "rational" approach of analysing ideas presented, the correction of problematic discourses by

means of open debate and placing limits on restricting speech-acts only to extreme cases, such as direct incitements to violence (Shafer, 2022, p. 156). Woke criticisms of this paradigm included the claims that (a) speech-acts can constitute violence or normalise dangerous ideas like racism or fascism, (b) bad actors can utilise the defence of free speech to consolidate unjust power relations and (c) expectations of being civil in the face of violent speech places additional burdens on marginalised populations and potentially expose them to further harm (Peterson, 2019; Aikin and Talisse, 2020; Schirch, 2021; Shafer, 2022; Cammaerts, 2022)

This led to the development of tactics to resist these negative factors. These included informal practices like *call-outs*, which were attempts to draw public attention to allegedly problematic or violent speech-acts, potentially resulting in *deplatforming*, referring to the removal of the means by which actors can spread ideas, or ultimately *cancellation*, which involves campaigns to disincentivize contact with such actors, either in public spaces or on social media (Legge, 2019; Brown, 2020; Aikin and Talisse, 2020). Terms like *microaggression* were popularised to draw attention to speech-acts and discourses that were thought to reproduce patterns of marginalisation even in contexts when speakers were well-intentioned (Campbell and Manning, 2018). Speech could also be formally regulated through hate speech laws, which applied legal sanction to specific speech-acts thought to harm protected groups (Kulenović, 2022).

Race was a key issue within woke discourses, particularly with regards to the popular grievances against structural racism and police brutality that gave rise to the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement (al-Gharbi, 2019; Solomon, 2019; Morgan, 2020). Gender and feminism, which were key elements in the culture wars in the 1990s, continued to be salient into the 2010s, especially

as the #metoo movement brought issues like sexual harassment and assault to major public attention (Chandra and Erlingsdóttir, 2020). Gay marriage was a major concern until the 2015 *Obergefell v. Hodges* supreme court ruling, which removed same-sex marriage restrictions nationally; following this, transgender-related issues began receiving increased attention (Kinsella et al., 2019; Castle, 2019). Narratives of the past, particularly regarding historical legacies of violence or discrimination, were also a public concern at the time, with conversations emerging about what to do with statues of historical figures seen as complicit in historical violence, or with public holidays connected to colonial pasts (Pillay, 2016; Chou and Busbridge, 2020; Satia, 2021).

While most of the societal issues listed above were not new, the early 2010s saw a major resurgence of these questions in the public sphere in what some scholars and public figures have called "the great awokening," a term first used in an influential journalistic article (Yglesias, 2019) but that later entered the academic literature (Rozado et al., 2023, p. 99; Thornton and Tischauser, 2023, p. 2). Academic discussions of this phenomenon have largely focused on two components. The first consists of a new shift, particularly among white liberals and Democrats, towards more left-leaning positions on issues like race, immigration and the causes of inequality, leading to a claim that white liberals began holding more liberal views on these issues than the average black American (Pew, 2017; Yglesias, 2019), though see Thornton and Tischauser (2023) for an argument against this claim. The second component was a well-documented spike in the frequency of terms describing or condemning prejudice based on ethnic, racial, gender, sexual or religious cleavages in major news outlets and academic sources starting the early 2010s (Rozado, 2022; Rozado et al., 2023).

The causes of the great awokening were a matter of vigorous academic debate. Some theories point to the steady reduction of prejudice in the United States since the 1960s (Gao, 2015; Krysan and Moberg, 2016; Marsden et al., 2020), suggesting that decreasing tolerance of discrimination has made the average American more sensitive to perceived marginalisation or oppression (Mallett and Monteith, 2019). Campbell and Manning (2018) claim that a cultural shift has resulted in the emergence of *victimhood culture*, which is thought to allocate social status and prestige to actors who successfully claim and maintain victim status – this trend was thought to incentivize the production of victimhood claims and stimulate greater discussion of marginalisation in the public sphere. Haidt (2016) and Haslam (2016) point to the notion of *concept creep*, which refers to a phenomenon whereby the standards for what constitutes harm, prejudice or violence slowly but consistently expand – for example, when hate speech or structural racism come to be understood as violence – eventually leading to a tipping point where newly-recognized instances of violence or injustice appear endemic. Finally, Rozado et al. (2023) talk about the *Trump effect*, which refers to the idea that the election of Trump to the American presidency prompted a mass response from the political left to defend historically marginalised groups.

Woke politics and a new culture war

The emergence and consolidation of woke discourses and related values over the 2010s led to highly publicised societal disputes that were labelled a new culture war by numerous scholars and public commentators (Stern, 2017; Castle, 2019; Perry et al., 2020; Chou and Busbridge, 2020; Alvis, 2021; Cammaerts, 2022; Kaufmann, 2022). I argue that these conflicts, while

transcending the liberal-conservative or secular-religious lines of Hunter's original thesis, nevertheless embody the four main criteria of his theory.

First, disputes over woke values are fought over seemingly non-negotiable values, like justice or diversity, and are primarily expressed through symbols, values, discourses and cultural practices (Sobande, 2020; Atkins, 2023). Second, just as Hunter and other scholars noted that the culture wars in the 1960s and 1990s displaced previous, religiously-motivated culture wars and led to the formation of new camps (Hunter, 2006; Hartman, 2019), disputes over harm, justice and discrimination led to the formation of new coalitions that mobilise pro- and anti-woke discourses and strategies (Kaufmann, 2022), which will be discussed below. Third, these conflicts are primarily non-armed in nature, with occasional instances of direct or armed violence, such as assaults on controversial campus speakers or the killing of a protester at the infamous 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia (Taylor, 2018; van der Vegt et al., 2021). Fourth, of key importance are control over the political and cultural institutions that produce, maintain or transmit values, such as the Supreme Court, which had the power to overturn Roe v. Wade (Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, 2022), or schools, which were at the centre of debates over whether to teach students concepts like systemic racism or white privilege (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

It is also important to understand perceptions of the new lines drawn in the culture wars, as well as the coalitions thought to be built along them. While culture war dynamics in the 2010s are currently understudied, the existing academic literature suggests that the anti-woke coalition was composed of various distinct groups, each possessing their own agenda, underlying values and

ultimate goals. What appears to have united them, even if superficially, was that their engagement in the 2010 culture wars put them in direct conflict with those promoting woke discourses, sometimes much more than with each other.

The first group I will explore is the *alt-right*. This was a coalition of right to far-right groups that was thought to reject mainstream Republican and conservative thought, seeking instead to overturn the political establishment in favour of structures that more explicitly privileged white, conservative-Christian and "traditional" American culture, sometimes to the point of advocating for racial segregation or the creation of a white American ethnostate (Hawley, 2017; Mirrlees, 2018). The movement was thought to be social media-savvy, youthful and hostile to minority groups favoured by woke discourses, such as blacks or the LGBT+ community (Cammaerts, 2022, p. 734). Goals of the alt-right included the normalisation of racism, and perhaps neofascism, in public discourse, as well as the promotion of ideas like impossibility of peaceful multiculturalism or the need to defend against the ethnic replacement of American whites (Hawley, 2017).

The next group reviewed is a coalition that promoted what Kaufmann (2022) calls *cultural liberalism*, which resists the woke notion that speech-acts can constitute harm, therefore requiring regulation or sanction through formal or informal mechanisms. I noted three distinct demographics in the academic literature that make up this coalition. The first were moderate liberals who sympathised with the groups privileged by woke discourses but who nevertheless disagreed with responses considered coercive or that could erode democratic norms like civility, due process or free speech (Haidt, 2016; Legge, 2019; Aikin and Talisse, 2020). The second

were bipartisan academics who claimed that woke values were increasingly dominating the social sciences, as well as select professions like social work or journalism – this was thought to marginalise centrists and conservatives or generate ideological incentives to promote woke values like equity or antiracism at the alleged cost of scientific integrity[4] (Thyer, 2010; Duarte et al., 2015; Grossman and Hopkins, 2016; Haidt, 2016, 2020). The third were classical liberals and libertarians who prioritised free speech and choice, an open marketplace of ideas, laissez-faire economics and the freedom to offend, many of whom were prominent members of the so-called *intellectual dark web*, a term referring to an informal grouping of public intellectuals, commentators and comedians who often challenged woke values (Parks, 2020, p. 178; Finlayson, 2021, p. 169).

The next group are the conservatives who formed one side of the 1990s culture wars (Hunter, 2006). This group included fiscal conservatives, who may not have been motivated by cultural concerns so much as the defence of political and economic autonomy as well as small government in the face of woke preferences for social or economic equity (Williams, 2015). Also in this category were the Religious Right, social conservatives who valued cultural traditionalism, conservative forms of Christianity and support for the Republican Party (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016). Their allegedly diminished cultural status following their loss in the previous culture war was thought to have led to a change in approach from *offensive* attempts to promote conservative values to *defensive* strategies aimed at retaining personal freedoms (Dreher, 2020). This importantly include securing legal exemptions from performing specific services on the basis of freedom of religion or conscience, with the term *conscience rights*

[4] While debates over whether certain academic disciplines or professions structurally privilege woke values are important to discuss at length, this lies beyond the scope of this thesis. I merely mention these criticisms here as they are important to one dimension of the culture wars in the 2010s.

legitimising choices like refusing to bake cakes for gay weddings or perform medical procedures like abortion or transgender-related surgeries (Clauson, 2019; Castle, 2019; van der Tol, 2020; Cherry, 2021).

Supporters of woke politics also faced resistance from the left, particularly from anti-woke elements of a resurgent socialist or far left. While the political American left was said to be in decline since the 1980s, several scholars noted that the 2011-12 Occupy movement as well as the 2016 Bernie Sanders campaign for the Democratic presidential candidacy seemed to revitalise and legitimise what was seen as further-left, even socialist thought in a country where the term *socialist* had possessed a decades-long stigma (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016; Rosenfeld, 2017; Gregory, 2020). But while some of these socialist and woke movements collaborated with each other, as with the Movement for Black Lives (M4BL), which demanded economic restructuring on a mass level in response to allegations of systemic racism (Solomon, 2019; Thornton and Tischauser, 2023), other socialist/leftist groups were deeply critical of woke politics. Some deemed corporate use of woke discourse (labelled *woke capitalism*) to be an attempt by predatory elites to divorce identity politics from the struggle for economic justice, as companies could "woke-wash" themselves with liberal imagery without fundamentally changing their behaviour (Sobande, 2020, p. 2740). Other critics claimed that supporters of woke discourses deliberately focused on issues like race, gender and sexual orientation at the expense of class, which was thought to allow upper- and middle-class liberals to speak about racism or sexism while ignoring the increasingly precarious position of the American poor (al-Gharbi, 2018; Olúfẹ́mi, 2022).

In addition to the groups listed above, figures like the “Trump voter” or the “Trump supporter” went on to loom large in the culture wars from the mid-2010s into the 2020s (Kaufmann, 2022). In order to discuss this demographic, it is necessary to first describe the impact of Trump’s presidency on America generally and on the culture wars in particular.

Donald Trump, Trump supporters and the woke culture wars

Many public commentators, scholars and journalists described the 2016 election of Trump to the American presidency as a profound surprise, overturning expectations that Hillary Clinton would win the White House (Grossman and Thaler, 2018; Klein, 2020; Aikin and Talisse, 2020). Trump became a central figure in the culture wars, in part due to his bombastic rhetoric (particularly on Twitter), weak condemnation of alt-right violence, policies limiting immigration and instances of vocal hostility towards groups favoured by supporters of woke politics, particularly hispanic-Americans, immigrants, women and the disabled (Mirrlees, 2018; Crandall et al., 2018; Barkun, 2017). These dynamics, in addition to the uncertainty surrounding Trump’s status as a political outsider, especially given his electoral promise to “drain” Washington of the mainstream political establishment (Enders and Uscinski. 2021, p. 48), led groups ranging from the far left to liberals to moderate conservatives to frame Trump as a threat to liberal democracy, to the neoliberal political mainstream, to the gains made by historically marginalised populations or even to national security itself (Klingner, 2018; Ettinger, 2020; Espinoza, 2021; Newman et al., 2021; James, 2021).

This level of felt threat was exacerbated among communities that supported woke politics, many of whom reported increased stress and anxiety following the 2016 election (Campbell and

Manning, 2018; Krupenkin et al., 2019). This is unsurprising, as Trump elevated certain issues as new fronts in the culture war, including the role of transgender persons in the military or the construction of a wall along the southern border with Mexico (Yang, 2017; Reno, 2020; Pepin-Neff and Cohen, 2021). He had also been accused of facilitating the emergence of culture war dynamics in the municipal political sphere, which is typically presented in the academic literature as especially resistant to polarised rhetoric (Rosenthal, 2005; Chou and Busbridge, 2020). The president himself labelled woke discourses an existential threat to American society (Fahey et al., 2022), taking an unambiguous side in the culture wars. Supporters of woke politics, as it were, had found an opponent within the highest office of the United States.

Trump was also accused of empowering the alt-right and white nationalism. For example, the president was seen as endorsing controversial groups such as the Proud Boys, famous for their opposition to woke politics; he also declined to outright condemn right-wing violence at the 2017 Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville (James, 2021). Trump elevated Steve Bannon, a founding member of the anti-woke news site Breitbart, an outlet associated with the alt-right, as White House chief strategist for his first half year in office (Barkun, 2017). Though the alt-right eventually distanced itself from the president, major figures in the movement, in the early days after the election, declared that Trump's victory "legitimised" their efforts (Mirrlees, 2018, p. 52). A sharp increase in hate crime reports following the presidential election, as well as key Trump rallies, may suggest that perpetrators felt emboldened by the president's anti-woke discourse and thus increased their readiness to commit hate crime (James, 2019; Gordon and Rhineberger, 2021; Newman et al., 2021).

Another obstacle to woke politics was Trump's shifting of the Republican Party further to the right, ideologically speaking, on cultural issues like racial and immigration policy (Espinoza, 2021). A particular victory for conservatives in the Trump-era culture wars involved the president's facilitation of a new conservative majority in the Supreme Court, which complemented the appointment of 54 judges to the United States Circuit Court of Appeals and 174 judges to federal District Courts and led to eventual, dramatic legal changes like the overturning of Roe v. Wade (James, 2021; Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, 2022).

Of concern to supporters of woke discourse and anti-woke classical liberals alike, the Trump presidency was associated with the erosion of informal democratic norms like civility, dialogue and compromise (Foa and Mounk, 2021). Arguments against certain Trump administration policies were occasionally dismissed by the president as fake news, whereas Trump's opponents labelled much of the information produced in the White House as misinformation (Klingner, 2018; Bratich, 2020). This was thought to create difficulties when assessing what was or was not factual, leading to discussions over whether the nation had entered an era of *post-truth*, where comparing information, checking facts and establishing claims in a nonpartisan manner were thought to take second place to disparaging political opponents and promoting one's own cultural, political or societal agenda (James, 2021; Enders and Uscinski, 2021).

It lies beyond the scope of this thesis to assess the legitimacy or veracity of these competing claims – instead, it suffices to point out that the Trump presidency ushered in a new, intensified stage of a preexisting culture war over woke values (Pope, 2021). He presented a new challenge

to woke liberal goals and strategies that created a new dynamic of adversity, as well as cultural and political escalation. Given these grievances and concerns, it is important to discuss another party to the conflict that was said to have played an important, discursive role in the culture wars: the "Trump supporter," an ambiguous label applied to a demographic thought to be loyal specifically to Trump instead of the Republican Party.

The popular use of terms like "Trump supporters" or "Trump voters" to refer to a single demographic may be problematic, as there is no academic consensus as of yet concerning who cast their votes specifically to support Trump, as compared to those who were already prepared to vote for the Republican Party. That said, there are a number of competing, though connected, theories that seek to explain Trump's ability to generate the cultural response that he did and secure the electoral support of those who were not already disposed to vote Republican in the 2016 election, namely (a) those who voted for Barack Obama in previous elections or (b) those who did not normally vote.

One major narrative points to intensified economic hardship, especially among the white working class (Mutz, 2016), claiming that Trump's campaign appealed to a (primarily white) working class that experienced greater precarity following the financial crisis of 2008 and may have welcomed messages like "Make America Great Again" (Mirrlees, 2018, p. 49), also known as MAGA. This theory was contrasted with those focusing on racial resentment, advanced by Abramowitz and McCoy (2019), who suggested that Trump activated racial grievances to secure support among the white working class – for example blaming Mexican immigrants or Chinese industry for American financial troubles.

Closely related to this is the "status threat" theory, whereby animus among Trump supporters was thought to be sparked by the loss of status across a number of spheres: international status on the world stage, the status of men in the face of strengthening feminist movements, the status of religious traditions like Christianity in a time of increased pluralism, and so on (Mutz, 2016). It is important to note a key distinction: whereas much of the alt-right actively promoted white superiority, many individuals who were motivated by racialized status threat experienced anxiety not because they deemed other races to be inferior, but because they feared the consequences of their own diminishing group status in the face of increasing competition. Certain scholars suggest that economic hardship, racial resentments and fear of status loss were explicitly utilised as motivators for culture war dynamics, as Trump's rhetoric sought to link working class troubles not only to "immigrants, unfair trade agreements and defence alliances, [but also] the 'liberal' media and intellectuals," framing them as "enemies of the people" (Abramowitz and McCoy, 2019, p. 150).

Enders and Uscinski (2021) sought answers in anti-establishment discontent, framing Trump support in populist language. They found a sizable portion of Trump voters to differ significantly from typical Republican supporters in that they rejected the conservative political establishment, decried foreign interventionism. Barkun (2017) claimed that these groups and were more likely to embrace theories considered by the mainstream to be *fringe* or *conspiracy theories*, for example concerning the birth of Obama (allegedly abroad, also known as *birtherism*) or claims of satanic child sex rings promoted by an enormously popular, anonymous online presence known as "Q." Members of these groups were also thought to be fuelled by grievances against a

mainstream political establishment that was seen to be deeply corrupt, making them willing to overlook problematic elements of the Trump presidency should he succeed in “draining the swamp” in Washington (Enders and Uscinski. 2021, p. 64). De Oliver (2018) claimed that populist sentiment may have also been linked to a deep sense of unrootedness or alienation in one’s own nation, possibly connected to the erosion of strong religious, regional or local identities, which some scholars theorise may have led to resentment against distant elites or to the creation of us-vs-them dynamics that facilitated a feeling of belonging. This may or may not be combined with a strong resistance to social change, which was also observed as an indicator of support for Trump (Grossman and Thaler, 2018).

These diverse theories paint a varied, if somewhat inconsistent, image of Trump supporters as an actor in the 2010s culture wars. While in office, President Trump was thought to direct their anxieties and anger against liberal elites, woke intellectuals and the historically marginalised populations who were a central concern in woke discourses. In response, supporters of woke discourses themselves at times framed Trump supporters, populists and poor whites as, at best, duped by Trumpian rhetoric to vote against their interests or, at worst, potentially fascist threats to the gains made by the oppressed (Hochschild, 2016; Mirrlees, 2018; Cammaerts, 2022).

While the literature reviewed in this chapter explores culture war discourse, its history and how contemporary disputes over public values shape the dynamics, coalitions and perceived stakes involved in the Trump-era culture wars, it does not provide any indications concerning how partisans conceptualise what peace with their opponents might look like, what preferences they

have for various visions of peace nor the strategies they utilised to work towards them. I reviewed this literature to present an overview of the conflict context.

