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Conservative Women and the Rise of White Christian Nationalism in the United States

**Introduction**

The last several years have seen a rise in conservative and nationalist movements around the world. In the United States, more conservative women are being elected than ever before ("New Records for Women in the U.S. Congress and House," 2022) and the presence of white Christian nationalism has become more pronounced. How have conservative women and white Christian nationalism shaped and influenced each other as they’ve each risen in prominence in US politics? Through the study of seven prominent women in US politics over the last 25 years, this paper will argue that a pivotal moment in the rise of conservative women and white Christian nationalism was the 2016 election. In the 20 years before the 2016 election, conservative women in the United States had been slowly shifting from a mild form of conservatism to a more extremist conservatism. While the election of Donald Trump was not the catalyst for this shift, it encouraged the adoption of a more outwardly extreme conservatism that had already been on the rise for several years.

While women are often assumed to be liberal (Crespin and Deitz, 2010), the 2022 election saw more Republican women elected to Congress than ever before ("New Records for Women in the U.S. Congress and House," 2022). These women set a new record of 42 elected Republican women in Congress and contributed to the new record of 27.9% women in the US Congress ("New Records for Women in the U.S. Congress and House," 2022). What makes this new wave of conservative women different from conservative women of the past? In this paper, I argue that the rise of white Christian nationalism in the United States and the resulting election of Donald Trump in 2016 paved the way for a change in the rhetoric of conservative women. Where women previously focused on families and patriotism, women now talk about gun rights and opposition to immigration. These topics have previously been seen as more masculine issues while education and family matters are considered to be more in line with women’s skillsets (Crespin and Deitz, 2010). Over the last several years, conservative women have begun to change these attitudes through their speeches, engaging in the white Christian nationalism movement in the US in new and more prominent ways. The rise of white Christian nationalism has had an influence on the priorities of conservative women in the US, shifting their focus from family matters and supporting the troops to the protection of freedoms and reduced immigration.

This paper will start with an explanation of the methodology, including the details of a qualitative content analysis. A review of the relevant literatures regarding conservative women and white Christian nationalism will then be discussed. Finally, the results of the qualitative content analysis will be presented as well as an analysis of the findings. This paper suggests that the attitudes and values of conservative women should be studied on a spectrum of milder conservatism evolving into the era of more extremist conservatism currently seen in the US. This shift can be seen through the changes in rhetoric of seven Republican women over the last 25 years as words like “home,” “bless,” and “love,” have taken a backseat to stronger language like “hate,” “enforcement,” and “guns.”

**Methodology**

Through a qualitative content analysis, the speeches of seven conservative women between 1996 and 2021 are studied. This 25 year look at conservative women allows for an examination of their rhetoric as well as the identification of significant vocabulary shifts, both between different women and between speeches made by the same woman. The findings in this paper are divided into two eras of conservative women in the US. There is some overlap in these women’s political tenures, so no attempt is made at naming a specific moment in time where the shift from one era to another occurred. It may be more helpful to think of these two eras on a timeline or spectrum, one era evolving into the other over time. The first era examines women who embody more mild conservatism, including Elizabeth Dole, Sarah Palin, and Mary Fallin. The women of the second era, while influenced by women of the first era, represent a more radical, far right approach to conservatism. These women are Michele Bachmann, Joni Ernst, Marsha Blackburn, and Marjorie Taylor Greene.

These women were chosen due to their prominent positions in conservative politics over the last 30 years as well as their pioneering roles as the first women nominated to Cabinet positions or elected to the Senate from their respective states. Two speeches were selected for each woman included in this study (with the exception of Marjorie Taylor Greene, who only had one speech selected due to her recent entrance into national politics and the resulting lack of speeches to pull from). Speeches given at the Republican National Convention (RNC) were prioritized. Such speeches indicate a woman’s prominence in the party and commitment to conservative values. In order to understand the position each woman held/holds in conservative politics, it is important to examine their political careers and the situations in which they spoke. Iowa State University’s Archives of Women’s Political Communication was helpful in providing background information, electoral history, and a catalog of speeches for each candidate.