Chapter Three: Sociopolitical Polarization in the United States

Types of sociopolitical polarization

In contrast to culture war, which refers to a specific type of non-armed societal conflict, the term *polarization* typically describes an increasing divergence between groups or coalitions, often with an emphasis on disappearing middle ground between the two consolidating poles. For example, economic polarization implies increasing distance between the rich and poor, along with a vanishing middle class (Kapeller et al., 2019), while ethnic polarization may refer to social, cultural or political distance between different ethnic groups within a state (Montalvo and Reynal-Querol, 2005). I use the term *sociopolitical polarization* to refer to diverging views regarding social and political issues – in the United States, this division is often framed *ideologically*, meaning between liberal/conservative or the political right/left, or as being *party-based*, between Republican- or Democrat-related groups (Greene, 2004; Mason, 2018; Merkeley, 2023).

Social scientists have debated over the nature and extent of American polarization since the 1990s. Consensus emerged concerning how elected officials, aspiring candidates for office, political activists and highly informed voters had become increasingly polarised with regard to ideological beliefs and policy positions (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016), but researchers remained divided over the degree to which ordinary voters were themselves polarised. Two camps

emerged in the debate: one represented by Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) who held that average Americans were polarised and another led by Fiorina et al. (2004) who claimed polarization was largely an elite and activist phenomenon.

The debate was eventually transformed when researchers identified different types of polarization that could develop independently of each other among political elites, activists and the mass public. One such type is *ideological polarization*, which refers to the possession of liberal/left or conservative/right views and perspectives (Iyengar et al., 2012, p. 406). Separate but deeply related to this is *issue/positional polarization*, the possession of diverging policy-related opinions and positions (Merkeley, 2023, p. 1). The current scholarly consensus holds that ideological polarization has steadily increased among political elites, activists and informed citizens since the 1980s, though debate continues regarding whether everyday voters are ideologically polarised (Lelkes, 2018; Kalmoe, 2020; Abramowitz, 2021; Merkeley, 2023). Components of ideological polarization include *ideological divergence*, which is when partisans adopt stronger views associated with either the political right or the left (Lelkes, 2016), *ideological consistency*, the degree to which the extent to which the views that citizens hold are consistently liberal or conservative, as compared to possessing mixed positions (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008), and *partisan-ideological sorting*, where partisan identity (which, in the US, refers to identifying as a Democrat or Republican) becomes increasingly correlated with liberal or conservative positions and issue preferences respectively (Abramowitz and Saunders, 2008). This sorting can occur irrespective of whether citizens become more ideologically extreme (Levendusky, 2009). As compared to debates over ideological divergence in the mass electorate,

scholars have reached a consensus that ideological consistency and partisan-ideological sorting have indeed increased over the past half century (Merkeley, 2023).

The second major type is *affective polarization*, sometimes referred to as *behavioural polarization* (Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2013). This type of polarization refers not to the ideas or policy positions one holds so much as one's dislike of the other side or the tendency to project negative traits onto sociopolitical outgroups, no matter whether they are official representatives or rank-and-file supporters, potentially leading to hostile behaviour toward them (Iyengar et al., 2012). High degrees of affective sociopolitical polarization make partisans more likely to identify with their political ingroups rather than with identity groups based on ethnicity, gender, religion or other traditionally salient cleavages (Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018b). This, in turn, means that more hostility is typically directed at political outgroups than members of other relevant outgroups.

While evaluations of ideological polarization as a positive or negative phenomenon are mixed (Mason, 2018; Zimmer, 2019; Sommer and McCoy, 2019), affective polarization is described near-universally as pernicious and as a major factor contributing to legislative deadlock, discrimination against sociopolitical outgroups and an inability to build a common future with them (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2018). Some political scientists, sociologists and peacebuilding practitioners worry that high levels of affective polarization may eventually result in increased instances of politically-motivated direct violence (Kalmoe and Mason, 2018; McNeil-Wilson et al., 2019; Burgess et al., 2022), though others treat such claims with scepticism (Westwood et al., 2022).

Sociopolitical polarization in the US: Mid-century to the present

The transition of the political landscape in the United States from a relatively depolarized mid-century to the increasingly fractious present has been the topic of much study (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016; Rosenfeld, 2017; Zimmer, 2019). In the 1950s, the Democrat and Republican parties were ideologically bipartisan and often represented concrete groups that advocated for their interests in largely big-tent coalitions. For example, the Democrat party was less a gathering of liberal-minded voters than a conglomerate of "New Deal" coalition groups (labour union members, the urban poor, African Americans and the working class), Catholics, southern conservative whites, liberal intellectuals and northern immigrants (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016). Both major parties lacked clear ideological differences, prompting some activists to begin advocating for *responsible parties*, which referred to parties that clearly diverged regarding platforms and provided clear choices to voters (Rosenfeld, 2017). It was thought that this would have prompted citizens to cast their ballots based on policy issues rather than group membership. In this sense, ideological polarization was promoted as a social good. To this end, the American Political Science Association (APSA) created the Committee on Political Parties in 1946, which released a report called "Toward a More Responsible Two-Party System" (APSA, 1950), which promoted ideological divergence between the two parties.

While responsible party activists were unable to prompt immediate political polarization between the Republicans and Democrats, cultural polarization did emerge in the 1960s, when major societal shifts led to the sexual revolution, the civil rights movement, protests against the Vietnam war and other major social changes (Hartman, 2019). This was accompanied by the rise of a "New Left" that altered the traditional New Deal focus on the working class and instead

emphasised the emancipation of historically marginalised communities like women, blacks and sexual minorities (Gregory, 2020). This shift in focus towards these groups may have alienated the white working class, facilitating a splintering of the big-tent Democratic base and prompting many working whites to begin voting for the Republican Party. This occurred roughly in parallel with the defection of conservative, southern, white "Dixiecrats" to the Republicans. Combined, this was the first of two major shifts in voting patterns that sorted liberal and conservative voters into the Democratic and Republican parties respectively, effectively starting the current era of sociopolitical polarization (Rosenfeld, 2017). It is important to note that this polarization was an example of partisan-ideological sorting in which the views of individuals did not change so much as did the demographic makeup of the two major parties.

While scholarly consensus exists regarding the periodic, ideologically liberal influence on Democratic public policy during the New Deal (1930s) and Great Society (1960s) eras, leading to occasional periods of left-centred polarization in those decades, much more has been written about consolidation of conservative dominance in the Republican Party from the mid-1960s until Ronald Reagan's presidential victory in 1981 (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016; Rosenfeld, 2017; Hartman, 2019). Polarization scholars note that Barry Goldwater, the mid-century's first staunchly conservative presidential candidate, failed to secure the White House in 1964, which was taken as a sign by mainstream political scientists of the unviability of highly polarised candidates (Rosenfeld, 2017). But within a decade and a half, the conservative movement effectively "captured" the Republican Party, a feat that the left-liberal movement had never done with the Democratic Party, which Rosenfeld claims led to the marginalisation of moderate conservative voices and laying the groundwork for the eventual "Reagan revolution" in the early

80s. While the reasons for this conservative shift are still debated, one noted factor in this process was conservative and white working class backlash to the shock of the 1960s counterculture and the liberation campaigns of the New Left (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016).

The Reagan era effectively established the party as a conservative institution that, while unable to turn back the clock on the cultural shifts of the 1960s, nevertheless prompted Democratic leaders to adopt more centrist economic positions on taxation or the welfare state well into the 1980s and 1990s (Baer, 2000; Kazin, 2011). During this time, some scholars posit that conservatives became so entrenched in the party that "claiming adherence to the conservative national movement became a virtual requirement for national party officials to retain their credentials as Republicans in good standing," with movement activists fusing religious traditionalism, economic libertarianism, hawkish foreign policy preferences and, while the Cold War lasted, anti-Communist sentiment into a lasting ideological package (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016, p. 9; Noel, 2013). It is important to note that while asymmetrical polarization existed regarding the Republicans' rightward shift on economic and foreign policy issues from the late 1970s onward, more symmetrical polarization existed regarding social, cultural and moral issues like abortion, civil rights and changing gender roles, as was discussed in the previous chapter. This state of affairs contributed to the paradox referred to in chapter two: that the conservative movement had proven especially effective at influencing national politics while nevertheless failing to halt the already decade-long shift in public values to the left.

Another major, though primarily religious, shift that continued to sort, and thereby polarise, the parties occurred in the mid-1990s. The first half of the decade saw a consolidation of the

Religious Right in which Catholics and other religious conservatives switched voting patterns from the Democrats to the Republicans, fuelling the 1994 rise of a Republican majority in both the House of Representatives and the Senate, which together attempted to implement ambitious conservative reforms (Layman et al., 2006). This was called the *Republican Revolution*, and Buchanan's famous culture war speech (1992) was noted by some scholars as a key moment facilitating this shift (Wolfe, 2006), and it was at this time that public debates over the culture wars emerged (Hartman, 2019).

While debates over polarization and the culture wars diminished in intensity over the early and mid-2000s (Wolfe, 2006; Jacoby, 2014; Hartman, 2019), tensions emerged once more at the tail end of the decade and into the 2010s, effectively pre-dating the emergence of the woke culture wars. Fiscal grievances among rank and file Republicans, as well as animosity toward the policies of the early Obama era, contributed to the emergence of the Tea Party movement in 2009, which challenged mainstream Republican incumbents and pushed for further conservative reforms (Horwitz, 2013). On the other side of the aisle, the Occupy movement mobilised tens of thousands of young people across the US against the neoliberal economic policies of the Bush administration, as well as the economically centrist early Obama era (Gregory, 2020). Each of the two movements galvanised a growing ideological base, though the dynamics were highly asymmetrical: Republicans and conservatives offered a fairly ideological package of social conservatism, fiscal libertarianism and American exceptionalism; the Democrats and many liberals focused less on leftist ideas and instead favoured discourses appealing to the concrete needs of the social groups that increasingly voted for the party: blacks, hispanics, the LGBT+

community, union members or residents in large cities (Klinkner, 1994; Grossman and Hopkins, 2016; Mason et al., 2021).

At the same time, the conservative movement and the Republican party consolidated a populist rhetoric criticising the perceived excesses of "liberal" or "establishment" elites, claiming that these groups were marginalising everyday Americans; on the other side of the divide, liberal activists were focused on making headways in elite spaces, such as university campuses, as well as in traditional and social media (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016, p. 131). Some sociologists and commentators argue that while liberal influence on the media and at universities certainly did increase, conservative efforts nevertheless proved more successful at mobilising a large, ideologically-motivated voting base (Critchlow, 2011; Grossman and Hopkins, 2016). Another paradox to right-wing success, however, is that conservative and Republican elites themselves were sometimes surprised by or struggled to control the grassroots forces that this populist discourse unleashed; the Tea Party movement, for example, ousted many established Republican incumbents, and the successful nomination of Trump as the Republican candidate came as a surprise to, and was ultimately against the wishes of, many within the Republican establishment (Grossman and Thaler, 2018; James, 2021).

A large number of journalists, political commentators and scholars reported a new spike in mass polarization (thought to be affective polarization in particular) in the mid-to-late 2010s and linked it with Trump's 2016 presidential campaign and subsequent term in office (Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018a; Campbell and Manning, 2018; Klein, 2021; Abramowitz, 2021). Following the election, the Pew Research Center (2016b) published a report finding that sizable portions

(sometimes well exceeding 50 percent) of Republican and Democrat voters thought very unfavourably of the other; they also reported feeling angry or afraid when thinking about outgroup members and that they had very little in common politically, culturally or socially with each other. Further reports found evidence that American voters perceived partisan conflicts as stronger than those involving class, gender or racial issues (Gramlich, 2017), a tendency that reportedly intensified in the final years of the Trump administration (Schaeffer, 2020). Partisans also frequently reported being unable to comprehend the other side's views, which may have indicated a "further [erosion of] the mutual understanding that is often a necessary condition for compromise and accomplishment within the American political system" (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016, p.13).

The Democratic party, which was thought to have retreated to the political centre through the Reagan until the Clinton (and even the Obama) administrations, soon started showing signs of movement to the political left during the 2016 electoral race, largely due to the Sanders campaign, which incorporated explicitly socialist language and proved surprisingly popular, providing a legitimate challenge to Hillary Clinton's decidedly more centrist campaign (Gregory, 2020). The 2020 primaries saw Sanders joined by other explicitly left-leaning candidates, including Elizabeth Warren, suggesting that the Democratic Party had consolidated this leftward shift, potentially following signals given by its voting base (Ettinger, 2020), even with the eventual 2020 win of the centrist Joe Biden. The rise of popular, young Democratic politicians espousing leftist views, such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, may indicate that this leftward trend will continue into the future (Gregory, 2020).

Developments in the study of sociopolitical polarization

While a scholarly consensus exists regarding a relatively bipartisan political era, sociopolitically speaking, from the civil war until the 1960s (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016; Rosenfeld, 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018; Zimmer, 2019), debates continue regarding how to evaluate the nature of this bipartisanship. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) viewed this depolarized period as an age of consensus, egalitarianism, freedom and civility, though this is a contested claim. Somer and McCoy (2019), for example, criticise this bipartisan consensus as existing primarily between privileged political elite, while Zimmer (2019) claims that this era of consensus may have preserved an inequitable status quo that prevented advancements in racial, gender and social equality.

Speaking about partisanship and party-based identities, an early major study from that period that drew attention to these dynamics was Campbell et al.'s *The American Voter* (1964), which concluded that the majority of voters make their political choices not based on ideological or policy-based decisions, but on party identities like Democrat and Republican, which were easily passed down through one's family. Political preferences, in other words, were linked mostly to identity and belonging. Regarding ideological or policy positions, Campbell et al. held that the average voter generally held a mixture of liberal and conservative preferences across a range of issues.

While the study of partisanship continued to place much attention on non-identity related issues like ideology and policy preferences, especially from the 1990s when scholars like Hunter (1991), Abramowitz and Saunders (2008) and Fiorina et al. (2004) debated the existence of the

culture wars and mass polarization, identity-based scholarship picked up speed once more from the mid 2000s. Researchers began to view partisan identity and polarization through the lens of social identity theory (SIT), developed primarily by Henri Tajfel in the 1970s and 80s (Greene, 2004). According to theories steeped in *realism* or *game theory*, both of which were popular approaches in the second half of the 20th century, conflict emerged primarily when groups faced resource scarcity, loss of position, overt aggression or other threats to ingroup or individual interests (Mearsheimer, 1990; Snidal, 2013). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), however, it takes far less for people to sort themselves into ingroups and outgroups or to spark conflict between them; all that was thought to be necessary for group comparison and competition to take place is the mere perception of difference. These us-vs-them dynamics were thought to remain dormant for long periods of time, at least until circumstances made conflict-conducive identities salient. These identities could then go on to shape perceptions of threat or of reasons for group competition. Importantly, such conflicts might be entirely unconnected to concrete interests and material benefits; the spoils may be immaterial, as winning is thought to produce positive emotions and consolidate individual or group self-image, status and esteem.

By analysing partisan identities like Republican or Democrat using SIT, scholars began to return to Campbell et al.'s idea (1964) that voting patterns and other partisan behaviours were motivated not only by policy consequences, ideological preferences or material gain, but also by individual and group belonging, by a sense of meaning and self-worth. Political and ideological identities were shown to provide a solid basis for ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation (Greene, 2004), which was a key factor that facilitated the eventual discovery of the difference

between ideological polarization on the one hand and group-based affective polarization on the other (Iyengar et al., 2012).

This distinction between the two types of polarization allowed for scholars to transcend the stalemate over whether the American populace at large was polarised: while only mixed evidence existed regarding ideological polarization, there was overwhelming evidence that Americans were experiencing increasing levels of affective polarization, sometimes quite independently of how strong their beliefs or policy positions were (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2018; Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018b; Merkeley, 2023). Following Tajfel, affective polarization was thought to be deeply correlated with identity: "the mere act of identifying with a political party is sufficient to trigger negative evaluations of the opposition…not only increasingly dislik[ing] the opposing party, but also [imputing] negative traits to the rank-and-file of the out-party" (Iyengar et al., 2012, p. 407).

The emergence of affective polarization as a dominant paradigm led to increased study into the nature of partisan identity, with scholars eventually finding evidence that animus in the US towards partisan and ideological outgroups had become more intense than hostilities along more conventional cleavages such as race, gender or sexual identity (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015). This is not to say that the *consequences* of racial, gender or other types of discrimination were less concerning, just that hatred towards political and ideological outgroups tended to be more prevalent in the general populace. Iyengar and Westwood (2015) also noted that such hatred (sometimes called *partyism*) is not mitigated by social taboos in the same way as racism or sexism, and in fact can be actively encouraged as a positive good in some communities. While

affective polarization was studied extensively first in the US, it has now been shown to exist in other countries across the Global North (Reiljan, 2019; Merkely, 2023), sometimes even eclipsing ethnic tensions in historically divided European countries like Belgium or Spain (Westwood et al., 2015).

Though the study of polarization long preceded the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency, the 2016 vote led to a surge of popular and academic interest in understanding the dynamics of polarization and political identity (Campbell and Manning, 2018; Chua, 2018; Abramowitz and McCoy, 2019; Klein, 2021; Jones, 2020). The Pew Research Center (2016a, 2016b, 2019) released reports documenting increased affective polarization as well as mutual incomprehension between Trump supporters and critics. Scholars found evidence that partisans in the Trump era "view[ed] supporters of the opposing party not as opponents but as enemies: bad actors who want to inflict harm to the nation and who will stop at nothing to achieve their goals" (Abramowitz, 2021, p. 349). Mistrust of opposing partisans reached new heights, and many citizens reported perceiving the stakes of losing to the other as enormous (Nilsen, 2018; Galston, 2020).

Given widespread opinion among scholars and policy makers regarding the pernicious nature of affective polarization (Mason, 2018; Somer and McCoy, 2019; Aikin and Talisse, 2020; Finkel et al., 2020), much research has been dedicated not only to understanding the nature and impact of affective polarization, but also to potential mechanisms of depolarization, though there is much debate concerning appropriate and effective methods of doing so (McCoy and Somer, 2019; Levendusky and Stecula, 2021; Schirch, 2021; Burgess et al., 2022; McCoy et al., 2022).

Possible causes of sociopolitical polarization

The wide array of possible causes for sociopolitical polarization, and in particular affective polarization, makes it difficult to pinpoint exact origins or trace direct causal structures. Researchers, practitioners and public figures have hypothesised various reasons for its origins and have marshalled evidence to support various theories. It is likely that polarization emerges and is compounded by diverse factors operating in parallel, and this section outlines various theories and places them in context.

Much has been theorised regarding the role of *media outlets* and *informational infrastructure* in the rise of US polarization. A major development in the past decades was the emergence of partisan news outlets promoting news with a marked ideological bias. Partisans watching these news sources are thought to have their biases confirmed and are less likely to be exposed to information that would disconfirm partisan narratives or present the other side in a holistic light (Levendusky, 2013; Sunstein, 2017).