This study focuses on shifts in the rhetoric of conservative women through a qualitative content analysis using NVivo. Qualitative content analysis is a method used to analyze written, verbal, or visual data (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). It involves organizing data into categories in order to derive meaning and to test theories (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). This paper uses speeches from seven different conservative women and through a qualitative content analysis notes patterns and shifts in conservative rhetoric. Each speech was run through a query in NVivo in order to determine the top 10 most frequently used words in each speech. Words less than 3 letters long were not included in the analysis, and common words and words that were not relevant to the results of the study such as “like,” “talk,” “additionally,” “states,” and the names of specific candidates were classified as stop words and removed from the analysis. Each woman’s speeches were analyzed in order to determine which words were used most frequently, and then these speeches were compared to speeches given by other conservative women in similar time frames to illustrate the trends in the rhetoric among conservative women collectively. These frequent keywords are presented as examples of the shift in the rhetoric of conservative women generally and as examples of the core values, issues, concerns, and beliefs of each woman individually. Some keywords that appeared frequently across all the speeches analyzed were country, America, American, believe, Americans, nation, life, work, children, and together.

**Literature Review**

This paper draws on research on conservative women and research about white Christian nationalism. This paper uses rhetoric from prominent conservative women in order to draw connections between the two groups.

*Conservative Women*

Questions about the role of women in conservative politics and what is enticing to women who join conservative moments have yet to be fully answered. Conservative women are defined as women who support socially or economically conservative policies such as traditional gender roles, anti-abortion policies, reduced business regulations, and lower tax rates (Schreiber, 2018). Liberal women are on the other end of the political spectrum, supporting policies such as same-sex marriage, federal regulations, and a separation between religious influence and state governance. Feminism is an ideology that promotes the equal rights of women, and while it is not officially tied to one political ideology over another, the policies feminists promote include Title IX, legal educational and employment rights for women, and access to abortion (Schreiber, 2018), a policy more connected to political liberals than conservatives. Ronnee Schreiber looks at the idea of conservative feminism, trying to understand if such a thing is even possible. Republican women like Sarah Palin, Carly Fiorina, and Ivanka Trump have labeled themselves as feminists, but other women have denounced the concept of feminism as a leftist idea that they want nothing to do with (Schreiber, 2018). The agenda of conservative women is often focused on attacking and contradicting traditionally feminist policies, specifically abortion and social programs that target women, and in some instances they have been successful at undermining the claim that feminists speak for all women and are the only ones representing women’s rights and interests (Schreiber, 2018). Conservative women try to portray themselves as the best advocates for women’s rights, preferring a rhetoric that Schreiber calls “choice feminism” (Schreiber, 2018). The focus of choice feminism is on women as actors, not victims in the public sphere. Kellyanne Conway criticized feminism by saying “there’s an individual feminism, if you will, that you make your own choices… I look at myself as a product of my choices, not a victim of my circumstances” (Schreiber, 2018). Similarly, Keli Carender of the Tea Party praised women like Sarah Palin and Michele Bachmann for being “incredibly strong and outspoken and they don’t say women are victimized… Nobody has stopped them from doing anything just because they’re women. They pushed through succeeded because they had it in themselves” (Schreiber, 2018). This idea of the self-made woman aligns with right-wing stresses on the value of personal independence and self-discipline (Barrasso et al., 2016).

Despite their denouncement of feminist ideology, Republican women struggle to be seen as truly conservative, hurting their electoral chances (Schreiber, 2018). Women are often introduced to right-wing movements through causes like school quality or community safety, but once a part of the movement, they are seen by other activists as mothers and wives rather than as comrades and partners (Blee and Creasap, 2010). There are even discussions about whether or not women can be involved in right-wing groups like the skinheads, who see themselves as hypermasculine (Blee and Creasap, 2010). This ideology is not unique to right-wing groups in the US. In order to join the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the leading group for Hindu nationalism in India, one must be male (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, 2017). Conservative women may see issues like community safety and education as more important than feminist issues like healthcare and paid maternal leave. With right-wing focuses on the safety and security of the nation, “women’s rights are often understood to be second in line to the bigger picture of national struggles” (Thomsen, 2020).