Up until 1987, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) implemented a policy known as the "Fairness Doctrine" that required news sources to present different sides of controversial issues, but this practice was abandoned during the Reagan presidency, which was thought to lay the foundations for the present, polarised newscape (Thomas, 2013). A major new player was Fox News on the conservative side, which presented itself as providing an alternative source of information to mainstream news sources that many conservatives perceived to be biassed (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016). Fox was accompanied by a broad new conservative "mediaverse" composed of conservative talk radio, blogs, think tanks and podcasts (Adamic and

Glance, 2005; Lawrence et al., 2010). This was eventually followed by the creation of MSNBC, a cable news network that presented the news with a marked liberal bias (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016).

Polarised news broadcasters, along with social media algorithms, may facilitate partisan isolation in *echo chambers*, which are like-minded communities in which the majority of social encounters are between those who hold similar positions (Ross et al., 2022). This is thought to magnify ingroup beliefs and assumptions, decrease the likelihood of partisans being challenged with opposing evidence, disincentivize drawing attention to competing narratives and intensify levels of confirmation bias (Sunstein, 2017). The lack of disconfirming content has been shown to radicalise partisan beliefs (Levendusky, 2013) and strengthen affective polarization (Rogowski and Sutherland 2016; Webster and Abramowitz, 2017). While evidence suggests a strong correlation between watching partisan news and high levels of affective polarization, there is a "chicken and egg" debate over whether one of the two more directly leads to the other (Arceneaux and Johnson, 2013). Furthermore, while echo chambers are broadly discussed in the media, some evidence indicates that few people find themselves locked inside one – but this minority may be likely to become more extreme and could perhaps wield disproportionate influence on the public conversation (Ross et al., 2022).

Economic factors are also thought to lead to increased polarization. Auter et al. (2016) found evidence suggesting that trade shocks and the decline of national manufacturing industries have contributed to US polarization. Some theorise that perceived economic instability or other forms of financial-based threat can be projected by ingroup members onto racial or national outgroups

– for example, Adler et al. (2021) demonstrated that levels of perceived financial threat following the 2008 recession were correlated to increased hostility and xenophobia against immigrants, Asian-Americans and Jews. These findings were particularly pronounced among groups who experienced higher levels of exposure to the financial crisis, for example among blue-collar workers in the Rust Belt.

Demographic changes are also thought to contribute to a polarised populace. Two relevant demographic changes that have been increasing over the past decades are the increasing ethnic diversity of the United States as well as increasing levels of secularisation, both of which are prominent especially in major cities (Craig and Richeson, 2014; Mutz, 2016; Jones, 2016; Klein, 2021). Certain sociologists theorise that ethnic diversity is perceived as a threat to some white Americans' sense of security – evidence has been found linking higher degrees of support for polarising figures like Trump less to economic downturns or industrial decay (though, as mentioned above, these may certainly be contributing factors) than to perceived status threat (Mutz, 2016; Abramowitz and McCoy, 2019; Brown et al., 2021).

Scholars have long noted that an increasing number of cities, neighbourhoods and regions have become more ideologically homogeneous. This, combined with a recorded decrease in public spaces believed to facilitate contact between people of different backgrounds (sports teams, churches, lunch clubs, etc.), has been thought to increase insulation from political outgroups, thereby leading to greater social distance, incomprehension or even hostility and fear (Putnam, 2000; Bishop, 2009; Mason, 2018). This homogenization has been observed inside families, which are becoming increasingly ideologically similar, with rates of politically mixed marriages

decreasing and with greater instances of parental disapproval for children befriending or dating members of political or ideological outgroups (Pew, 2016; Iyengar et al., 2018).

Another demographically-related potential source of affective polarization is a phenomenon called *social sorting* (Mason, 2018). The term sorting is used to refer to a number of separate, though interrelated, phenomena – for example, the concept of partisan-ideological sorting noted above, describing the process by which ideological identities like "liberal" or "conservative" become increasingly correlated with political affiliations like "Republican" or "Democrat" (Merkeley, 2023, p. 1). Social sorting, on the other hand, is the phenomena by which societal groups become more linked with ideological-partisan identities. In other words, identity markers like religion, gender, class, race or place of residence become increasingly predictive of whether a person identifies as Republican/conservative or Democrat/liberal (Merkley, 2023). These lead to the creation of what are referred to as *mega-identities*, which are large, overarching, increasingly homogenous sides or coalitions (Mason, 2018). For example, during the years of the Trump administration, Mason found that black, hispanic, university-educated white and secular identities were more sorted into a Democratic-liberal mega-identity, while rural, high school-educated white, religious and middle-class groups were more sorted in with a Republican-conservative mega-identity.

Not only has this type of sorting increased in the United States in recent decades, but high degrees of social sorting are strongly correlated with affective polarization, leading some social scientists to theorise that the more strongly sorted one's identities are, (that is, the more of one's identities fit into one of the two mega-identities), the more likely one is to be affectively

polarised (Mason, 2018; Merkeley, 2023). Researchers theorise that this is due to how increased internal homogeneity can (a) consolidate the relationship between ingroups and outgroups into one of "us" and "them," (b) make contact with outgroups less likely to occur or (c) render the other side deeply unfamiliar and perhaps even culturally threatening (Mason, 2013). Additionally, Mason (2013, p. 144) claims that the more sorted one's identities are, the less one has *cross-cutting identities*, that is, identities that are associated with both sides of the mega-identity divide; such cross-cutting identities are thought to mitigate the impact of affective polarization.

Another two major contributors to affective polarization are *elite* and *group cues*. This is when people look to influential leaders or group dynamics for models of how to engage with outgroups – when leaders or collectives signal that outgroup disparagement is acceptable, perhaps even encouraged, this is thought to normalise such behaviour (Mason, 2018). The same goes for signalling incomprehension, fear or even disgust with the other; voting behaviours may also be influenced in this manner (Mackie et al., 2000; Nicholson, 2012; Armaly and Enders, 2020; Bakker et al., 2020). Such cues have been found to impact the perceived scientific credibility of theories involving climate change or the COVID-19 pandemic (Merkeley and Stecula, 2020; Hamilton and Safford, 2021). In some cases, ingroup members may mimic group dynamics not necessarily because they believe in or agree with them, but in order to consolidate or perform group status, thereby securing their social position or a sense of belonging (Haidt, 2012; Legge, 2019). This becomes especially pernicious when cues are given by opportunistic or bad actors who influence ingroup opinion or behaviour in order to achieve specific goals. This may work

both ways: elites and groups can also set norms for toleration or respect for the other side (Haslam et al., 2019).

Dynamics and consequences of affective sociopolitical polarization

Scholars have identified a number of potential consequences of high polarization, especially affective polarization. A major grouping of consequences has to do with distorted perceptions, increased bias and an inability to objectively assess the other side. Partisanship has been shown to colour what people believe to be true (Bartels, 2002; Kaplan et al., 2016; Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018a). For example, highly polarised groups in conflict are thought to be more likely to frame their allegiances or concerns as virtuous and those of the other as irrational, immoral or held in bad faith (Ross, 2001; Aikin and Talisse, 2020). These perceptions are thought not only to resist attempts to change them with evidence, but may in fact be strengthened when presented with evidence of opposing views (Kaplan et al., 2016; Hessler, 2017; Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018b; Mason, 2018). Partisans are likelier to see their ingroup as more popular or beloved (Mackie et al., 2000) or to see the other side as "not merely incorrect, but depraved, dangerous, and threatening to democracy itself" (Aikin and Talisse, 2020, p. 4). These perceptions can lead to the consolidation of narratives that contradict the other side's understanding of past and present facts: "disputants are divided not only over the facts, but also over the criteria for determining what the facts are," or they may argue about issues in ways that primarily affirming one's identity or secure status among ingroup members rather than address outgroup views in good faith (Aikin and Talisse, 2020, p. 79).

Heightened affective polarization may also result in increased anger, aggression, resentment, hostility toward or marginalisation of outgroup members. Affectively polarised partisans are more likely to experience feelings of anger, fear and disgust in response to outgroups, as well as to feel elation at their defeat or humiliation at their victory (Mackie et al., 2000; Mason, 2018). This may also lead to the delegitimization of outgroup needs, identities and preferences, which itself is a predictor of dismissing the other side's legitimate grievances, wishing them ill, believing that moral duties (i.e. respect, civility, nonviolence) do not extend to outgroup members, resenting their intellectual freedoms, desiring to limit their political or social agency by illiberal means, supporting direct or structural acts of harm or oppression towards outgroup members, downplaying harm committed against outgroups, the inability to hold ingroups accountable for harm committed against other groups and the moral justification of such behaviours as well as the beliefs underlying them (Bar-Tal and Avrahamzon, 2017; Hadarics and Kende, 2018; McCoy et al., 2018; Somer and McCoy, 2019; Aikin and Talisse 2020; Saguy and Reifen-Tagar, 2022). Additionally, heightened political anger can lead to decreased trust in governing bodies and institutions, especially when outgroup members are in power (Webster, 2018). This distrust is thought to contribute to gridlock in congress, increased attacks on political opponents, a decreased interest in active political engagement and a perceived loss in governmental credibility or even legitimacy (Layman et al., 2006; Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015; Mason, 2018)

It is possible that this increase in hostility, fear and other related emotions contributes to *negative partisanship*, which is a trend where Americans cast their votes not in order to support a party that they agree or identify with, but to prevent the outgroup party from taking power

(Abramowitz and Webster, 2015, p. 15). In a two-party system, this can create a binary in which a party wins less out of support for their policies and more out of being seen as a more acceptable option, perhaps even as a lesser evil. The degree of negative partisanship increased sharply during the 2016 election, with negative partisanship being twice as able to predict voting behaviour than the degree of warmth felt towards ingroup candidates (Abramowitz and Webster, 2018). This animosity is also thought to be a major factor in why large numbers of conservatives and Republicans "who had reservations about Donald Trump nevertheless voted for their party's standard bearer, [as they felt] fear and dislike of Hillary Clinton" (Abramowitz and Webster, 2018, p. 133). It may be important to note that the 2016 election was unique in that both candidates were, historically speaking, the most universally disliked candidates by ingroup members since comparable data was recorded in the late 1970s.

Affective and other kinds of polarization can also impact seemingly non-political choices or behaviours. For example, partisans may choose to live in neighbourhoods dominated by ingroup members and may express dissatisfaction upon finding out that outgroup members live nearby (Hui, 2013). Matching partisan sentiments has also been found to increase the likelihood of starting a friendship or romantic relationship (Huber and Malhotra, 2017). Polarised individuals are likelier to give jobs to ingroup members when all other factors are equal, to accept lower wages from ingroup employers and to boycott companies associated with outgroups (Gift and Gift, 2015; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Panagopoulos et al., 2016; McConnell et al., 2018). Partisans are more likely to believe that the economy is stronger when the ingroup president is in power, which may impact investment or purchasing preferences (Krupenkin et al., 2018). Lifestyle markers, like clothing, leisure activities or food preferences, may also become

associated with outgroup members, making some partisans feel aversion to certain products, brands, hobbies, lifestyle choices or travel destinations (DellaPosta et al., 2015).

Polarization also impacts partisan reception of highly politicised facts, which during the Trump years included assessments of the legitimacy of the 2016 and 2020 elections, as well as the contentious national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Partisan loyalties had been shown to impact vaccine hesitancy prior to the pandemic – polarised Americans on both sides of the divide were less likely to give their children vaccinations when the president was a member of the outgroup, potentially indicating a lack of trust in outgroup-aligned government agencies (Krupenkin, 2018, p. 24).

Partisan vaccination dynamics, however, took a major turn with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic: Druckman et al. (2021) have demonstrated that COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy was less correlated with who was in the White House than with cues received from ingroup members. There were indications liberals and Democrats are more associated with mask-wearing and taking health precautions more seriously, with conservatives and Republicans more likely to show scepticism regarding masks and vaccines, highlighting instead the negative impact of lockdowns and restrictions on mental health and the economy (Lipsitz and Pop-Eleches, 2020). But affective polarization proved a key factor in how these preferences were expressed; in counties that were more affectively polarised, Democrats and liberals were especially likely to display caution and take protective measures, while Republicans conservatives were more likely to criticise restrictions. Druckman et al. (2021) interpret these data as evidence that highly polarised partisans base their decisions less on the science than on what one's ingroup presents as

normative, which can have major economic or health-related consequences during a major pandemic. One major caveat the researchers noted, however, was that this effect was mitigated in counties that possessed high case counts, potentially indicating that affective polarization may have greater consequences in contexts where partisan lives are less directly impacted by crisis.

Similar dynamics are not limited to pandemic-related beliefs and behaviours but may extend to other phenomena that are highly politicised, especially those associated with a particular side of the divide. For example, some researchers attribute Republican scepticism of the mainstream scientific consensus regarding climate change not to a distrust in science, but a distrust in perceived Democratic interpretations of the science (Merkley and Stecula, 2020). Science, in this case, may not be perceived as neutral but as instrumentalized, biassed and potentially weaponized by the outgroup against the ingroup. In other words, a belief or attitude strongly associated with outgroups in highly affectively polarised contexts will likely appear suspicious or even morally compromised to ingroup members. This may indicate that controversies over certain issues are more relational than intellectual, and that attempts to change such positions by presenting facts may only further intensify distrust and rejection of what is being said, regardless of its accuracy.

I hold that the strengthening of polarization, and especially affective polarization, has major relevance for the study of positive and negative peace preferences among liberal and conservative activists during the Trump-era culture wars. The data shows that ideologically and politically diverging groups have become increasingly hostile to each other, as well as more likely to view the other not as opponents or competitors in the public sphere, but as irrational or

even evil enemies that need to be stopped. Furthermore, the sorting of ideological and political identity markers (liberal-Democrat and conservative-Republican) into mega-identities creates more distinct divisions between the two sides, even if these divisions are not backed up by significantly differing policy preferences or ideological beliefs among the majority of the populace. This focus on ideological *identity* rather than *policy preferences* means that space for cooperation may seem to shrink or that contact may appear socially, morally or cognitively unacceptable (Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2018; Aikin and Talisse, 2020). These dynamics very likely exacerbate the disputes over public values, morality, culture and institutions reviewed in the previous chapter. They also shaped participant responses to the interviews that I present in chapter five regarding preferences for visions of peace, strategies used to build peace and preferences for either – all of which are explored in the following chapter.

Chapter Four: Positive and Negative Peace Theory

Johan Galtung's idea of peace

Historically speaking, the notion of positive or negative forms of peace predates Johan Galtung's work. Nobel Peace Prize winner Jane Addams' "positive ideals of peace" (Addams, 1907, p. xvii) was an early forerunner, as were Quincy Wright's (1954) and Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1963) distinctions between positive and negative peace. That said, it was the Norwegian sociologist who refined and popularised the concept in the 1960s, eventually developing a theoretical framework that would shape the emerging field of PACS.

Galtung's theory emerged from a sharp critique of the approaches to peace that were popular in his time. He highlighted how most contemporaneous notions of peace amounted to the absence of *direct violence* (Galtung, 1969, p. 169), which refers to visible acts of physical attack such as war, assault and similar actions. For him, this was an unsatisfactory framework as it ignored what he called *structural violence*: the less visible socio-cultural factors preventing individuals and groups from meeting their basic human needs or otherwise thriving in society (Galtung, 1969, p. 171). For Galtung, common examples of structural violence included racism, religious oppression or the unequal distribution of resources. In his opinion, vertical structural inequities like these could lead to deep-seated grievances that eventually lead to direct violence or armed conflict – in other words, he claimed, "violent relations and structures produce more violent relations" (Galtung, 2010, p. 22).

In his view, it was thus necessary for discussions about peace to be expanded in order to take into account the less visible factors that nevertheless contribute to conflict onset. He began to promote the paired concepts of *negative peace*, with the word negative referring not to a value judgement but to the absence of direct violence, and *positive peace*, which refers to the presence of factors that lead to harmonious relationships and result in a state in which human needs are met in a way that makes direct violence unnecessary, perhaps even unthinkable. Initially, Galtung described positive peace as synonymous with the presence of social justice, which for him was effectively the absence of structural violence (Galtung, 1964, 1969).

The reception of Galtung's original formulation

Although Galtung's theory proved majorly influential in the emerging field of PACS, which Galtung himself played a key role in shaping, Sharp (2020) notes that it took time for the innovation of positive peace to make inroads in academic and policy-based discourse elsewhere. In fact, the very issue of the journal where Galtung first proposed the theory was otherwise dominated by discussions of what he would have deemed negative peace (Regan, 2013).

Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of peace as being more than the absence of war, and eventually of positive peace as a necessary component of conflict resolution practice, gained increasing prominence in PACS through the 1980s and ultimately achieved global acceptance as a liberal policy paradigm following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the perceived victory of western peacemaking models globally (Christie et al., 2008; Pureza and Cravo 2009; Sharp, 2020). This was codified in UN documents such as *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peace-keeping* (1992), in which UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali proposed a number of activities that would address the perceived roots of conflict, thus aiming to achieve a deeper form of peace than the mere absence of war. Importantly, the concept of constructing the necessary infrastructure for sustainable peace, which Galtung had previously called *peacebuilding* (Galtung, 1975), was codified as official UN policy. This turn towards peacebuilding and positive peace was further emphasised in the influential *Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations*, also known as the "Brahimi report," which highlighted the need to "reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war" (UN, 2000). Given the increasingly liberal nature of the emerging post-Cold-War world order, this approach to positive

peace became associated with the so-called *liberal peace*, a model assuming that peaceful societies emerge following the establishment of a state monopoly on violence, institutions guaranteeing rule of law, freedom of the press, free markets and fair election processes (Sharp, 2020).

This liberal approach represents something of a pivot from Galtung's original concept. It certainly embraced Galtung's notion that positive peace involves building societal infrastructure that facilitates the peaceful resolution of disputes, but it did not reflect Galtung's prioritisation of social justice as a means of conflict prevention (Sharp, 2020). This may have been partially due to how the original conception of positive peace as social justice, or the absence of structural violence, faced major criticism in the years since Galtung first promoted the theory. Some of these criticisms focused on how Galtung's original concept of positive peace was not seen as particularly actionable. For example, it was suggested that, in contrast to liberal peacebuilding practices like the establishment of fair elections or a free press, social justice-aligned values like equality or equity proved too vague to provide concrete guidance for peace-minded actors (IEP, 2022). Social justice, as a value system, could be interpreted variously and give rise to contradictory approaches and policies, which may complicate intervention design (Turan, 2015) or itself be implemented in coercive, conflict-conducive ways (Standish et al., 2022). Another factor complicating possible interventions is how focusing on social justice requires defining when and where injustice has occurred, which can prove difficult should competing groups claim victim status and delegitimize outgroup grievances and claims (Noor et al., 2012).

Furthermore, others brought forward ideological criticisms of Galtung's equation of positive peace with social justice. Galtungian social justice, for example, was criticised for focusing on top-down power structures such as race, class, gender while saying relatively little about other grounds for conflict, such as horizontal competition between identity groups (Turan, 2015). This emphasis on vertical power structures of marginalisation was also challenged for allegedly privileging leftist thought, structurally excluding centre- and right-leaning approaches to peace that focused more on maximising personal freedoms and appealing to individual responsibility (Rummel, 1981). In a similar vein, Boulding (1977) highlighted how certain modes of equity promoted by Galtung as a way of achieving positive peace, such as resource-sharing, could themselves involve "a loss of liberty" (p. 80) if implemented by a centralised state, potentially lead to other forms of structural violence or oppression. Additionally, other critics claimed that peacebuilding interventions aimed at changing local norms in order to establish social justice in conflict-affected societies, particularly by means of broad societal transformation, would prove deeply neo-colonial – especially as this often involves Western countries intervening in the Global South (Schellhaas and Seegers, 2009; Cunliffe, 2012; Sharp, 2020).