*White Christian Nationalism*

Religion is a large part of the identity of conservative women, especially Protestant evangelicals who work to ban abortion, same-sex marriage, and pornography but actively support Christian rhetoric in the public sphere, as seen in the focus on including prayer in schools (Schreiber, 2018). In this way, conservative women criticize the tactics of liberal women who prefer questions of morality to be determined in the private sphere (Tamir, 2019). As in white Christian nationalism, Islamophobia is present in conservative feminism, taking the form of hatred of Islamic head coverings and campaigning for educational freedom for women in Muslim countries (Schreiber, 2018). In this sense, right-wing activists use women’s rights as a way to save women who are outside of the nation, viewing foreign women as “victims to be rescued, injured and exotic subjects lacking autonomy to whom western countries promise shelter and liberation” (Thomsen, 2020).

The race aspect of white Christian nationalism is often disguised in supposedly race-neutral policy positions and rooted in traditionally right-wing ideology. Concern about government overreach (an issue not foundationally about race) is used to oppose affirmative action, public housing programs, and federal educational policies (Blee and Creasap, 2010). This allowed conservatives in the South to support white nationalism after the civil rights movement without having to be labeled as overtly racist, and such tactics continue today (Blee and Creasap, 2010).

As seen in Donald Trump’s slogan “Make America Great Again,” one of the things that has ignited the white Christian nationalist movement is what Yael Tamir describes as a desire to return to the familiar public sphere that they traditionally associated with the US (Tamir, 2019). This longing can be seen in the focus of the right on “returning” to homogeneity through the support of anti-immigration policies (Tamir, 2019). Although this desire for homogeneity is unifying for Trump supporters, it is not possible to return to this era because it did not exist. In this way, white Christian nationalists have imagined a nation which has never existed but to which they belong (Anderson, 1983). As politics in the US have become more diverse with the election of Barack Obama and increasingly divisive views on immigration, conservatives have begun to see themselves as left behind by elites who care about diversity and forget about them, allowing whiteness to rise in importance in conservative identity (Schildkraut, 2019).

The speeches analyzed in this paper all have themes that connect to traditional conservative policies, and eventually themes that are tied to white Christian nationalism. The results of the qualitative content analysis show the development of traditional conservative values into more extreme views aligned with white Christian nationalism, specifically in regard to immigration. It is clear that this rhetoric was rising before the election of Donald Trump, but the 2016 election ushers in a more direct embrace of white Christian nationalist rhetoric among conservative women.

**Discussion**

The first conservative woman in this study is Elizabeth Dole. Although her included speeches were after her marriage to Bob Dole, the Republican presidential candidate in the 1996 election, her husband was not her primary connection to politics. Thirteen years before the 1996 election, Dole served as the first female Secretary of Transportation for four years under President Reagan and then as Secretary of Labor for one year under President H. W. Bush (“Elizabeth Dole,” 2021). In 2003, she became the first woman elected as a Senator in North Carolina, and while serving in the Senate she chaired the National Republican Senatorial Committee for two years, the first female chairman of the committee (“Elizabeth Dole,” 2021). Her pioneering achievements are the reason she was selected as the first woman of this study.

At the 1996 RNC, Senator Dole spoke as the wife of the Republican nominee for president. The rhetoric from Dole’s speech is an example of the mild conservatism that is seen at the beginning of the conservative spectrum presented in this paper. Dole focuses on harmony and family values, as seen through her most frequently used words. The words used most in Elizabeth Dole’s 1996 RNC speech in order of frequency are love, life, values, parents, leader, fellow, care, bless, Americans, and America. These words indicate a devotion to family and goodwill, and her use of fellow is used in reference to her “fellow Americans.” These words generate a tone of unity and peace within the country and the party.

Figure 1

Her speech at the 2000 RNC had a similar tone. The most used words in this speech were America, American, power, strength, purpose, politics, home, heart, freedom, and faith. While this speech had a slight shift in tone that included references to America’s power and strength, the frequent use of home, heart, and faith continue her focus on traditional family values evident in her 1996 RNC speech. Overall, Elizabeth Dole used her RNC speeches to focus on mild, warm language such as love, home, heart, and faith. Her support of her husband and references to home serve to reinforce traditional gender roles, a large focus of conservative politics. Dole does not attempt to “other” any groups outside of her audience, choosing instead to focus on unity within the country. The top 10 most frequently used words by Senator Dole across both of her speeches can be seen in Figure 1.

The next woman on the spectrum is Sarah Palin. Palin was the first woman to be included on a Republican presidential ticket, making her a fitting choice for this study (“Sarah Palin,” 2021). Before becoming John McCain’s vice-presidential running mate in 2008, Palin served as governor of Alaska for two years (“Sarah Palin,” 2021). She started her political career as a city councilwoman for four years before becoming mayor of Wasilla, Alaska for six years (“Sarah Palin,” 2021). Following her and Senator McCain’s presidential run, she became a leader and strong voice in the Tea Party movement, giving the keynote speech at the first National Tea Party Convention (“Sarah Palin,” 2021). Her contributions to the conservative Tea Party movement also made her a good candidate for this study. The speeches chosen to represent Governor Palin’s rhetoric are her vice-presidential acceptance speech at the 2008 RNC and her keynote address at the National Tea Party Convention in 2010.

Palin formally joined John McCain in his run for president during her 2008 RNC speech. Unsurprisingly, her top three words were America, country, and American. The other most frequent words were reform, taxes, raise, fellow, energy, family, and Americans. Palin used her speech to advocate for reform, specifically tax reform, and to warn against the idea of raising taxes. This rhetoric ties her heavily to economically conservative values and is especially appropriate given her need to promote McCain’s presidential platform. Like Dole, Palin references family and her fellow Americans, which shows the continuing influence into the 21st century of family values and community among conservative women.

After the 2008 election, Palin became connected with the rise of the Tea Party, a political group considered to be more conservative than the Republican Party. Sarah Palin was the keynote speaker at the first Tea Party Convention in 2010, and here shifts in rhetoric begin to appear. Family is not one of the top ten most frequently used words in her Tea Party address, being replaced by movement, work, and support. Her speech focused on criticizing Barack Obama’s stimulus bill and the importance of sticking up for what one believes in, even when it’s tough. Palin also focused on the importance of having a clear, authoritative foreign policy that would help America stand out from the rest of the world. The most frequently used words in this address were movement, work, country, support, stimulus, America, hope, Americans, tough, and foreign. While this speech is a shift in tone from the milder, family-focused rhetoric of Elizabeth Dole, Palin’s rhetoric is still in line with classic conservative policies, focusing on hard work, independence, and the hope of America. Palin is not as mild as Elizabeth Dole and thus represents the next woman on the mild to extreme conservative spectrum. Palin’s most common words across both speeches can be seen in Figure 2. Like Elizabeth Dole, there is a strong focus on America/Americans, as well as the continuing theme of hope and children. More specific policies start to appear, including a focus on work, energy, and the new Tea Party movement.

Figure 2

The third woman included in this study and the first woman to show significant shifts in rhetoric between speeches is Mary Fallin. Fallin has had an extensive career in government, starting out as a representative in the Oklahoma House of Representatives from 1991-1995 and then serving as lieutenant governor of Oklahoma for 12 years (“Mary Fallin,” 2021). Following her tenure as lieutenant governor, Fallin served in the US House of Representatives, representing Oklahoma for two terms before becoming the governor of Oklahoma for the next eight years (“Mary Fallin,” 2021). She was the first woman to serve as lieutenant governor in Oklahoma as well as the state’s first female governor (“Mary Fallin,” 2021). Her pioneering role in Oklahoma politics, a traditionally conservative state, is the reason she was chosen for this study. While her long political career provides many different speeches to choose from, this paper focuses on her two RNC addresses, given in 2008 and 2016.

In her first RNC speech in 2008, while American and country carried over as important words, her focus was noticeably different from Elizabeth Dole’s and Sarah Palin’s rhetoric. Fallin focused on the tragedy of losing loved ones to terrorist attacks and the heroic efforts of first responders who gave their lives in service to their country. While this topic is a staple of conservative women, Fallin’s speech also includes less unifying rhetoric and more emotionally charged language than either Dole’s or Palin’s speeches. The frequent use of the word “evil” in this speech is the first significant rhetoric shift that appears in the results. Fallin stressed the importance of having a leader who would preserve freedom and the spirit of America by fighting against evil. The most used words in this speech were American, lost, gave, free, evil, standard, spirit, help, city, and country.