Galtung continued to update positive and negative peace theory in a way that reflected developments in PACS and peacebuilding practices generally. While his classic formulation equating positive peace with the absence of structural violence – and thus the presence of social justice – continues to resonate in recent literature (Pureza and Cravo, 2009; Paulson and Bellino, 2017; Shields, 2017), he went on to codify a broader approach described in the following section.

Galtung's updated theory of positive and negative peace

Galtung's updated positive and negative peace theory (Galtung, 2013) takes into account a number of developments in his understanding of conflict and violence. First, he acknowledges the concept of *cultural violence*, which he developed in the late 1980s (Galtung, 1990). In Galtung's own words (1990, p. 291), cultural violence involves "those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence – exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science (logic, mathematics) – that can be used to justify or legitimise direct or structural violence." Examples of such cultural violence include sexist music lyrics, religious practices normalising war or school curriculums marginalising the histories of particular groups – all of which may render direct/structural violence invisible or, in some cases, promote them explicitly. This effectively creates a triangle composed of direct, structural and cultural forms of violence, all of which are thought to support, lead to or sustain the others. Similar to Hunter's (1991) notion of culture war, the theory of cultural violence draws attention to the capacity of symbols, discourses and institutions to serve as an arena within which conflict can take place.

Second, Galtung suggests that direct, structural and cultural violence each have positive and negative aspects, which is a major shift from his original conception of negative peace as the absence of direct violence and positive peace as the absence of structural violence (Galtung, 2013). In this updated approach, negative peace is seen as the absence of any (if not all) of the three types of violence, while positive peace involves addressing deep-rooted barriers to peace, often through the meeting of needs, the exchange of "goods" instead of "evils" and the construction of a peaceful, thriving social order inclusive of all persons and groups (Galtung,

2013, p. 174). While his previous approach to positive peace was sometimes perceived as prioritising social justice for "underdogs" (Galtung, 1969, p. 181), this updated framework highlights diverse components of societal transformation not limited to equity and social justice, but also including, for example, cooperation between formerly hostile parties and the promotion of dialogue. The following table illustrates examples of this approach and is adapted from his article "Positive and Negative Peace" (Galtung, 2013):

	Direct Violence	**Structural Violence**	**Cultural Violence**
Negative Peace	No invasions, attacks, harassment, etc.	No discrimination, repression, etc.	No cultural justifications of violence
Positive Peace	Cooperation between former enemies	Equality, equity	Culture of peace and dialogue

Fig 2. Galtung's updated (2013) formulation of positive and negative peace theory

As with his original formulation, Galtung's updated approach to negative peace points to the *absence* of violence which, while important in its own right, does not necessarily imply harmonious or thriving societal relations. Positive peace, on the other hand, points to the presence of factors that lead to harmonious relationships, thriving societies and, importantly, sustained nonviolence. Even so, many scholars nevertheless draw attention to a key point: while negative peace may be insufficient to create long-term, sustainable peace (Turan, 2015), it is often a major achievement in and of itself and is certainly preferable to many forms of violence (Cleven et al., 2018; Sharp, 2020). Positive peace, on the other hand, points to the presence of factors that lead to integrated relationships, fair societies and, importantly, sustained nonviolence.

It is important to note that not every instance of peace includes all three of Galtung's components. For example, when discussing East Asia's pivot to stability following a bloody mid-20th century, Bjarnegård et al. (2017) note that China's hegemony in the region indeed established direct negative peace between nations (called the "East Asian Peace"), but did so using mechanisms involving structural violence and geopolitical domination of minority populations or neighbouring nations. Thus, it is important to note that, while negative peace amounts to an absence of violence, this absence may exist only with regard to one of the many parties involved.

Positive peace may also be generated within one, but not all, of Galtung's three categories. Two or more formerly belligerent nations, for example France and Germany, can create a "security community" that not only guarantees they will not go to war, but that they will in fact actively assist the other in cases of military activity elsewhere (Klein et al., 2008, p. 75). This amounts to a kind of direct positive peace between two nations that can exist independently of just relations or mutual understanding.

Visions and strategies: The applicability of positive and negative peace

When applied in the field to analyse conflicts or to plan interventions, positive and negative peace theory is often used in one of two ways. The first involves describing a desired end state to a conflict, which I refer to in this project as a *vision of peace*. The examples in Figure 2 above detail various visions, such as a lack of invasions and hate crimes, or the presence of equality, cooperation or reconciliation (Galtung, 2013). These different visions of peace can be identified as positive or negative in nature, creating conceptual categories for analysis and discussion. The

second common way the theory is applied is to classify the strategies thought to build positive or negative peace. Standish et al., in the *Palgrave Handbook of Positive Peace* (2022), distinguish between *negative peacebuilding*[5], which works to "halt to overt aggression," and *positive peacebuilding*, which aims to create interventions that are more "sustainable, legitimate, far-reaching, and conceptually comprehensive" (p. 5).

Examples of negative peacebuilding include the signing of a ceasefire, as in Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh (Arslanli, 2022), the segregation of populations formerly involved in an armed conflict, as in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Kulkova, 2019), the repression of armed groups, as in Chechnya (Lewis et al., 2018), or official policies encouraging silence on past political violence, as in Mozambique (Igreja, 2013). Here a central irony must be noted: negative peacebuilders can themselves use violence in attempts to build negative peace, as in a pre-emptive strike meant to deter future hostilities or a pogrom aimed at neutralising political opponents, even though such attempts may inadvertently escalate the violence itself. Positive peacebuilding strategies instead attempt to resolve the root causes of violence using approaches like the creation of liberal democratic institutions (IEP, 2020), fostering societal reconciliation (Clark, 2009), proactive dialogue between at-risk populations (Turan, 2015), alleviating group inequalities (Pureza and Cravo, 2009) or other measures. Examples of different visions of peace, with a corresponding strategy, are listed in Fig. 3 below:

Vision of Peace	Type of Peace	Corresponding Strategy
Absence of armed conflict	Direct negative peace	Negotiated ceasefire (Richmond, 2008)

[5] Sometimes called *peacemaking* or *peacekeeping* (Reychler, 2010).

Liberal democracy	Direct positive peace	Development of economic integration, rule of law, institutions for the peaceful resolution of disputes (IEP, 2020)
Social justice	Structural positive peace	Policies promoting equality (Galtung, 1969)
Consensus concerning contentious pasts	Cultural positive peace	Producing inclusive, conflict-sensitive textbooks (Uremovic and Milas, 2013)

Fig 3. Visions, types and strategies of peace

Preferences for positive or negative peace

Debates exist among scholars and practitioners regarding the question of whether one type of peace is preferable to another and, if so, under which circumstances. The answers given to this question vary according to the goals of specific peacebuilders – actors may prioritise, for example, reducing direct violence, addressing discrimination, building stable societies, transforming relationships or confronting perceived oppressors (Standish et al., 2022), all of which may lead to preferences for very different visions of peace. As this project will explore how the interview respondents perceive and promote visions of positive and negative peace in the context of the Trump-era culture wars, it is important to discuss how peace has been perceived and promoted elsewhere. Within the spheres of peacebuilding and PACS, three general approaches have been identified: those that (a) promote positive over negative peace, (b) promote negative peace over positive peace or (c) promote a synthesis of the two.

The prioritising of positive over negative peace has been especially prominent among academics and peacebuilders since the 1990s (Sharp, 2020). Galtung's work itself, while ostensibly

promoting a hybrid vision of peace, has embodied this approach, in places associating positive peace with "cooperation...equity, equality…[a] culture of peace, and dialogue" while describing negative peace as "a limited and limiting category suitable for dualist minds" (Galtung, 2013, p. 174). Some supporters forwarded value-based arguments, like how positive peace approaches allegedly provide more space for marginalised voices in public life and governance (Christie et al., 2008) or are better able to infuse political and social systems with "life-affirming principles and practices" (Brown, 2020, p. 8). Others highlighted more pragmatic arguments, such as how positive peace is linked to higher GDP, social cohesion, ecological protection and resilience in the face of pandemics (IEP, 2020; Syropoulos et al., 2021). Paffenholtz (2015) claimed that positive peace strategies, like inviting more diverse actors to the negotiation table, often lead to more durable results in the long run.

Diehl (2016) claimed that disingenuous parties have used the search for negative peace as a justification for military aggression. Negative peace has also been criticised as a seemingly necessary evil that oppresses people's human rights (Parlevliet, 2011), as "minimalist" when compared to positive peace's focus on holistic inclusivity (Pureza and Cravo, 2009, p. 5) or as "an appearance of stability" under which "many problems fester unaddressed just below the surface" (Legge, 2019, p. 8). Furthermore, an exclusive focus on negative peace has been linked, on the one hand, to oppressive "law and order societies" that quash opposition (Galtung, 1969, p. 184) or, on the other, to revolutionary changes that marginalise concrete groups or otherwise prove "disruptive, disorienting and [creating] unease and resentment" (IEP, 2022, p. 2). A common theme found among these sentiments is that positive peace leads to more long-term

solutions conducive to lasting nonviolence, from which negative peace is thought to provide only temporary (or perhaps even authoritarian) respite.

I identify three broad arguments in the literature for promoting negative over positive peace. First, scholars like Parlevliet acknowledge voices who contend that the immediate stability brought by negative peace can be deeply necessary, especially "during transitions in the transformation process" (cited by Kriesberg, 2011, p. 55). In such cases, practitioners in post-conflict scenarios may prioritise negative over positive peace when it promises to bring a needed, though perhaps temporary, degree of basic security – even while affirming that positive peace remains a desirable goal (Bjarnegård, 2017). A key factor here is that interventions promoting positive peace, such as liberal state building or dialogue between antagonistic parties, can be seen as premature, or even dangerous, if prerequisite factors like physical safety have not first been properly established by means of negative peacebuilding mechanisms (Paris, 2004). What's more, attempting to bring people together before they feel ready, or before they have sufficiently mourned their losses, may unintentionally exacerbate a conflict and possibly lead to additional cycles of violence or marginalisation (Stimec et al., 2009; Cleven et al., 2018).

Another set of arguments for negative peace involve values or morals. For example, one of the conflict-affected parties can frame the outgroup as having crossed a red line, thereby placing themselves outside the moral order and thus too illegitimate or "dangerous" to build positive peace with (Salnykova, 2015, p. 15). As a result, ingroup members may claim the right to impose a negative peace that disadvantages the other, possibly utilising domination or structural violence to create or maintain it. A common reason for the delegitimization of outgroups is perceived

outgroup use of violent, oppressive or hostile behaviour toward the ingroup (Anderson, 1993; Held, 2005; Salnykova, 2014). Other value-based justifications for negative peace involve concerns that win-win solutions can prop up an oppressive status quo (Kreisberg 1997; Winslade and Monk, 2000) or that engagement with the other side will be equated with legitimising their positions or values (Rothman and Alberstein, 2013). Concerns about justice also fit inside this grouping, as some scholars and practitioners assert that "developing harmonious relationships when…injustice remains unaddressed risks embedding structural violence" (Standish et al., 2022, p. 14). In other words, establishing a negative peace with perceived aggressors, especially as a way of protecting vulnerable groups or resisting injustice, can be preferable to working towards positive peace in ways that may allow oppressive actors to entrench dynamics of power or domination.

Finally, some supporters of negative peace express scepticism of positive peace in general. One form of scepticism doubts whether positive peace is possible under certain circumstances; for example, Thomas (1992) suggests four factors that make working towards positive peace difficult or impossible: (a) the presence of factors incentivising competition rather than collaboration among parties, (b) a lack of problem-solving skills on one or all sides, (c) a timeframe that doesn't allow for long-term positive peace initiatives to take root and (d) a lack of trust between the parties. In his words, these factors make focusing on positive peace "naive and impractical, and that alternative modes should be advocated" (Thomas, 1992, p. 271). Another form of scepticism not only doubts the feasibility of interventions aimed at positive peace, but suspects that these can be used by hostile or hegemonic actors as a way of destabilising fragile situations to further their own interests. Top political figures in Russia (Lewis, 2022a), China

(Bjarnegård et al., 2017) and India (Lewis, 2022b) have framed certain peacebuilding initiatives promoted in the West, like establishing free elections, encouraging dialogue with minorities or enshrining protections for sexual minorities, as likely to undermine internal security and cohesion and thus amount to a threat to peace. Furthermore, positive peacebuilding has been directly accused of being not only ineffective, but a hypocritical way to forward "humanitarian concerns as simply a fig-leaf for western-backed regime change" (Lewis, 2022, p. 658). As a result, many of these countries instead promote illiberal negative peacebuilding measures, like military crackdowns and controlling the press, as a way of maintaining an allegedly more realistic and, notably, locally-derived negative peace.

In response to the above approaches prioritising either positive or negative peace, there are still other voices claiming that both are necessary components of a broader peacebuilding project that require integration, an approach sometimes called *strategic peacebuilding* (Lederach and Appleby, 2010; Schirch, 2021). Some highlight the need to address both the direct and structural causes of a conflict (Christie et al., 2008, Kriesberg, 2011), while others focus on the interconnectedness of immediate and long-term needs (Thomas, 1992; Shields, 2017). Despite the occasional use of language emphasising positive peace, Galtung (2013) himself nevertheless advocates for the integration of both. Turan (2015) notes that, in particularly volatile contexts, negative peace often needs to be established prior to initiating positive peacebuilding interventions, but that the latter need to eventually occur in order to bring about more sustainable peace. Lederach (2003) strongly advises positive peacebuilders not to dismiss the reasons why actors may prefer negative peace, such as fear of the other, concerns over justice, experiences of trauma or distrust in the peacebuilders' agenda. An understanding of these positions is thought to

be necessary in order for positive peace interventions to be designed so as not to alienate or retraumatize the parties involved (Cleven et al., 2018). This requires a context-specific approach in which peacebuilders come to understand the extent to which negative or positive peacebuilding can occur simultaneously or on a staggered timeline (Standish et al., 2022).

Beyond Galtung: Differing visions of positive peace

As described above, the UN (1992, 2000) promoted an interpretation of positive and negative peace theory that differed significantly from Galtung's approach. This was not a unique instance, as a number of researchers and practitioners have developed their own interpretations over the years, leading to debates within the field over which approach is most effective (Sharp, 2020). Most of these debates focus on positive peace, generating very different ideas of what positive peace should seek to accomplish and what interventions are capable of building it. While they are not formally categorised in the literature, for the sake of analysis and discussion I have divided them into three groups that I term *narrow*, *broad* and *emancipatory* positive peace.

Narrow positive peace focuses on the creation of legal and societal institutions through which conflicts can be resolved prior to the outbreak of direct violence. Such institutions are often associated with liberal state building projects, where international actors intervene in post-conflict societies to implement rule of law, democratic elections, liberal markets and the protection of human rights (Richmond, 2015; Sudebi, 2022). Proponents of liberal peace theory claim that these factors create more durable periods of nonviolence than ceasefires or negotiated agreements alone (Barnett et al., 2007), amounting to what Galtung calls direct positive peace (Galtung, 2013). Critics of narrow positive peace claim that this approach does not address the

deep roots of conflict and can furthermore prove "insensitive towards local ownership, emancipation, everyday needs and empowerment of the people in societies being 're-built'" (Turan, 2015, p. 114; Kulkova, 2019).

The Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), which began releasing a yearly *Positive Peace Report* starting in 2015, is an influential champion of narrow positive peace and has proposed a comprehensive redefinition of Galtung's theory that proposes eight specific components they call the "pillars of positive peace" (IEP, 2022, p. 8). These include (a) well-functioning government, (b) a sound business environment, (c) equitable distribution of resources, (d) free flow of information, (e) low levels of corruption, (f) acceptance of the rights of others, (g) good relations with neighbours and (h) high levels of human capital (IEP, 2022, p. 8). The IEP paradigm was designed with practitioners in mind and has become a widely accepted approach to positive and negative peace theory, going on to be reproduced within diverse peacebuilding organisations and academic work (Hauschild, n.d.; Sharp, 2020; Syropoulos et al., 2021).

What I term broad approaches to positive peace focus on additional factors like societal reconciliation (Clark, 2009; Kulkova 2016), the development of shared narratives and understandings of history (Bar-Tal, 2018), the resolution of group-based grievances (Tuban, 2015) or the healing of collective trauma (Volkan, 1997). Supporters of these strategies claim that they contribute to the transformation of relationships between the parties, which is thought to take place through dialogue, the reduction of cultural violence or the pursuit of win-win problem-solving approaches (Galtung, 1990; Rothman and Olsen, 2001; Nolte-Laird, 2022). Those who criticise broad positive peace have claimed that focusing on relationship

transformation in moments of ongoing or even recently-concluded violence may be premature (Wolff, 2004), “naive” (Thomas, 1992) or potentially coercive, especially in cases when reconciliation is seen as imposed on unwilling parties from the outside (Rothman and Alberstein, 2013; Cleven et al., 2018).

An influential example of broad positive peace is found in Tuban Turan’s *Positive Peace in Theory and Practice: Strengthening the United Nations's Pre-Conflict Prevention Role* (2015). Turan claimed that though narrow positive peace could instil tolerance and economic integration, it could not address the relational or structural causes of conflict, which she termed *Fundamental Conflicts* (FC) (Turan, 2015, p. 131). FCs are made up of two components: (a) deep-seated divisions among increasingly salient identity groups that (b) possess the potential for mobilisation to violence. These were thought to provide the fuel for violent conflict (Turan, 2015, p. 119). For this reason, Turan proposed another redefinition of positive peace: the absence of Fundamental Conflicts. She theorised that the resulting peace would be more durable than narrow positive peace as it would arise from social cohesion rather than from institutional mechanisms for resolving existing disputes.

There is also a third category that I call emancipatory positive peace, which may be the closest vision to the original, Galtungian formulation of the theory. It suggests that true positive peace can only be achieved through radical changes ensuring equality, equity and social liberation (Galtung, 2013). This may involve reconstituting post-conflict societies so as to institutionalise the provision of basic needs and services to all, thus eliminating material and societal deprivation, which are described as one of the classic causes of violence (Roberts, 2008).

Galtung and others also claim that, ultimately, spiritual freedom (inner emancipation) is one of the highest forms of positive peace, where love and *ubuntu*, the recognition of our common humanity and dignity, replace hate and violence (Webel, 2007; Galtung, 2013; Sharp, 2020, p. 126). As mentioned above, critics of emancipatory positive peace claim that values like equality are often too vague a basis upon which to design interventions (IEP, 2022), that it may ideologically marginalise peacebuilders with diverging vision of equality (Rummel, 1981) or that notions of liberation can justify coercive or violent policies in order to implement institutional equity (Boulding, 1977).

Standish et al. (2022) attempted to synthesise these different approaches into a common framework in *The Palgrave Handbook of Positive Peace*. They proposed four separate categories within which positive expressions of peace can manifest themselves. The first is *nonviolence*, which refers primarily to direct positive peace and can be expressed in ceasefires, in protecting victims from abuse/aggression and in nonviolent civil disobedience. The second is *social justice*, which mainly addresses structural violence and seeks to produce societies that extend equal rights to all members of its constituent groups. The third is *positive relationships*, addressing both cultural violence as well as societal polarization, often utilising dialogue and other forms of facilitated intergroup contact as a way to promote reconciliation or address conflict-conducive narratives one side may have about the other. The final, and an entirely new element, is *environmental sustainability*, which identifies exploitative elements in the relationship between humans and other members of the natural world as a legitimate interest for peacebuilding actors.

Standish et al. (2022) claim that all four categories are interconnected and can produce tensions when they exist in isolation from each other. Nonviolence without positive relationships, for instance, can leave communities estranged (Clark, 2009), improved relationships can maintain an oppressive status quo if injustice remains unaddressed (Dixon et al., 2010) and justice campaigns can alienate societal groups when done in a coercive or violent manner (Legge, 2019). Importantly, Standish et al. (2022) make the claim that positive peace must bring all of these elements together in a way that takes into account environmental concerns.

The problem with violence: limitations of Galtung's theory

While Galtung's notion of positive and negative peace has proved significant in the fields of PACS and peacebuilding, I argue that there are obstacles that nevertheless complicate the theory's application to contexts of culture war. One such obstacle is the centrality of *violence* in Galtung's framework. Speaking about visions of peace, both positive and negative types are differentiated with regard to violence – negative peace is the absence of violence and positive peace is the presence of infrastructure that proactively addresses the root causes of violence, thereby facilitating the growth of thriving societies (Galtung, 2013). Similarly, negative peacebuilding seeks to mitigate violence once it has started, while positive peacebuilding attempts to prevent violent onset or resurgence (Standish et al., 2022).

This presents difficulties when speaking about positive or negative peace in contexts like the Trump-era culture wars, where the definition of violence itself is a key contestation. As discussed in chapter two, a major debate between woke liberals and their opponents concerns whether speech-acts or the systemic production of unequal outcomes can indeed be considered a

form of violence or harm (Haidt, 2016; Shafer, 2022; Atkins, 2023). What's more, while direct violence seems to be a near-universally accepted notion, Sharp (2020) claims that the same cannot be said of structural and cultural violence. For example, competing philosophies instead position violence as a result of individual choices rather than structural factors (Rummel, 1981). Additionally, individuals without exposure to structural approaches to culture may not be inclined to "associate violence with the impersonal, unintended consequences of an ill-defined system" (Sharp, 2020, p. 126).

Scepticism over structural or cultural theories of violence may also be fuelled by a political element: a focus on structural elements of power and violence has been framed by some academics as a phenomenon primarily associated with the political left (Haidt, 2016; Hartman, 2019; Garlitz and Zompetti, 2021; Kaufmann, 2022). What's more, Galtung has been identified as a left-wing thinker by his contemporaries as well as later generations (Sharp, 2020). While this will not automatically create barriers for conservatives and right-leaning thinkers when engaging with Galtung's framework of violence, there is nevertheless the chance that normalising perceived left-wing frameworks like structural violence in an ideologically-charged context like the Trump-era culture wars may be perceived as promoting one partisan framework over the other. Given the fact that this project is rooted in the fields of PACS and peacebuilding, one of the principles informing this work is *conflict sensitivity*, which refers to an awareness of how research projects or interventions may inadvertently be seen to take sides or otherwise exacerbate a conflict (Conflict Sensitivity Consortium, 2012). Therefore, finding a way to frame positive and negative peace theory other than through the conventional lens of violence may

generate less obstacles to knowledge production and ultimately make this project more accessible for a politically diverse set of participants or, ultimately, readers.

Another potential issue complicating the application of Galtung's theory to contexts of culture war is that instances of violence may not be as easily found as in instances of armed conflict or authoritarian governance. As was discussed in chapter three, Hunter (2006) claimed that culture wars are disputes over "competing understandings of the good that [are regarded] as sacred and, therefore, non negotiable" (Hunter, 2006, p. 10). These disputes can certainly manifest themselves in acts seen as directly or structurally violent, but they also do so through public symbols, narratives, practices and institutions that promote certain norms to the exclusion of others (Hunter, 2006; Wolfe, 2006; Hartman, 2019). Such symbols or practices may promote narratives that support direct or structural violence against other groups, which would classify them as cultural violence (Galtung, 1990), or they may not.

In cases where they are not, culture war struggles may amount to a sphere of contestation within which competing philosophical, moral and value-based systems are promoted in mutually exclusive but ultimately nonviolent ways. As compared to Galtung (1969), who focuses on how conflict emerges in response to violence, Hunter and other culture war scholars draw attention to persistent societal conflicts that emerge simply in response to proximate outgroup norms or practices that ingroup members find threatening (Hunter, 2006; Stephan et al., 2016). This suggests that Galtung's theory may be made more comprehensive, not to mention more applicable to contexts like culture war, if it is adapted to take into account nonviolent instances of felt threat.

In fact, various theories exist in the academic literature to support the idea that threat, not only violence, is certainly enough to prompt conflict onset. One threat-informed cluster of conflict theories, which were derived from social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), suggests that mere group membership can create the impression of difference, generate perceptions of threat, prompt hostilities and form the basis of action aimed at threat mitigation, even in the absence of scarcity, competition or violence. SIT has gone on to inform contemporary frameworks in which scholars try to explain why culture war dynamics emerge even in the absence of violent histories (Greene, 2004; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2018).

Proponents of intergroup threat theory (ITT) claim that "the mere existence of outgroups with different value systems is a potential challenge to the ingroup's morals, beliefs, and norms," generating what are called *symbolic threats* (Stephan et al., 2016, p. 256). Symbolic threats, even without a clear risk of direct violence (known in ITT as *realistic threat*), may nevertheless prompt ingroups to believe themselves to be challenged, supplanted or in danger of having their systems of meaning destroyed by threatening outgroups. In cases like these, and especially when symbolic threat is paired with societal polarization, it is thought that ingroups experience collective angst resulting in a desire to resist outgroup value systems – which in a pre-violent context leads to philosophical, moral and value-based contestation in spheres such as the media, public institutions and popular opinion (Wohl and Branscombe, 2008; Hunter, 2006).

Saguy and Reifen-Tagar (2022) propose that many of the factors mentioned above contribute to what they call a *conflict-supporting mindset* (CSM) among affected groups, which they define as

"a psychological orientation of negativity" manifesting in "negative beliefs, emotions and convictions regarding the outgroup" (p. 1). They claim that the development of CSMs within social groups leads to increased polarization, outgroup stereotypes and perceived threat, which may in fact form a basis for eventual violent action aimed at outgroups. Importantly, these factors consolidate and are consolidated by conflict-supporting narratives that entrench these mindsets into stories told about existential threats to the ingroup, ones which can be transmitted through partisan media or passed down through generations (Bar-Tal, 2018). Importantly, Saguy and Reifen-Tagar (2022) affirm that threat in the absence of direct violence is more than enough to fuel a CSM.

Expanding positive and negative peace theory to account for threat

I argue that the literature cited above proves ample justification for expanding Galtung's theory of positive and negative peace to not only take into account how conflict-affected individuals respond to violence, but also to threat. Redefining or expanding Galtung's theory in order to increase relevance and applicability is nothing new: (a) the IEP (2022, p. 8) promoted the idea that positive peace is being constituted by eight quantifiable pillars, (b) Turan (2015) defined positive peace as the absence of deep-seated Fundamental Conflicts and (c) Standish et al. (2022) integrated environmental concerns with traditional factors like nonviolence, justice and positive relations. Each sought to make Galtung's theory more applicable, accessible and relevant to different situations, and I seek to do the same for contexts of culture war.

To that end, I propose defining negative peace not only as the absence of direct, structural, cultural or other forms of violence but also as the absence of actual or perceived threat.

Accordingly, within this framework, negative peacebuilding is expanded to include interventions aimed at mitigating threats felt by oneself or one's ingroup. Similar to Galtung's original formulation, this new framework also defines positive peace as the presence of factors that facilitate thriving societies, harmonious relationships and the provision of needs, with the caveat that positive peacebuilding seeks not only to proactively address the factors that give rise to violence, but also to felt threat. The differences between Galtung's formulation and the one I propose can be seen in the following table:

	Response to violence (Traditional)	**Response to threat (Expanded)**
Negative Peace	The absence of violence	The absence of felt threat
Positive Peace	The presence of factors that address the root causes of violence.	The presence of factors that address the root causes of felt threat.

Fig 4. Positive and negative peace with regard to both violence and threat.

I applied this reformulated theory in the 20 interviews I conducted. In the literature reviewed earlier in this chapter, I explored existing conceptions of positive and negative peace, the peacebuilding strategies thought to be conducive to both and the preferences reported by scholars and practitioners for one, the other or both types of peace. The resulting data, which I present in the next chapter, paints a nuanced picture of how people operated within the culture wars and opens up new avenues for analysis and intervention.

Chapter Five: Results and Discussion

Results and analysis

The sections of this chapter are organised according to the research questions I outlined in chapter one, which in turn informed the questions I used in my interview guide (see Appendix A). The answers to the first question, regarding how participants positioned themselves (via self-identification) with regard to the Trump-era culture wars, were discussed in chapter one and form the basis for the categories presented in Figure 1 reproduced below. In addition to categories like "liberal" or "conservative," participants were grouped by partisan strength (weak, moderate, strong and strongest) and, among liberals, by support for woke politics. Additional demographic details for all participants are listed in Appendix B.

Liberal				**Conservative**	
Weak Liberals			2	Weak Conservatives	3
				Right-Leaning Libertarian	1
Moderate Woke Liberals	3	Moderate Non-Woke Liberals	1	Moderate Conservatives	3
Strong Woke Liberals	2	Strong Non-Woke Liberals	1	Strong Conservatives	2
Strongest Liberal (Non-Woke)			1	Strongest Conservative	1
Total			10	**Total**	10

Fig 1. Participant Breakdown by Ideological Categorization

The second, third and fourth questions asked participants about (a) the different visions of peace they identified as relevant to the Trump-era culture wars, (b) the peacebuilding strategies that

were thought to contribute to those visions and (c) their personal preferences for working towards one or the other type of peace. The fifth and sixth questions in the interview guide, which asked participants about the impact of Trump's presidency on their answers as well as about any visions of peace and related strategies that they find problematic, produced data that is integrated throughout the results and analysis in this chapter.

The following sections present the results detailing various (a) visions of peace (negative and positive, (b) categories of negative and positive peacebuilding strategies, and (c) preferences for either type of peace. This presentation of the data is the product of the analysis I conducted on the interviews and serves as the main result of this study. It is followed by a discussion on the data's relevance, applicability to the field and contribution to the literature. While the data collected from 20 exploratory interviews cannot be used to make claims concerning tendencies within the broader populace, they do present a variety of ways that positive and negative peace have been conceptualised in contexts like the culture wars in the United States. This provides a basis for future, in-depth research with the communities under study that would further explore the implications of preferred visions of peace as well as the strategies various actors use to achieve them.

Visions of negative peace

According to the adaptation of Galtung's theory that I described in chapter four, negative peace can not only refer to the absence of violence, but also of felt threat. The visions of negative peace described by the interviewees, ones that they promoted as well as those they saw promoted around them, were diverse. Upon analysis, I identified six main visions of negative peace that

emerged from the interviews. The ideological demographics of the supporters of each vision of negative peace can be found in the graphs in Appendix D.

1) Absence of the other. In this vision of negative peace, conflicts and tensions disappear because threatening others, simply put, no longer exist in the public sphere. Participants noted different versions of this vision, including the incarceration of particularly threatening others – "lock them [violent leftist groups] up!" (strongest conservative) – or the (self-)confinement of activists to the private sphere. In one interview, a respondent expressed exasperation, speaking of Trump supporters: "sometimes I would love for them not to exist" (strongly woke liberal), though she admitted that she considers this an extreme sentiment that she had no plans to pursue. In one case, an interviewee was told by a family member, concerning their dispute over public values relating to COVID-19-related mandates, that he should "walk into a COVID ward and die" (moderate conservative). Only three of the most strongly polarised respondents expressed personal support for this vision of peace.

2) Victory over the outgroup. In this vision of negative peace, one group is seen as having "won" the culture war, and as a result their values become dominant and normalised in the public sphere. Accordingly, the other side's values or beliefs are marginalised. This domination can take many forms, such as the neutralisation of opposing militant street groups, the official marginalisation of so-called dangerous ideologies, standardised school curriculums that explicitly favour some values over others, police mandates to crack down on certain political groups or activities, limits on advocating for marginalised values, regulation of how "harmful" information is spread, the presence of federal laws binding in all states and the demarcation of

clear boundaries as to what speech is considered legitimate or harmful. For example, in the case of abortion, respondents spoke about "a return to Christian morality [where] abortion is unthinkable…or illegal" (strong conservative), or "[a context where] women always have the option to get an abortion…and there are legislative barriers preventing attempts to limit access" (strongly woke liberal). An important aspect of this vision of peace is its *coercive* nature – marginalised groups do not acquiesce to this state of affairs and their ability to resist is limited by mechanisms put in place by dominant groups. Only weak partisans decried this and the previous strategy entirely, as this was seen as requiring unacceptable levels of coercion or violence against the outgroup to achieve. Moderates on both sides found the coercion involved regretful, though perhaps occasionally necessary. Only among the strongest partisans did some participants express little to no regret for the coercion involved.

3) Voluntary accession of outgroup members to the ingroup. This type of negative peace involves members of ideological ingroups voluntarily leaving behind their beliefs and joining the outgroup. Participants used three discourses to describe the intellectual process by which one "changes sides" in the culture war: (a) *enlightenment*, where group members realise the allegedly problematic nature of their views, which respondents described as requiring exposure to evidence or "the facts," (b) *conversion*, which carried a religious connotation and invites not only an intellectual change, but often an interior/spiritual one as well, and (c) *rescue*, in which interviewees described beloved outgroup members as "in thrall" to dangerous or seductive ideologies, perhaps requiring frequent interventions, long-term relationships or dedicated care.

Some respondents spoke about their desire for family members to switch sides: “My ideal peace would have been having a conversation where I could say, ‘here is the evidence, here’s what happened, can you sit down with me?’ I wanted them to change their mind” (moderately woke liberal). Others described entire social demographics as being vulnerable to problematic ideologies, therefore requiring interventions to prevent radicalization: “The people who join the far-right are ‘produced.’ I mean…all these people in Pennsylvania don’t just decide to become fascists overnight” (strongest liberal). This vision of peace differs from victory in that it is non-coercive in nature, albeit nevertheless motivated by the conviction that one’s ingroup is in the right. as well as by enough concern or empathy for outgroup members to motivate attempts to transition ideological outgroup members to the ingroup. Moderate and weak partisans expressed significantly more support for this vision than for victory or the absence of the outgroup. Moderates who regretfully supported the latter two visions noted that they should be seen as a “last resort” should voluntary accession fail to stop threatening outgroups from doing harm.

4) De-escalation. Participants who promoted this vision of negative peace described a desire not to win against the outgroup so much as to limit their destructive capacities. In this context, peace does not require the resolution of the culture wars so much as their continuance in a less polarised, less harmful form. De-escalation can take the shape of mutually accepted limits to how values are contested (i.e. no derogatory language), or the softening of outgroup strategies that are perceived as especially harmful or radical. De-escalation was positively described especially by weak partisans on both sides as a way of mitigating the damage of the culture wars without needing to implement coercive measures against the outgroup.

5) Segregation. In many ways this vision of negative peace is similar to the absence of the other, but differs in a key feature. Rather than removing ideological outgroups from the public sphere, segregation implies the creation of separate, parallel spheres that are dominated by differing norm systems. The scale of this segregation can take many forms – on the personal level, it can mean avoiding places where one would have contact with the other side, or it can mean living in cities or states that are less hostile to one's beliefs. On a grander scale, one participant expressed a preference for a mass, geographical restructuring of the United States that would allow for different cultures and value systems to exist unimpeded by the other: "The radical right need to leave Oregon, Washington state or New York, they need to give up…and the militant left needs to leave Texas" (moderate conservative). This vision was supported by all participant groups, though they were approximately divided in half concerning whether segregation should be a temporary or permanent state of affairs. It was most commonly framed as either a "good enough" peace in an increasingly hostile world, or as a second-best option should a more preferred vision of peace fail.

6) Nonengagement. The majority of participants who described preferences for negative peace ascribed to some form of nonengagement with the other side, most often manifest as a form of apolitical coexistence ("agree to disagree" or "live and let live"). While segregation amounts to the separation of opposing partisans, nonengagement still allows for regular contact, though under specific conditions. The most common condition was that polarising topics should not be pursued in conversation so as not to stoke tensions – one interviewee termed this "a détente in personal relationships" (weak conservative), while another likened it to a "ceasefire" (moderately woke liberal). Some respondents described nonengagement as a general principle, while others

limited engagement with to specific outgroup members who were seen as unfamiliar or particularly threatening: “If I don’t know you, if I don’t trust you, if I can’t see your face, if there isn’t any context, I am not doing this with you. No good will come of this. A negative peace is healthy in that regard” (weak conservative). This vision of peace was found mainly among more moderate and especially weaker partisans. Strong partisans who spoke about instances of nonengagement described them as particularly painful, and settled for them only when other visions like victory or accession failed.

Visions of positive peace

In chapter four, I argued that positive peace implies not only the presence of factors that address root causes of violence but also those of felt threat, promoting integrative social cohesion among outgroups where possible. On analysing the interviews, four visions of positive peace emerged and are outlined below. The ideological demographics of the supporters of each vision of positive peace can be found in the graphs in Appendix E.

1) A culture of collaboration in spite of differences. A major component of this vision of peace involves accepting the right of ideological outgroups to exist, as well as the possibility that they may not change sides in the near or distant future: “The solution I would like to see is for both communities…to accept that there are these broad swathes of the country that aren’t on board with their ideas” (moderate conservative). In this vision, engagement need not necessarily aim at creating warm relations or reconciliation between the two, but rather a dedication to understanding core differences, finding pragmatic overlap in terms of policy or social norms and maintaining the maximum amount of outgroup freedoms as possible. This vision of peace was

described by some as a temporary state on the way to improved relations (or new episodes of contestation), or as a permanent "best possible unideal situation" (moderate non-woke liberal). Support for this vision of peace was found among nearly all participant groups.

2) A culture of dialogue and relational engagement. If the prior vision of positive peace involves the normalisation of pragmatic collaboration, this vision refers to a normalisation of contact for the purposes of dialogue and relationship-building. Like a culture of pragmatic collaboration, this does not imply positive relations so much as a series of institutional mechanisms facilitating sustained contact, as well as the presence of cultural values that legitimise such contact. In the words of one respondent, "I want a [culture of] respectful dialogue where you can take issue with somebody's position without being attacked…a give and take, an exchange of ideas where both sides are willing to listen to and be open to changing their mind" (strongly non-woke liberal). As with the prior vision of positive peace, this vision was met with support from all partisans, though strongly woke liberals expressed additional reservations concerning dialogue that will be discussed below.