Fallin’s second RNC speech in 2016 has a lighter tone than her 2008 speech, but there are still key differences between Fallin and earlier conservative women like Dole and Palin. The most frequently used words in Mary Fallin’s 2016 RNC speech are America, American, belief, country, opportunity, nation, bold, bless, believes, and afraid. This is the first speech of the analysis where “nation” makes it into the list of top ten words used. While both Elizabeth Dole and Sarah Palin used the word nation in their speeches, it is more prominent in Fallin’s speech because of its shorter length. Emotionally charged language appears in this speech again, with “afraid” making it into the top ten list. Fallin remarks on how she is afraid the “sense of unity and optimism” she once saw is now leaving the country, and that the people are divided and afraid (Fallin, 2016). She praises the Republican nominee Donald Trump for his boldness, a hint at the more extreme rhetoric that has begun to appear among conservative women. Where her first RNC speech highlighted the bravery and unity Americans witnessed in the wake of tragedy, her second RNC speech focuses on the divisiveness that has seeped into the country.

Figure 3

Mary Fallin’s most used words across both speeches were American, America, country, belief, nation, free, lost, gave, evil, and city. These words can be seen in Figure 3. Fallin’s speeches show the shift towards more emotional language, increasing slightly in anger towards outgroups like foreigners and terrorists and differing from Sarah Palin’s focus on hard work and independence.

Michele Bachmann is another transitional woman in US conservative politics. Bachmann was a representative to the US House of Representatives from Minnesota for eight years, the first female representative for Minnesota (“Michele M Bachmann,” 2021). Bachmann entered the 2012 presidential race as a candidate in June 2011 but withdrew her candidacy in January 2012. Representative Bachmann has not spoken at an RNC, but her position as a Republican woman in the 2012 primaries as well as her tenure as a member of the House and a pioneering woman in Minnesota politics provides several key speeches. The speeches analyzed in this study are her presidential candidacy announcement and an address she gave at the Faith and Freedom Coalition Conference in 2013.

The speech Bachmann gave to announce her candidacy was analyzed and produced the following top ten most frequently used words: together, Americans, voice, country, America, future, promise, life, believe, and children. As is to be expected in a presidential candidacy announcement, Bachmann’s address is optimistic and focused on the future. She uses words like together, promise, and believe to inspire hope and unity within her audience, and her focus on children is a nod to the importance of family among conservative women. Her announcement is very similar to both of Elizabeth Dole’s speeches as well as Sarah Palin’s 2008 RNC speech, initially categorizing her as a mild conservative.

However, Bachmann’s address two years later at the Faith and Freedom Coalition Conference has a notable shift. The most commonly used words in this address are believe, illegal, aliens, faith, compassionate, status, education, compassion, American, and amnesty. This list introduces a policy focus that is part of the shift from mild to extremist conservatism that could be a product of white Christian nationalism. Bachmann’s focus on illegal aliens and their immigration status as well as her concern with granting amnesty is the first mention of immigration in this analysis. It also represents the most explicit example in the analysis so far of “othering” a group from her audience, an important component of nationalism. Bachmann holds onto some of the milder words of past conservative women with her use of compassionate, compassion, and faith, indicating a period of transition for conservative women where the previous values have not been abandoned even as harsher rhetoric begins to be adopted and embraced.

It is difficult to see an overall trend among Bachmann’s two speeches given their different focuses and rhetoric, but the top ten most frequent words from both speeches can be seen in Figure 4. While study of each speech individually indicates movement towards a more extremist conservatism over time, in general Bachmann continues to embrace the values of America, family, and unity held by the conservative women before her.