3) Positive relations. This vision of peace implies the development and maintenance of positive, perhaps even warm relationships between ingroup and outgroup members. Like with the previous two visions of positive peace, mutual understanding is a key factor. But this understanding extends not only to differences of opinion, but also to why and how people arrived at their beliefs, an awareness of ingroup bias towards outgroups (particularly in partisan media) and resistance towards narratives that reduce complex outgroup realities to "simplified buzzwords." Another component is what some participants called a "culture of dignity…[that

cannot] just fall into pragmatism" (weak conservative). Respondents described dignity as involving humanising the other side, respecting their choices and autonomy and, perhaps, "encountering the beauty" (weak conservative) in individual outgroup members even while they hold opposing views. This does not necessarily result in a personal relationship: "even if we aren't friends, it remains possible for us to interact fruitfully…We can still turn toward each other rather than away from each other" (weak liberal). For some interviewees, however, friendship is a key component of this vision of peace: "I still have strong beliefs, I do have red lines, but I fundamentally believe that it's important to have friends in communities that are *other* to me and threaten me" (strongly woke liberal). Respondents on both sides support this vision of peace regarding pre-existing relations, but strong partisans expressed scepticism regarding the building of new friendships with outgroups. Liberal participants did not use the language of "a culture of dignity."

4) Meeting structural community needs. This vision of peace involves a state where the core needs that are thought to underlie conflict-conducive behaviour are met in a way that makes hostile, violent or threatening actions unnecessary. When discussing this vision, respondents often listed concrete structural issues that were thought to fuel culture war conflicts along with ways that they could be addressed. For example, concerning abortion, this may include the prevention of pregnancy or rape; for police brutality a balance of social programs and a culture of de-escalation; for populist resentment, a restoration of dignity and livelihood for the economically precarious. These need not be limited to nationally-implemented infrastructural changes; some participants instead emphasised the work that local communities can do to meet the basic needs of their residents: "I want to make sure people feel safe and that they can thrive.

In my vision there's more of an emphasis on…the neighbourhood, what they need, how to protect everyone, and that leads to more practical action" (moderately woke liberal). Participants on the left were significantly more likely to promote this vision of peace than those on the right.

Strategies for negative peacebuilding

This and the next section summarise the strategies that participants thought would contribute to negative or positive peace respectively. Following Standish et al. (2022), I refer to these strategies as examples of *negative* and *positive peacebuilding*.

1) Mitigating destructive outgroup dynamics (without aiming for resolution). These strategies were primarily framed by participants as a way to promote de-escalation. They include *making strategic contact with threatening outgroups* for the purposes of reducing hostility, and may involve *making compromises or concessions to the other side* to build credibility with outgroup members or help them save face. Some respondents claimed that this can be done in order to legitimise outgroup moderates while marginalising outgroup extremists, especially among family members: "I was reaching out to my Republican family…because I was trying to [encourage] the lesser evil…I wasn't against Republicans, but Trump supporters" (moderately woke liberal). This may involve *preventing perceived extremists from appropriating or sabotaging* contact and dialogue: "We can't let them hijack the process; if you can't be part of it, you can't be part of it, I don't care what kind of person you are or on what side you're on" (strongly non-woke liberal). Some of these strategies may also be used to build positive peace, but they are included here as interviewees were explicitly describing circumstances when they were used to achieve de-escalation. This strategy was promoted by participants across the

political spectrum, though weaker and moderate partisans showed a somewhat larger preference than strong partisans.

2) Creating or exacerbating distance from outgroup members. A major element of this grouping of strategies is the *removal of self from situations leading to contact with the other*, which lends itself to segregation. This may be expressed geographically by moving from cities or states dominated by ideological outgroups to more friendly locales: "this is self-segregation, not forcing people to do so…but if I live in California and I don't like it, I need to leave. California isn't changing; the population believes something different" (moderate conservative). One interviewee advocated for segregation on a national scale, and described potential campaigns for this as a strategy to build negative peace. On a more individual note, ingroup members can *create safe spaces* where outgroup presence is regulated or precluded entirely. Partisans may also work towards segregation by *socially distancing themselves from outgroup members*, *walking away from heated conversations* or *avoiding contact with threatening "others*," even if they happen to be family members. An area where respondents said this happened often was online, as certain platforms make it easy to limit online contact with outgroup members, especially through *blocking people on social media*: "My cousin fell into very far alt-right ideologies… I almost immediately deleted or blocked him" (moderately woke liberal). These strategies were supported by all participant groups, but were favoured more by liberal respondents.

3) Maintaining boundaries with outgroups. Rather than initiating or adding distance from threatening others, this grouping of negative peacebuilding strategies aims at entrenching pre-existing boundaries, for example through *maintaining ideological homogeneity of ingroup*

spaces or by *creating apolitical spaces*. In the words of one participant, "I don't think every conversation should be political. I don't think it should be natural to talk politics around the dinner table. We need [places where] talking politics is impolite" (strong conservative). Some interviewees used the metaphor of a demilitarised zone where culture war dynamics are "left at the door." This also expressed itself geographically, with certain respondents advocating for *less federal lawmaking and increased state autonomy* as a way of preserving the ideological and cultural differences between regions in the United States. Finally, some participants spoke about leaving *ideologically dissident spaces alone*, without attempting to change, engage with or integrate them into one's own value system: "At my church, they want a peace…more a negative peace, something like 'just let us be our own way and not have to change'" (moderate conservative). Participant support for these strategies were found equally on both sides of the political spectrum.

4) Campaigns to "change" the other. This may involve coercive behaviour, such as *intimidation directed at outgroup members*: "I've seen it on social media, people telling me stories that they posted something and then people told them to kill themselves – instead of having a conversation, they make threats or try to silence and cancel them" (right-leaning libertarian). Multiple respondents reported seeing instances of or having themselves *utilised shame to prompt others to change their views or behaviour*. Conservative participants expressed anxieties about coercive instances of official policies in schools or businesses that incentivize value changes, such as mandatory *diversity, equity or inclusion (DEI) training*, or *threats of termination or expulsion* for expressing certain views publicly. This category also includes non-coercive strategies such as *debating* with co-workers, friends or family members or

presenting evidence to support one's own value system. Two participants described spiritual practices such as *prayer* as a strategy to change outgroup hearts and minds. The most common strategies described by far, however, were *education and advocacy*. This involved challenging outgroup narratives, offering voluntary workshops promoting ingroup values, posting ideological content on social media, challenging outgroup sources of information or designing children's and youth programming aimed at outgroup demographics. This grouping of strategies was highly promoted by all participant subcategories.

Participants described the four categories of negative peacebuilding strategies listed above as conducive to the following visions of negative peace: de-escalation, accession of the outgroup, segregation or nonengagement. The following five categories were framed as conducive to victory or, in extreme cases, to the removal of the outgroup. There was much discussion during the interviews concerning whether the following strategies could truly be described as negative peacebuilding rather than, say, the mere exacerbation of conflict for conflict's sake. Nevertheless, many respondents affirmed their belief that these strategies indeed worked towards the normalisation of one group of values and the marginalisation of others – in other words, a cultural "victory" followed by negative peace.

5) Placing coercive limits on outgroup members. One major strategy involved *campaigning for* or *passing legislation that mandates or incentivizes ingroup values*. Examples include placing limits on abortion access, legally requiring health practitioners to perform procedures that go against their conscience, forbidding teachers from disclosing a child's sexual orientation to their parents or banning drag shows for minors. This may also include the *forced removal of the other*,

possibly by policing certain behaviours or practices – one interviewee wished for greater policing of protesters and allegedly violent activists: "we need to let the police do their job but they're often told to stand down. The best thing they can do is to arrest certain people and not put up with nonsense" (strongest conservative). Concerning polarised responses to COVID-19, one respondent advocated for the removal of unvaccinated children from public schools. Interviewees also noted less directly coercive means of compelling outgroup members to remove themselves from specific spaces, such as pressuring outgroup members to quit their jobs, not to frequent areas/establishments associated with the ingroup or to change their place of residence. Another strategy involves *limiting the ability of the outgroup to express themselves*, which when implemented formally can involve strategies noted in chapter two, such as like speech regulation (especially to counter hate speech), establishing deplatforming policies in institutions or on social media, stripping outgroup institutions of funding and resources or reducing the ability to access, promote or share information (banning books, removing information from online platforms, regulating information disseminated in classrooms, etc.). This also includes informal practices such as call-outs, cancellations, rescinding invitations to speak at events or the disruption of public speeches. This strategy was favoured by stronger partisans on both sides. That said, only strong liberal partisans advocated for limiting outgroup expression, though they claimed they encountered conservative instances of this in the news.

6) Encouraging the "othering" of outgroup members. This is an extensive grouping of strategies that includes attempts to delegitimize not only outgroups, but even ingroup members seen as "too extreme" or "too passive." This may involve *stigmatisation*, for example directed at concrete individuals or social groups: "I can't stand when I see other people on the left talk about

Trump supporters like they're dumb or trashy; it's classist language. They don't care about understanding where they come from or what they believe, what they do" (strongest liberal). Common tools for this stigmatisation include *shaming* or *mockery*, which may extend to target lifestyle choices or cultural habits associated with the other side (red baseball caps, eating sushi, etc.). In extreme cases, outgroup members may be *classified as dangerous, distasteful* or even *infectious*. Some respondents noted that *discouraging contact with the outgroup* was common in highly partisan contexts, at times to the point where such contact was interpreted as a betrayal of the ingroup or ingroup values. Alternatively, interviewees described ways of engaging with outgroup members, such as debate, that prioritised *making fun of the other* or *framing their beliefs and values as absurd*. This type of engagement was typically described as "performative" and is allegedly done to serve the ingroup rather than address the outgroup on their own terms. Participants often denied utilising these strategies themselves but accused outgroup members of doing so.

7) Undermining ideas, ideologies or values associated with the outgroup. This may take the form of *campaigns to delegitimize outgroup ideologies*. For example, a strong conservative respondent spoke of the need to normalise the idea of young people starting families instead of travelling the world. Alternatively, a liberal participant challenged antiracist narratives that assumed deep-seated racial resentment as a core cause for Trump's election, instead highlighting economic precarity and resentment against distant and allegedly predatory elites. Delegitimization of outgroup narratives may come with *moralising or villainizing opposing groups for holding certain ideas*. In the words of one interviewee, "In my experience talking with certain people, it's either their way or you're a fascist. There's no room for nuance, or to

agree to disagree" (moderate conservative). Another participant example of the delegitimization of outgroup values was *highlighting allegedly problematic consequences of seemingly unproblematic axioms*. For example, respondents reported being told that providing information on alternatives to abortion would necessarily lead to a crackdown on those seeking to terminate a pregnancy, or that protesting police brutality would lead to mass criminality. The undesirability of these end states would be used as justification to limit or resist the associated behaviours.

8) Direct resistance. A common tactic of resistance noted by participants was *protest*. Participants described various types of protest – (a) single instances of mass protest, like the 2017 Women's March and various BLM protests, (b) yearly protests, like the March for Life in Washington D.C., or (c) campus protests, often in response to controversial speakers, to encourage the dismissal of specific staff or as an act of resistance against outgroup student groups. Another form of resistance is *nonviolent direct action*, such as sit-ins, strikes or obstructing outgroups in ways that prevent them from achieving certain goals. One conservative respondent described such behaviour on campus: "[There were] leftists who went out of their way to make life harder for us. People spat at us and flipped our tables…we battle on a daily basis" (strongest conservative). While participants on the right reported participating in protest and direct action, this was a strategy more commonly supported by liberal participants.

9) Violence. This grouping of strategies was described as the most extreme or controversial by the interviewees. It includes *property damage*, especially but not limited to vandalism committed during mass protests. It also includes *threats of physical violence*, as when one respondent described how "the church I go to has received bomb threats for our pro-life views" (moderate

conservative). Participants also referred to *direct, physical violence* against outgroup members, which ranged from "preemptive" assaults on problematic actors to violent responses to outgroup violence. The majority of respondents condemned violence as a strategy. While violence in response to outgroup violence was justified by at least one strong partisan on each side of the divide, violence as a response to allegedly harmful ideologies (as compared to harmful behaviours) was only supported by strongly woke liberal participants.

Strategies for positive peacebuilding

Participants also noted a wide range of different positive peacebuilding strategies. As in the section on negative peacebuilding above, overarching categories are listed in bold and individual strategies are italicised.

1) Humanising or legitimising the other. This category of strategies seeks to improve or otherwise rehabilitate the image of the other and may be implemented to circumvent (a) negative peacebuilding strategies aimed at delegitimizing the other or (b) cognitive prejudices associated with affective polarization, as was discussed in chapter three. This humanization of the other was described by participants as an essential step towards building visions of peace like cultures of pragmatic engagement or dialogue. For example, ingroup members spoke about *challenging their personal biases* concerning outgroup members, potentially by *looking for sources* that would render outgroup positions more understandable, or *consuming content that humanises* outgroup members, histories or choices. For some respondents, this was an easier alternative to pursuing contact with the other: "I would listen to podcasts of conversations with Trump supporters…it was pretty clear that dialogue wasn't going to happen between me and my family,

but I still wanted to generate empathy and understanding" (moderately woke liberal). *Listening to the other tell their story* was another common strategy listed by interviewees. This could result in *challenging negative stereotypes* about the outgroup, especially among ingroup members. Two ways of doing this include *acknowledging differences within the outgroup*, for example by distinguishing between extremists and moderates, or *identifying nuances*: "I have people in my family who are pro-life and I don't 'other' them. I see them as complex human beings and not as bad people. I try not to mix political beliefs with morality" (strongly woke liberal). One participant, a writer, shared her hope to *create art* that humanises all sides of various divides. This strategy was promoted by all participant categories except the strongest partisans.

2) Legitimising contact and cooperation. A major strategy in this grouping is *destigmatizing contact and collaboration* with the other side; the active stigmatisation of dehumanising and coercing outgroup members may be involved. This may also include *challenging narratives that paint the other as irrational or unreachable*, or it may advocate for *contact as a means of understanding outgroup needs*, which may then open up avenues to collaborate on ways to meet those needs nondestructively. The latter strategy bears similarities to the negative peacebuilding approach of initiating contact for the purposes of convincing, converting or rescuing the other from their ideologies, with the key difference being the desire to uncover and possibly address legitimate outgroup needs. This may lead to *building solidarity or coalitions* between groups that, due to culture war dynamics or affective polarization, thought they were enemies even while possessing grounds for cooperation. This work was said to involve *identifying overlapping areas of interest, agreement or common ground*, as described by one respondent: "[pro-lifers and pro-choicers] mostly agree that abortion is not the ideal…some supporters see it as a necessary

evil…there may be space to work together to prevent rape or support single mothers" (weak conservative). This strategy was promoted on both sides of the political divide, though supporters of woke politics expressed reservations that will be discussed in the following section.

3) Creating tools, platforms or aids for contact. This may involve designing platforms for direct, possibly regular contact with ideological outgroup members. These may be *official platforms* for creating contact within institutions like universities or governing bodies, "arenas on the federal and local level" (moderate conservative), where nondestructive, though still passionate, contestation could take place. This could also involve the construction and dissemination of *nonpartisan negotiation tools* to facilitate said contact. Unofficial platforms were also discussed, especially as a parallel offering to safe spaces: "an area where people can venture from safe spaces into one where [people] are disposed to dialogue…where you can receive assistance or be coached by facilitators or assistants" (moderate conservative). Some interviewees noted the importance of having *trauma specialists* available to assist triggered participants who would like to process their histories in a way that makes it easier to enter into desired contact with the other. Key strategies underlying this grouping include *training and employment of qualified facilitators*, as well as *educating citizens in dialogue techniques and approaches*. This strategy was promoted on all sides of the political divide.

4) Creating opportunities for casual contact. This grouping refers to strategies that allow for or incentivize occasional contact with outgroup members in low-stakes environments. *Moving into mixed neighbourhoods* was one method mentioned that facilitated this kind of contact, which may result in *non-political joint projects*. In the words of one respondent, "we know our

neighbours, even if we don't…vote the same way…we pick up trash or maintain public spaces, have block parties or share a meal" (moderate conservative). Another interviewee described moving back in with her family as a way to re-establish connections. Spending time together was also spoken about as a way to build common ground before broaching political topics: "Having too much in common isn't a bad thing…I'd rather [start by] watching a hockey game or a halftime show. This creates common ground for discussion…a neutral area" (moderate conservative). One interviewee described joint activities that he organised between polarised groups, including outdoor education or other forms of training that fostered "shared challenges, like hour-bound activities…so that hopefully a shift occurred from being together in order to argue your side, to being together in order to simply be together" (weak liberal). This casual contact may be followed up by *intentional attempts to build long-term relationships* with ideological outgroup members. While all participants except the strongest partisans expressed openness to these strategies, they were more often promoted by weak and moderate partisans.

5**) Dialogue**. This refers to two distinct branches of activities that respondents described engaging in: (a) *conversations with outgroup members* conducted in good faith, which were planned or occurred spontaneously in day-to-day life, and (b) specially organised *group dialogue sessions* supported by a trained facilitator. Interviewees reported engaging in dialogue at home, with friends and occasionally online. Some respondents had participated in facilitated group dialogue programs hosted by *bridgebuilding organisations*. A key, though controversial, tool when holding such dialogues was a set of *established norms for contact and dialogue*. These norms could include treating outgroup members with civility, affirming areas of agreement or resisting attempts to shame others for their beliefs. In the words of one respondent, "[we must]

always respect dignity, never be manipulative, never try to get others to agree with [us] and genuinely try to find common ground" (moderate conservative). This strategy was supported by participants regardless of political affiliation, with the exception of promoting norms like civility, as this was seen by woke liberals as potentially problematic for reasons that will be discussed in the following section.

6**) Promoting reconciliation**. When interviewees used the word "reconciliation," it referred not merely to the re-establishing of relations, but also to (a) *admitting past and present wrongdoing*, (b) *acknowledging legitimate grievances on all sides*, (c) *redressing wrongs in ways that do not lead to the development of further grievances* and (d) *committing to building a common future* where felt threats would be mitigated. Some respondents identified weak and moderate partisans as ideal first targets for such initiatives, hoping that reconciliation "will start in the centre and then expand outwards" (moderately woke liberal). Key to this is the notion of *reparative justice*, where boundaries are set in place but alleged outgroup wrongdoers continue to remain part of the community so long as they act in good faith: "we use *call-in culture*…the conversation doesn't end with 'no.' The 'no' must be there to provide safety but then you have to start the act of repair" (moderately woke liberal). Strong partisans on both sides expressed scepticism over the possibility of reconciliation with ideological outgroups.

7**) Implementing educational reform**. Many interviewees believed that changes in the school system could pave the way for positive peace. The main strategy listed was teaching *conflict resolution, peacebuilding or dialogue techniques* in schools, including *peer mediation* programs or *debate club* practices that require participants to investigate points of view they do not

themselves hold. Some respondents noted the importance of exposing children to these skills while young: “if you explicitly teach children [these skills] at a young age and continue to develop them over time, things would be much better” (strongly woke liberal). Other strategies respondents discussed included (a) *teaching history with nuance*, resisting narratives valorizing or demonising whole nations or peoples, (b) *identifying partisan narratives* embedded in education practices and structures or (c) *altering educational philosophies* that exclusively promote binary right-wrong answers and (d) designing courses that *facilitate understanding of different approaches* to a topic. While these strategies received support by participants no matter their political affiliation, many participants nevertheless noted that such reforms, if not done in a bipartisan manner, could in fact be seen by the other side as an attempt to institutionalise ingroup values at the cost of outgroup values.