Figure 4

Joni Ernst is another transitional woman in conservative politics. Ernst was elected to the Senate in 2014 after serving as an Iowa state senator and a county auditor (“Joni Ernst,” 2021). She is the first woman in Iowa elected to Congress and the first female combat veteran in Congress (“Joni Ernst,” 2021). As a veteran, Senator Ernst advocates for veterans’ rights and supports measures that increase national security. After less than two years in the Senate, Ernst spoke at the 2016 RNC. Four years later, she spoke at the 2020 RNC, indicating her prominence within the party. Her Senate campaign announcement and her 2016 RNC speech are the speeches included in this study.

Joni Ernst’s speech when she announced her candidacy for the US Senate in 2013 brings to the foreground another policy issue that has become important to extremist conservative women. In her speech, Ernst stressed the importance of the Second Amendment and her belief that it needed to be protected. She talked about her time in the Army and her commitment to soldiers and the local people in Iowa. Her most frequently used words in her candidacy announcement were local, values, life, believe, second, national, soldiers, army, business, and amendment. While support for national security could be categorized as a traditionally conservative position, Ernst’s rhetoric is different than that of previous women who have advocated for the troops, most notably Sarah Palin. While Palin focused on the military, Ernst highlights the Second Amendment and stresses that it is under attack and needs to be preserved.

Less than two years into her first term as a senator, Ernst spoke at the RNC. As she voiced her support for then nominee Donald Trump, she again focused on security, using words like “safe,” “allies,” and “national.” Like Mary Fallin at the same RNC, Ernst uses the word “nation” enough that it ranks as a commonly used word in her speech. Ernst also resembles Fallin in her use of emotionally charged vocabulary, repeatedly telling the audience about the failures of Trump’s opponent, Hillary Clinton. The most commonly used words in Ernst’s address are failed, country, fail, America, allies, safe, national, nation, freedom, and Americans. Ernst is the second woman to have nation make it into the top ten most frequently used words across both speeches. Her emotionally charged rhetoric also reaches the top, with “failed” being her second most used term. Her ten most frequent words from both speeches can be seen in Figure 5.

Figure 5

Marsha Blackburn has had an extensive political career and serves as a current example of a prominent conservative woman. Blackburn started as a state senator in her home state of Tennessee, serving for four years before being elected to the US House of Representatives (“Marsha Blackburn,” 2021). After 16 years in the House, Blackburn ran for the US Senate and won her election in 2018 (“Marsha Blackburn,” 2021). She is the first woman to represent Tennessee as a Senator (“Marsha Blackburn,” 2021). Senator Blackburn has risen in fame over the last few years, speaking at three Republican National Conventions throughout her time in federal politics. Her most recent addresses from the 2016 and 2020 RNCs are included in this study.

Her RNC speech in 2016 had the following most frequent words: leadership, together, nation, American, greatness, freedom, dream, country, change, and believes. Like Mary Fallin and Joni Ernst, the word nation appears in Blackburn’s address as the third most frequently used word. Nation even ranks above American and country in terms of usage. Unlike Fallin and Ernst, however, Blackburn’s rhetoric is very optimistic and hopeful, focusing on words like greatness, freedom, dream, and believes. Her speech seems to echo the rhetoric of more mild conservative women, despite her adoption of “nation.”

However, Blackburn’s most recent RNC speech in 2020 embraces harsher rhetoric. While she does not mention nation enough for it to be included in the top ten words, she does criticize the Democrats enough to have Democrats be the second most used word in her speech. Although she is speaking to the Republican party, she spends more time demonizing the “other” (Democrats) than she does unifying her audience. Additionally, strong words like enforcement and cancel are included as frequently used. The top ten most used words in her speech are heroes, Democrats, country, volunteer, serve, lives, enforcement, cancel, believe, and America. Blackburn builds off of Fallin and Ernst’s rhetoric in 2016 and gives a speech four years later that suggests a stronger shift towards nationalism and extremist conservatism than has previously been seen.

Figure 6 shows the most frequently used words across both of Blackburn’s RNC speeches included in this analysis. While “country” is still used more than “nation,” Figure 6 shows that it is rising in use and is only one use short of tying with country for third most used word. Most of Blackburn’s commonly used words reflect a desire for unity and leadership, but her negative remarks about the opposite party does allow the word Democrats to be included in her most frequently used vocabulary. While initially siding with the rhetoric of mild conservative women, Blackburn clearly aligns with extremist conservative rhetoric at the 2020 RNC.