8**) Implementing media reform**. The majority of participants identified social media as a culture war exacerbator during the Trump era, with some advocating for *restructuring algorithms and business incentives* to reduce the spread of polarising content. It is important here to note that this was not aimed at the censorship of partisan content, but at reducing the reach of material designed to make audiences feel threatened by or angry at outgroups. Other interviewees advocated for the *regulation of legacy media* to reduce bias and promote a diversity of viewpoints, potentially by resurrecting American practices like the “Fairness Doctrine” (see chapter three). Others advocated for *strengthening media literacy* among key demographics, as well as *the creation of bipartisan resources* that present facts independent of opinion or analysis, which may require *joint fact-finding initiatives* supported by diverse communities. As with strategies aimed at reforming educational practices, participants noted that media regulation

could easily be done in a way that reinforces one camp's worldview and biases, thereby entrenching culture war dynamics.

9**) Pragmatic systemic reforms**. Nine interviewees claimed that an important strategy was *implementing systemic reforms in ways that do not lead to backlash*, which was thought to require (a) using less explicitly partisan language or reasoning for justifying reforms, (b) understanding and acknowledging legitimate losses that come as a result of reform and (c) implementing reforms slowly and sensitively so as to minimise coercion and backlash. Participants discussed these strategies as a way of creating more ideologically and culturally inclusive systemic reforms in areas as diverse as policing, the legacy of historical privilege, voting policies or economic precarity.

Reasons for preferring negative peace

In addition to outlining their preferred visions of peace or strategies conducive to building them, respondents were asked about their reasons for preferring positive or negative peace. This section explores reasons given for preferring negative peace.

1) To mitigate violence and harm. This was one of the most common reasons for preferring negative peace. Participants typically framed outgroup members, especially Trump supporters, woke liberal activists or the alt-right, as sources of harm, though bad actors were singled out on all sides who were believed to manipulate culture war dynamics to obtain or maintain power. They were seen as particularly problematic or in need of resistance. The interviewee who held the strongest liberal views noted that ideological outgroups were not the only source of harm; he

claimed even that erstwhile allies (centrists and liberals) in the fight against the radical right nevertheless "are unable to work [with us] even after alliances of convenience… liberals will go after the left under specific circumstances if they view us as a threat to power" (strongest liberal). A conservative advocate of geographical segregation feared the possible formation of ideologically-motivated terrorist cells in culturally mixed areas. Questions of what precisely constitutes harm, as well as what are seen as likely sources of harm, proved key to many participant approaches to positive and negative peace. These will be explored in particular in the discussion section below.

2) To protect something of value. Interviewees listed a number of factors that, if placed under threat, would prompt a response aimed at generating negative peace. For some participants in the centre or on the right, this included freedom, especially in cases of alleged coercion: "as medical professionals, we don't want to be coerced into doing things against our conscience" (weak conservative). The maintenance of rights framed as fundamental was another reason given by respondents; for a number of liberal, female participants, maintaining access to abortion was a major concern: "when people don't want to compromise on [their pro-life views], it feels dangerous. [Abortion] is a right I don't have fully in my state anymore, and in my gut I still feel quite a lot of threat" (strongly woke liberal). In keeping with Hunter's (2006) culture war thesis, interviewees also preferred negative peace with outgroup members in order to protect values that were seen as non-negotiable. In cases where these values clashed, and where one's own values were seen as supremely important, visions of peace like victory, the marginalisation of threatening values or the conversion of outgroup members to the ingroup were promoted as solutions.

3) To promote a personal or ingroup good. Negative peace was sometimes described as a way to positively affect society, for example by creating social order or promoting virtue or equity. This was particularly the case when outgroup members were seen as socially disruptive, for example due to violence or the promotion of values deemed problematic: "society can't function when there are a bunch of lawless [people] running amok…they're showing up and disrupting public life and someone usually gets hurt, which is unacceptable" (strongest conservative). In one case, a respondent noted that egregious outgroup members were not only dangerous, but also disgusting and thus threatening to the aesthetic order of public life. Some interviewees advocated conversion or rescue, especially of friends and loved ones, as a way to create a simpler world to live in that was less fraught with tension and hurt. Still others claimed that negative peace could be promoted in order to create a "better" world, freed from the influence of threatening outgroups – expressions of this desire ranged from creating communities that served as permanent safe spaces to societies where ingroup values were embedded in all social structures and institutions. For one respondent, changing his state of residence following experiences of marginalisation at home freed up additional personal resources to develop mental health or to engage with less extreme representatives of the outgroup.

4) To create temporary respite. Some claimed that negative peace was not a desirable end-state, but rather an intermediary, often strategic stage prior to a hoped-for emergence of positive peace later on. This stance was particularly pertinent to visions like de-escalation, segregation or non-engagement. According to one participant, "negative peace between the far ends of the political spectrum, at least initially, would be your safest bet. Because those people

are not going to find common ground initially…[we have to wait] for positive peace to work itself from the centre out" (moderately woke liberal). This was particularly the case when interviewees described instances of negative peace with loved ones, friends or co-workers during heated, complicated or tense moments. In situations like these, prolonged negative peace was described as a painful reality, one that respondents hoped to overcome. Some respondents framed space spaces, unfrequented by outgroup members and free of opposing value systems, as important but temporary institutions that allowed partisans to retreat, regroup or prepare for future work and engagement.

5) The difficulty of building positive peace. Rather than justifying negative peace as a way to create a more desirable world, some interviewees described it as simply an easier state of affairs to produce and maintain than positive peace. As described in the previous paragraph, positive peace was seen as a more desirable end-state, but one that for various reasons was seen as less feasible. In some cases, the process of building positive peace was seen as requiring too much patience, or as too painful: "I still hold a lot of internal conflict…it's so hard to sympathise with folks who are still pro-Trump…there were some family members I cut off because it was too far, too extreme, too much" (moderately woke liberal). Positive relations in particular was not a universally supported vision of positive peace; some respondents described outgroup members as too alien or "unrelatable" (strongly woke liberal) for anything more than a constructive rapport to develop. A few interviewees said they would like to build positive peace but didn't have the tools, or that it was sometimes not worth the trouble: "this guy is too much work, it's too much to get on the same wavelength as him…it can get tiring" (weak liberal).

6) The perceived impossibility of building positive peace. The reasons respondents gave for being sceptical of positive peace as a concept were diverse. Many revolved around negative perceptions of the other side – that, for example, outgroups worked in bad faith or were simply not interested in engagement: "people need to come with true intentions to talk. If you're not coming to actually listen to the other side, it's better to be just civil and not talk at all" (moderate conservative). Some reasons revolved around a lack of trust, understanding or relationship, which was thought to make positive peacebuilding impossible, at least for the time being: "If we don't speak the same language, or if I feel unsafe, I won't be interested…we'll have to draw a circle around some things and say we can't talk about them right now. We don't trust each other, we don't know each other" (weak conservative). Others mentioned continued outgroup hostility as a significant barrier to reaching out to the other. Still others claimed that, in cases where harm had and was still being committed, dialogue can be misguided: "when people are not heard and have been silenced so much, what more can you do than something more extreme…talking things out doesn't always solve the problem" (strongly woke liberal). Certain outgroup members were perceived as illegitimate partners for engagement: "some people…are sometimes too willing to engage [with all sides] in a debate in order to be fair or equal. But you don't need to invite Nazis to debates" (strongly woke liberal). Other interviewees noted barriers to positive peace embedded in the structural or institutional dynamics of the United States, such as increasing extremism or affective polarization (see chapter three).

Reasons for preferring positive peace

The reasons respondents gave for preferring positive peace were divided into three overarching categories.

1) The perceived negative impact of negative peace. This was the largest category of reasons for preferring positive peace. For some, negative peace was seen as inferior to positive peace: "I don't think it's true peace, it's just, you know, laying dormant conflict for later that will grow and breed…We've been doing negative peace for our entire tenure of being a country and things are only getting [more heated]" (moderately woke liberal). To these respondents, long-term negative peace was thought to have an undesired effect on society: for example that (a) the implementation of coercive institutional mechanisms promoting one group's values could set precedents that the other side could then use to implement their values should they take power, (b) that total victory by one side could lead to the rise of outgroup extremists, or (c) that sustained nonengagement with ideological outgroups, and in particular family members, could leave them vulnerable to radicalising rhetoric and narratives. Some interviewees felt that negative peace would not be sustainable over time: "it just kicks the problem down the road…people are already talking about violence and civil war and that's a terrifying thought considering how many weapons are out there" (strongly non-woke liberal).

2) A desire for sustained interaction with outgroup members. For some participants, this reflects the pragmatic reality of living in ideologically mixed contexts: "We all live in the same towns, the same states, the same country. We need to build bridges" (strong conservative). Empathy, understanding and building relationships were presented as more effective ways of building sustainable peace, as well as a more pleasant world to live in. This pragmatism, for certain respondents, was complemented by varying degrees of care, affection and love felt for particular outgroup members, with a resulting desire to strive for positive peace when possible.

This care or concern, for other interviewees, extended to future generations: “I’m a parent, I’m moulding the future, I want my kids to grow up in a world not like the one I grew up in. That’s a motivation to work for [positive] peace” (moderate conservative).

3) Positive peace as a source of positive goods. This was another large category, with respondents listing various goods they associated with positive peace. These included greater trust and cohesion within the polity, assorted benefits thought to stem from ideological and cultural diversity and the smoother operation of gridlocked institutions like Congress. Another positive benefit involved the creation of spaces where diverse groups could live their lives not only without interference from ideological outgroups, but together “form a rich tapestry” underlying the bedrock of American life. Increased engagement, contact and positive relations with the other side was also thought by some to lead to increased happiness, well-being, or even personal growth: “I learn from [the outgroup] and am better able to relate to other communities and work with more people” (strongly woke liberal). Still others found positive peace a better way to experience community or unlock collective, creative energy, which were framed as key to living a good life: “why would you want negative peace? You’ll have stasis like that…I want the possibility of reinventing the things that work instead of defending the things that work…that only happens when people can turn to each other and establish a living, mutual relationship” (moderate conservative). On a personal level, some respondents expressed a desire to simply be understood by the other side: “[dialogue is] way for people not to be convinced by what I believe but to understand that I’m not an evil conservative who wants to take their rights away, but that there are [reasons for] what I and my community believe” (strong conservative).

Discussion

Insights and partisan asymmetries

The scope of an MA thesis can only facilitate a preliminary, exploratory application of Galtung's theory to the conflict context – these 20 interviews are not intended (nor are they sufficient) to extrapolate trends among the broader groups the participants are drawn from. Rather, they are meant to test the theory's relevance to conflicts like the culture wars and to present initial findings concerning the potential range of visions of peace, related strategies and preferences that may be found within them.

The findings demonstrate that positive and negative peace are far from monolithic in nature; the respondents observed a range of distinct types of both positive and negative peace as well as how they can manifest in a given context. The typology above is not exhaustive in nature, but it does document the conflict dynamics certain actors observed in their communities. By differentiating between these various visions of peace, peacebuilding strategies and related preferences, practitioners, researchers and policy makers may be able to better understand and respond to such conflict dynamics.

Many of these dynamics involve asymmetrical preferences expressed by participant groups regarding visions of peace and peacebuilding strategies. Asymmetrical positions and behaviours have been identified as a key pattern in polarised societal conflicts in the US (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016), and thus are worth noting here. In particular, I note asymmetries along the lines of the three salient markers I described in chapter one: (a) whether a participant identifies as a

conservative or a liberal, (b) how strong or weak a participant's ideological views are and (c) the degree of support for woke politics found among liberal participants.

As compared to respondents with moderate and weak partisan views, those with stronger partisan views were more likely to support positive peace only if certain conditions were first met. This implies that interventions aimed at engaging with strong partisans may first need to understand the nature (and potential limitations) of such conditions. For example, these conditions differed depending on whether the participant in question held woke and non-woke views. For strongly woke interviewees, a condition that was frequently expressed was that outgroups abandon *views* seen as problematic, violent or harmful. Alternatively, for strong conservatives and non-woke liberals, conditions more often involved outgroups abandoning *behaviours* seen as problematic, violent or harmful.

This is not to say that woke liberals are not concerned with behavioural change, but it may indicate that actors planning interventions may need to pay additional attention to ideological frameworks seen as harmful when working with communities that ascribe to woke politics. Non-woke liberal respondents, on the other hand, expressed greater willingness to create coalitions with ideological outgroups, either for the sake of building positive peace or in order to resist more threatening actors – potential interveners may find greater openness among this group towards contact and cooperation with the other side. No conservative participant in this project reported finding the possession of liberal ideologies, at least in the absence of behaviours seen as problematic (i.e. cancellation, speech regulation or deplatforming), to be an obstacle for collaboration or dialogue; given the small participant pool, I have no data to suggest whether this

is a feature of contemporary conservatism or if it reflects a lack of extreme conservative voices in the project.

In some cases, there were noticeable asymmetries among respondents regarding partisan preferences for types of peace, which may suggest limits to the range of interventions deemed acceptable within certain communities. Furthermore, this may mean that various conflict-affected actors working for a specific vision of peace may come into conflict with outgroup members looking to build a very different vision of peace.

For example, conservative interviewees were more likely than their liberal counterparts to promote positive relations as a form of positive peace, while liberal respondents were more supportive of visions rooted in the resolution of structural grievances (see Appendix E). Liberal interviewees who strongly supported the resolution of structural grievances were more likely to treat the prioritisation of personal relations over attempts to address structural injustice with suspicion, as this was thought to entrench structural violence and preclude true positive peace. Alternatively, conservative respondents who strongly supported positive relations were more likely to frame positive peace as ultimately rooted in personal connections, the acknowledgement of outgroup dignity and the humanising influence of individual relationships over structural reforms – accordingly, they viewed structural reforms with suspicion when they were promoted as an alternative to fostering the personal encounters seen as the true source of lasting peace. Further research would need to be conducted to ascertain whether these patterns permeate participant groups; if they do, then this knowledge would better equip interveners to work with these communities.

Another key insight from the interviews was the centrality of harm, as well as definitions of harm, in shaping preferences for positive and especially negative peace. A major factor in negative peace preferences appeared to be how dangerous or threatening the interviewees perceived outgroup members to be; stronger partisans usually framed outgroup members as more threatening and were thus more tolerant of coercive measures to contain, resist or defeat them. Visions of negative peace like victory or the absence of the other were more often promoted in cases where interviewees felt that outgroup actions or values posed a threat of direct or structural violence that required immediate action. This tolerance for coercion was reduced among strong partisans who reported having close relationships (i.e. familial ties) with outgroup members. Alternatively, the weaker partisan views a respondent possessed, the more likely they were to view coercive responses to the outgroup as more threatening than the outgroup itself. Weak partisan interviewees were also more likely to frame polarization or culture war as a greater threat than the outgroup.

Woke liberal participants expressed a specific approach to harm that may require particular attention from potential interveners. As mentioned in chapter two, a key feature of the Trump-era culture wars was the notion that speech acts could themselves constitute harm or violence. Woke liberal interviewees who ascribed to this position noted that certain outgroup narratives, concepts or value systems needed to be delegitimized in order to prevent harm against individuals or groups seen as vulnerable or marginalised. In cases where outgroup members were perceived to have problematic, oppressive or dangerous views, such participants were more likely to eschew strategies like legitimising contact with outgroups, humanising the other or engaging in dialogue,

as such strategies were thought to inadvertently legitimise or provide a platform for views and values deemed harmful, violent or dangerous. Strongly woke partisan respondents also heavily resisted strategies like normalising the treatment of outgroup members with civility (described as a key strategy to build positive peace by all moderate and weak partisans) as this was thought to place additional burdens on marginalised populations who find it difficult to engage civilly with perceived oppressors, as well as possibly expose them to instances of hate speech. Calls for slower, more pragmatic structural reforms were also greeted by suspicion by many woke liberal respondents, as these were thought to halt or slow down hard-fought reforms aimed at alleviating oppression or resisting allegedly problematic actors. Peacebuilding practitioners who regularly utilise such strategies may be seen as being complicit in structural patterns of oppression and thus not legitimate partners for building peace.

Applying Galtung's theory to the field

This approach to Galtung's theory could lay the foundation for the creation of tools that may assist practitioners, researchers, policy makers and conflict-affected individuals make sense of how groups responded, and may continue to respond, to the culture war patterns that emerged in the 2010s. Namely, the added comprehension of certain conflict dynamics may inform more relevant responses, and perhaps interventions, in the context. Generating a comprehensive list of examples of how Galtung's theory could inform such interventions lies beyond the scope of this master's-level thesis; however, I list three examples of how the framework presented in this thesis could be applied in the field.

First, identifying visions of peace or peacebuilding strategies that are deemed problematic or harmful by certain partisan groups may prove essential when designing interventions that do not

exacerbate conflict dynamics or inspire backlash. As mentioned above, the interviews suggested that positive peace initiatives that prioritise either positive relations or structural reforms to the exclusion of the other may risk alienating certain strong conservatives or liberals respectively. Initiatives claiming to be bipartisan but that nevertheless make this mistake may then be seen by one side as being biassed toward the other. Alternatively, practitioners looking to work with woke liberal communities will need to be aware of whether the groups they work with view the act of dialogue with certain outgroup members as entrenching systemic injustice or marginalisation. Equipped with such information, peacebuilders aiming to implement bipartisan or partisan-sensitive projects may be inspired to design interventions that take into account these and other relevant strategies, or to potentially develop new visions or approaches to peace that appeal to all relevant, affected groups in a given context.

Second, applying Galtung's theory could result in the identification of factors that prompt individual or group preferences to shift from positive to negative peace, or vice versa. This process was colloquially termed "flipping the switch" in the interviews and proved of great interest to me as a researcher. Examples from the interviews of behaviours that would prompt participants to switch priorities from positive to negative peace included (a) perceptions that outgroup members committed new instances of harm (often described as "crossing a red line"), (b) that outgroup members were seen as "impossible to convince" by means of evidence or facts or (c) the discovery that outgroup representatives engaged with the ingroup in bad faith.

That said, participants also identified "green lines," which refers to actions that conflict-affected individuals could take to encourage outgroup members to see them as legitimate targets for

building positive peace. Participant examples of green lines included: (a) developing a common language to discuss concepts like harm, equality or "the good," (b) challenging assumptions of hostility/prejudice by doing something positive for an outgroup member or (c) successfully developing trust over time, perhaps through dedicated relationship-building. By developing an awareness of both "red" and "green" lines, various actors may be more empowered not only to understand outgroup resistance to ingroup visions of peace, but also to facilitate the development of common visions of peace (in cases where conflict-affected groups set that goal for themselves).

Third, this may involve cases where community members are dissatisfied by potential interventions proposed by policy makers, peacebuilding practitioners or activists. In such situations, Galtung's theory can provide them with a language with which to speak about their peace preferences, describe the issues they have with competing visions of peace or propose alternative interventions that better speak to their needs, lived experiences or understanding of the conflict at hand.

Contribution to the literature

This project is situated within an emerging literature in which peacebuilders apply their tools and experience to North American polarised conflicts (Schirch, 2021; Burgess et al., 2022; Menkel-Meadow, 2022). To my knowledge, there as of yet has been no comparable study applying Galtung's theory of positive and negative peace to contexts like the American culture wars. This thesis seeks to contribute to efforts to better understand and respond to such conflicts.

This project may also be relevant to the field of *strategic peacebuilding* (Lederach and Appleby, 2010), which refers to the large-scale coordination of various peace efforts aimed at collectively transforming conflicts and the societies impacted by them. Within the literature on non-armed societal conflicts in North America, strategic peacebuilding may specifically refer to the integration of various interventions in ways that strengthen rather than subvert each other. For example, it has been noted that interventions aimed at bridgebuilding or at reducing social justice have occasionally led to clashes between the respective actors implementing them (Schirch, 2021; Standish et al., 2022), echoing ways that respondents in this study who supported structural reforms in the name of positive peace may alienate or feel alienated by participants who strove to build peace primarily by means of developing personal relationships. The findings of this study suggest that Galtung's theory provides additional tools for understanding the ways different peacebuilding strategies may clash in the field, as well as indicate ways that actors may be able to mitigate such conflicts.

This study also provides preliminary evidence to support findings in the academic literature on polarization and culture war. As was noted above, the stronger partisan leanings participants possessed (no matter their political allegiances), the more alien outgroup members appeared and the more tolerant they were towards extreme or coercive measures to defeat or contain them. This mirrors findings on affective polarization, explored in chapter three, which suggest similar dynamics (Iyengar et al., 2012; Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018b). What's more, this effect was mitigated by the presence of close ties to ideological outgroups, especially family members. This may reflect what Mason (2018) calls *cross-cutting cleavages*, namely identities and relational ties that bridge political divides in ways thought to mitigate the intensity of affective

polarization. This thesis also provides support to discourses in the academic literature that frame polarised conflict dynamics among liberals, conservative, Republicans and Democrats as asymmetrical in nature (Grossman and Hopkins, 2016). My findings appear to illustrate distinct differences among participants in preferences for visions of peace and peacebuilding strategies depending on political affiliation, partisan strength and support for woke liberal values. These findings, however, are limited by the small participant pool and would need to be followed up with additional research in order to move beyond an exploratory application of Galtung's theory.

Furthermore, another contribution of this project lies in bringing together strains of the academic literature from different disciplines and the separate spheres of culture war, sociopolitical polarization and peacebuilding, which are assembled in a way to provide an original analysis of the non-armed societal conflict in the United States. The literature on culture war (chapter two), outlined various partisan groups in the US, what they fought over as well as what they perceived to be at stake. Understanding the transition from the culture wars of the 90s, with its focus on traditional-progressive values, to the woke culture wars of the 2010s, with its redefinition of violence and harm, is important to understanding the motives, tactics and preferred visions of peace among different actors. The literature on sociopolitical polarization, and especially affective polarization (chapter three), outlines the societal dynamics that may prompt polarised actors to see ideological and political outgroups as "other" or even as "enemy." All of these have major implications for how conflict-affected actors view and promote visions of peace and peacebuilding strategies, and the data I collected and analysed through my exploratory interviews suggests ways that these dynamics manifest themselves on the ground.

Conclusion

This study shows that Galtung's theory of positive and negative peace, once expanded to account for dynamics like felt threat, proves relevant in contexts of non-armed societal conflicts like the Trump-era culture wars in the United States. I argue that the traditional formulation of the theory, focused on instances of direct, structural or cultural violence, fails to take into account the nonviolent instances of felt threat, such as the proximity of contrasting value systems or cultural practices, that may lead to conflict onset.

I tested this expanded version of Galtung's theory through 20 exploratory interviews, which provided a preliminary glimpse into how participants framed various visions of positive and negative peace, their preferences for each and the strategies used to achieve them. This was followed by a discussion how these findings could lead to applications in the field, as well as what they contribute to the academic literature. It is my hope that practitioners and researchers would be able to use this adapted version of positive and negative peace theory to produce data in other conflict contexts for comparative study and to deepen our understanding of non-armed conflicts.

Areas for future research

As the application of peacebuilding lenses to non-armed conflicts like the American culture wars is still a relatively new phenomenon, there are a wealth of directions available to practitioners and researchers looking to further understand or plan interventions in such disputes. In addition to the avenues alluded in previous sections, namely (a) conducting interviews with stronger, even extreme, partisans, (b) the generation of empirical data on visions of peace or related strategies

or (c) integrating academic literature on intergroup contact or other forms of dialogue, the data generated by this project suggest further possible directions for future work.

I noted that some participants expressed loyalties to paired values such as harm-reduction (which may lead to support for the regulation of speech acts) and freedom of speech, though many of these participants ultimately ascribed to a hierarchy of values that prioritised one of these values over the other when under threat or pressure. This hierarchization of values has been noted in other work (Kaufmann, 2022), though more research is needed to understand the reasons behind forming specific value hierarchies, along with which values are prioritised in which circumstances. This may contribute to a better understanding of what "flips the switch" between preferences towards negative or positive peace.

Certain participants also noted significant differences in their preferences for positive or negative peace depending on whether the outgroup member in question was a friend/family member, a distant acquaintance or a fleeting online encounter. This project made no distinction between these different relationships, and more research would be necessary to understand the impact of relationship type on one's preferred vision of peace.

Also, while my original intention with this project was to interview 10 liberals and 10 conservatives, I noted during the interview process that there is a broad range of different sub-groups within these two large, rather heterogeneous groups. More work will be necessary concerning the groups involved to uncover more nuances of how each of these operates within the broader culture war. In addition to paying attention to the ideological sub-groups

acknowledged in my methodological approach, it would be useful to investigate the degree to which identity markers like race, class, gender, religion, sexual orientation, place of residence (urban-rural) or others may impact understanding of or preferences for positive or negative peace. Comparative work in other contexts will also provide an opportunity to see if similar dynamics emerge in nations like Canada or other areas of the Global North where affective polarization is on the rise.

Finally, this project took place during a global pandemic that exacerbated both polarization and culture war dynamics in the United States and abroad. Given the relevance of such a massive event, participants spoke about how the pandemic influenced their preferences for both visions of and strategies conducive to positive and negative peace. The limited scope of this thesis left no room to explore these avenues, though I hope to follow up on this topic in future projects.

If current societal patterns continue, there may be no shortage of opportunities to observe such dynamics in the future. As discussed in chapter three, polarization and related phenomena are only intensifying across the United States and the Global North. What's more, Trump's presidential campaign to secure the 2024 Republican nomination has already utilised language that draws on, and may prove to exacerbate, the culture war dynamics explored in chapter two (Donald J Trump, 2023). Both as a researcher and a peacebuilding practitioner, I hope to contribute to constructive ways of understanding such conflicts, which impact the lives and relationships of many, as well as to pragmatic, actionable and ultimately humane ways of responding to them.

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Appendices

Appendix A. Interview Guide

1) How would you ideologically identify yourself or your community with regards to attitudes and positions in the American "culture war"?

2) With regards to the American "culture war" during the years Donald Trump was president, how would you describe your preferred vision of peace?
Possible follow-up questions:

-What conversations or controversies have emerged concerning preferred visions of peace within the communities you participate in?

3) What were your preferred strategies for achieving your preferred vision of peace?
Possible follow-up questions (if relevant):

-How might other members of your community answer this question?
-How do you anticipate how the "other side" would answer this question?

4) What motivations did you have to work towards positive, negative or some hybrid vision of peace?
Possible follow-up questions (if relevant):

-How might other members of your community answer this question?
-How do you anticipate how the "other side" would answer this question?

5) Did societal developments resulting from Donald Trump's election influence your vision of peace and preferred strategies used to achieve it, and how?
Possible follow-up questions (if relevant):

-How might other members of your community answer this question?
-How do you anticipate how the "other side" would answer this question?

6) Of the different types of peace described, and the preferred strategies used to achieve them, would any be deemed potentially unsafe, problematic, illegitimate or threatening for you or your community, and why?
Possible follow-up questions (if relevant):

-How might other members of your community answer this question?
-How do you anticipate how the "other side" would answer this question?

Appendix B. Participant Demographics

Participant	Gender	Age	Ideological Category
Participant 1	Female	39	Weak Conservative
Participant 2	Male	72	Weak Liberal
Participant 3	Female	33	Strongly Woke Liberal
Participant 4	Female	20s	Moderately Woke Liberal
Participant 5	Female	50s	Weak Liberal
Participant 6	Female	34	Moderate Conservative
Participant 7	Male	21	Strong Conservative
Participant 8	Female	30	Moderately Woke Liberal
Participant 9	Male	26	Strongest Conservative
Participant 10	Male	22	Right-Leaning Libertarian
Participant 11	Female	24	Strongly Woke Liberal
Participant 12	Male	33	Strongest Liberal
Participant 13	Female	30s	Moderate Non-Woke Liberal
Participant 14	Male	60	Strongly Non-Woke Liberal
Participant 15	Male	42	Weak Conservative
Participant 16	Female	70s	Strong Conservative
Participant 17	Female	33	Moderately Woke Liberal
Participant 18	Male	30s	Moderate Conservative
Participant 19	Male	42	Moderate Conservative
Participant 20	Female	39	Weak Conservative

Fig 5. Participant Demographics

Appendix C. Consent Form

Consent Form

Title of the study: *Using Positive and Negative Peace Theory To Analyse the American "Culture Wars" During the Trump Era*

Name of researcher: Josh Nadeau of Saint Paul University, Faculty of Human Sciences, School of Conflict Studies, under the supervision of Professor. Enkelejda Sula-Raxhimi. He can be contacted at jnade076@uottawa.ca.

Invitation to Participate: I am invited to participate in the above mentioned research study conducted by Josh Nadeau, supervised by Professor Enkelejda Sula-Raxhimi and approved by the Research Ethics Board (REB).

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of the study is to learn more about the sociopolitical conflict between American liberal and conservative activists during the years of the Trump Administration (2016-2021). More specifically, qualitative data will be collected on (a) how American activists during the Trump era understood what "peace" looks like in the context of this conflict, (b) what motivated them to work for a specific conceptualization of "peace" and (c) what their preferred strategies were to achieve said "peace."

Participation: My participation will consist of one interview ranging from 45-60 minutes during which I will be asked six main questions, with potential follow-up questions to be asked if appropriate. The interview will take place on Zoom on [date] at a moment during the day that is convenient for me, when I am free of other obligations. I will allow (or will not allow) the researcher to record the interview(s).

Risks: My participation in this study will entail describing my political and ideological positions regarding sensitive sociopolitical issues as well as elaborate on my activities as an activist during the years of the Trump Administration. I have received assurance from the researcher that the risk of experiencing psychological or emotional distress is minimal. These topics will be addressed with sensitivity and I have the freedom to ask for a pause or even interrupt the interview if, for whatever reason, I experience discomfort while sharing my experiences.

Benefits: My participation in this study will contribute to the generation of knowledge concerning sociopolitical conflicts during the Trump era and will provide me an opportunity to contribute to the advancement of such knowledge. I will also be informed about the preliminary results of the project through a short (1-2 pages) report provided by the researcher. Should I request a full link to or PDF version of the finished project, it will be provided once it has been published.

Confidentiality and anonymity: I have received assurance from the researcher that the information I will share will remain strictly confidential. I understand that audio and visual recordings of the interviews will be used only for the production of transcripts and their analysis, and that my confidentiality will be protected by means of fictional names used in the final text.

Anonymity will be protected in the following manner: a fictional name will be used in the transcripts and final text.

Conservation of data: The data collected (video and audio recordings of interviews, written transcripts of interviews) will be kept in a secure manner on an encrypted key available only to the researcher and his supervisor. The original data, or a copy of this data, will be kept at the Saint Paul University campus during the full period of retention. Original and analysed data will be conserved for (at least) five years, after which the data will be destroyed in a shredder (paper copies) or permanently deleted (digital data).

Voluntary Participation: I am under no obligation to participate and if I choose to participate I can withdraw from the study at any time and/or refuse to answer any questions without suffering any negative consequences. If I choose to withdraw, all data gathered up to the time of withdrawal (correspondence with researcher, video recording of interview, transcript of the interview) will be deleted.

Acceptance: I, _____, agree to participate in the above research study conducted by Josh Nadeau of the School of Conflict Studies at the Faculty of the Human Sciences at Saint Paul University, whose research is under the supervision of Professor Enkelejda Sula-Raxhimi.

If I have any questions about the study, I may contact the researcher or his supervisor.

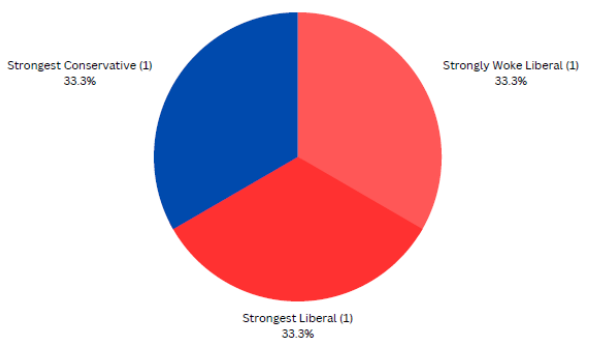
If I have any questions regarding the ethical conduct of this study, I may contact the Office of Research and Ethics, Saint Paul University, 223 Main Street, Ottawa, ON K1S 1C4
Tel.: (613) 236-1393.

There are two copies of the consent form, one of which is mine to keep.

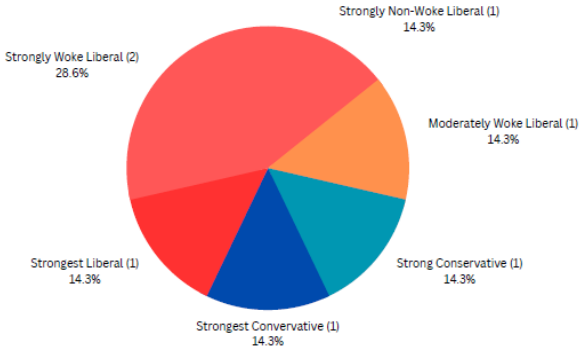
Participant signature: _____ Date:_____
(Signature) (Date)

Researcher signature: _____ Date:_____
(Signature) (Date)

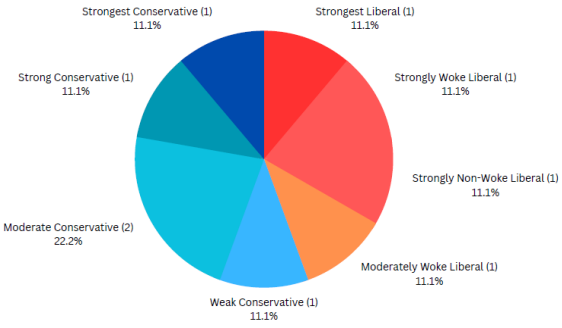
Appendix D. Graphs: Visions of Negative Peace



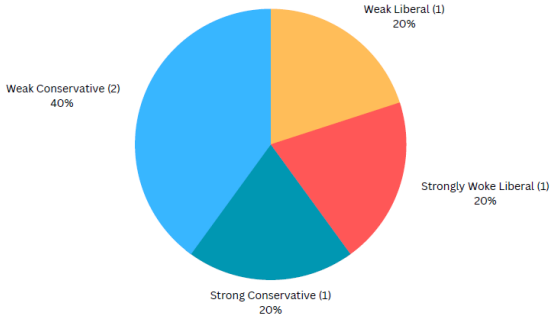
Absence of the Other



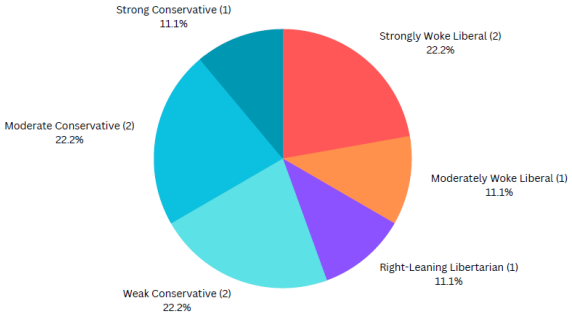
Victory



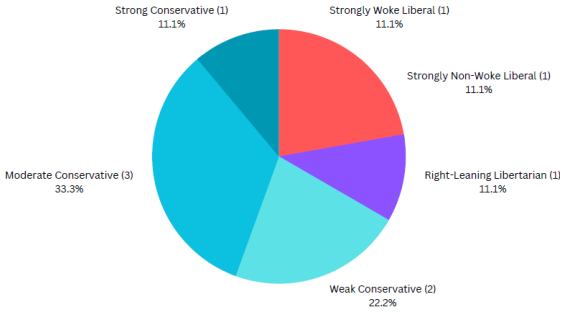
Voluntary Accession



De-Escalation

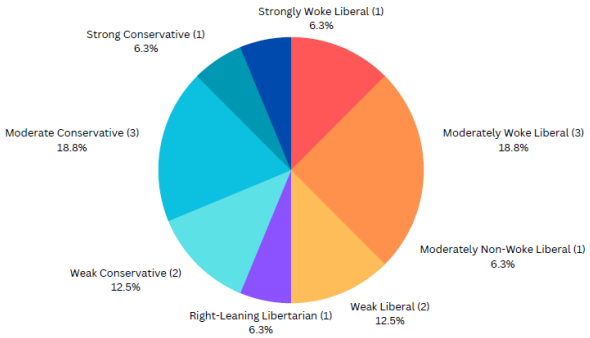


Segregation

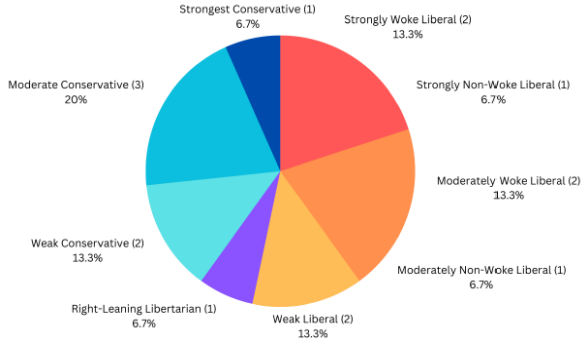


Nonengagement

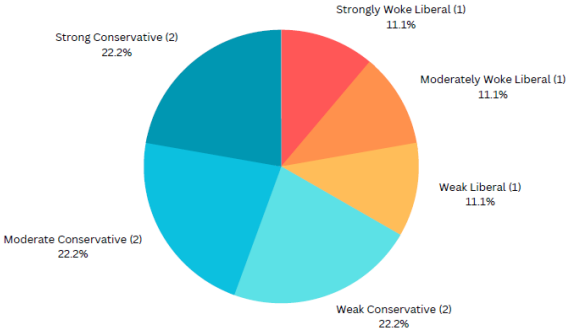
Appendix E. Graphs: Visions of Positive Peace



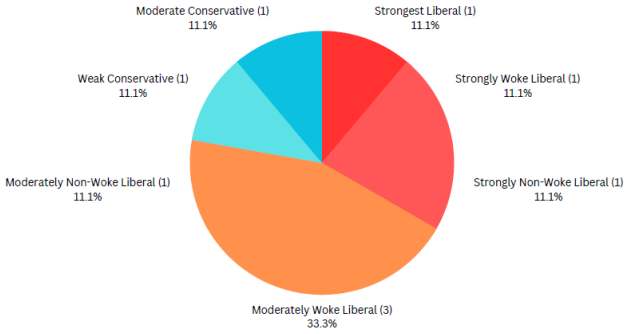
Culture of Collaboration



Culture of Dialogue



Positive Relations



Meeting Structural Needs