Figure 6

The final woman included in this study, and perhaps the woman who most embodies the white Christian nationalist sentiment of the current conservative wing in US politics is Marjorie Taylor Greene. Representative Greene has not served long in the federal government, winning a seat in Georgia in the most recent 2020 election (“Marjorie Taylor Greene,” 2021). Because she is at the beginning of her political career, Greene has a limited list of speeches to pull from. However, her controversial comments in the first weeks of her tenure resulted in her removal from committee assignments (“Marjorie Taylor Greene,” 2021), and the speech that she gave to the press following that removal is included in this analysis. Elected just a few months before this paper was written, Greene has quickly become a recognizable figure in federal politics, known for her inflammatory remarks and devotion to Donald Trump. Her speech included in this analysis is no exception. Her social media posts indicating her belief in conspiracy theories such as Q-Anon led to a House vote that removed her from her committees. Following her removal, she held a press conference where her most used words were country, American, school, care, children, free, life, hate, guns, and attacked.

Figure 7

Greene’s rhetoric is the most extreme of all the speeches included in this analysis and as the most recent woman studied, she resides at the end of the mild to extremist conservatism spectrum. Her focus on hatred and guns is indicative of her concern for the safety of children, especially those involved in school shootings, and her speech makes it clear that she believes her conservative values and ideals are under attack. Unlike the other woman on the extremist side of the conservatism spectrum, Green does not use the word nation enough to have it included in the most frequently used list. However, like other extremist women, Greene adopts emotionally charged language and spends much of her speech pointing out the “other,” most notably the opposite party and members of her own party that voted to remove her from her committee assignments. Her frequent mention of religion and her devotion to Christianity is a pillar of white Christian nationalism that is extremely apparent throughout her speech. Figure 7 shows the number of times each of her most frequently used words was said.

Figure 8

Figure 9

As white Christian nationalism is a focus of this paper, the use of the word “nation” versus the use of the word “country” is significant to these findings. Figures 8 and 9 show their usage across all of the women included in this analysis. Figure 8 details how many times each woman said “country” in the speeches included, and Figure 9 does the same for “nation.” While each woman uses both terms, there are some notable trends. While “country” is used significantly more often than “nation” by every woman, the women who use “country” less often appear to use “nation” more frequently than the other women. Marsha Blackburn and Joni Ernst in particular, two women on the extremist side of the mild to extremist conservatism spectrum, appear to use the word “nation” almost as frequently as they use the word “country.”

The word nation did not start to appear as a frequently used word until the 2016 RNC. This coincides with the 2016 election and the nomination of Donald Trump as the Republican nominee. The relationship between Trump’s election and the increase in usage of the word nation illustrates how Trump’s nomination encouraged the more outward adoption of nationalist rhetoric that had already been rising for several years.

**Conclusion**

Conservative women in US politics have been increasing. Their rise has coincided with the rise of white Christian nationalism, and as white Christian nationalism has grown more popular, more conservative women have adopted its rhetoric. Through demonization of outgroups, a focus on national security, and concerns about increasing immigration, the speeches of conservative women in the last 25 years show a shift from mild conservatism to extremist conservatism. While the changes have taken place over time rather than all at once, the most significant rhetoric shifts happen during or after the 2016 election. The election of Donald Trump did not spark a change in the rhetoric of conservative women, but his support of extremist rhetoric paved the way for more explicitly extremist rhetoric among them. As the speeches of the seven women included in this study became more extreme, their adoption of nationalist ideology grew. This shift can be seen in the increase in use of the word “nation” across these women and their speeches.

Analyzing the speeches of conservative women in the context of the rise of white Christian nationalism in the US illustrates how conservative women in the US have grown more extreme in recent years. The introduction of emotionally charged language and the focus on demonizing the “other” have led to a change in the focuses and principles of conservative women in US government. Conservative women have joined the white Christian nationalist movement, using their rhetoric to broaden its influence and encourage more conservative women to make the shift from mild to extremist conservatism.

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