Stopping a W.O.K.E. Florida: A Frame Analysis of Anti-CRT Policy from a Terror Management Perspective

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I. Introduction

Since 2020, there has been an ongoing, controversial debate amongst politicians from several states over whether the scholarly framework of Critical Race Theory (CRT) should be allowed in public school curricula. Given the large number of states that have proposed or passed what has been termed "anti-CRT legislation," this paper examines precisely how politicians define "Critical Race Theory" in the policies they propose and considers the implications of such policies for students. I focus specifically on the framing of anti-CRT policy in legislation and in public statements by political proponents of the policy with attention toward how framing seeks to influence public audiences and prospective voters. For this study, I have chosen to analyze the case of Florida's anti-CRT policy – House Bill 7 – which was the first such policy to be adopted on the state level restricting the teaching of CRT in public schools. I also examined remarks on Twitter by Florida Governor Ron DeSantis about the "Stop W.O.K.E. Act" he endorsed to observe how he framed critical race theory. I find that the legislation and DeSantis' remarks tend to invoke fear that traditional American values are being threatened by CRT. I situate these findings within a theoretical framework of terror management theory to consider how the use of such language and negative framing may have implications for swaying audiences and voters.

In this paper, I situate the analysis of recent attempts to ban Critical Race Theory within a larger literature about the politicization of education programs and their consequences. Theoretically, I extend the framework of terror management theory to consider how politicians invoke fear around the death of an idea ("America") rather than a person. I also consider the

implication for social identity, placing emphasis on framing effects of policy and rhetoric. Given how recent the policies around CRT are in the United States, any research into the cause and effects of the politicization of Critical Race Theory are warranted. This analysis provides insight into the potentially detrimental effects of the politicization of CRT, language used within an Anti-CRT policy and promotive social media posts, and how the use of such language may influence attitudes. Ultimately, this research is focused on the following questions: How is Critical Race Theory being framed within social media by political proponents (Governor Ron DeSantis) of anti-CRT legislation? How is Critical Race Theory being framed within legislation? What do stances against "CRT" imply about the theoretical ideology? How could these influences produce a change in attitudes among citizens?

II. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

Literature Review: Schooling and the Politics of Identity

Similar to what is being categorized as Critical Race Theory curriculum, are Ethnic Studies programs, which have also faced legislative controversy. The film "Precious Knowledge," directed by Ari Luis Palos in 2011, investigates political opposition in Arizona schools to an ethnic studies curriculum. Following the implementation of the Mexican American Studies program, students who have participated have experienced higher success rates in terms of continuing their education, graduating high school, and pursuing college, along with establishing a proud sense of self, an appreciation for learning and a confident cultural identity. Arizona politicians argued that these studies are un-American, with the Arizona legislature passing HB 2281, banning Ethnic Study Programs in Arizona public schools in 2012.

Much like Ethnic Studies and Critical Race Theory, bilingual education is also highly politicized. Existing research provides insights on the effects of restricting language among young bilingual populations through education policies. Previous studies show that teaching students to read in their original language allows them to develop greater reading abilities and skills that transfer to English (August & Shanahan, 2006; Goldenberg, 2008). Menken (2013) situates their research through two policy changes resulting in increasing English-only instruction within American schools, harming bilingual students in the process. The two policies are the statewide anti-bilingual education mandates in California (Proposition 227), Arizona (Proposition 203), and Massachusetts (Question 2 anti-bilingual education mandate) along with the federal passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

The first three statewide mandates successfully outlawed bilingual education in California, Arizona, and Massachusetts, proving to be damaging to bilingual education on a national scale (Menken, 2013). California was the first to pass such a policy in 1998, with Arizona modeling their stricter policy after California's in 2000, and Massachusetts following suit in 2002 while implementing a dual language education program. As a result of each of these policies, national enrollment of English language learners in bilingual programs has decreased by 22% from 1992 to 2002 (Zehler et al., 2003). Since the passing of the NCLB in New York, there has been an increase in the achievement gap between English proficient students and English language learners, English language learners' graduation are lower by 30% and dropout rates are 14% higher than before the passing of NCLB (Menken, 2013). Such policies represent ongoing attempts to assert specific models of "American" education that is particularly hostile to non-Native English speakers.

Policies that attempt to regulate particular histories discussed in the classroom and the modes of language instruction have also extended to issues of sexuality and gender. The HB 7 policy also notes that sexual identity and orientation are not to be instructed, only in an "age-appropriate manner", with no specific age being disclosed. Most recently, Florida passed a separate bill focusing on prohibiting the mentioning of sexuality and gender in HB 1557, also known as the "Don't Say Gay" Law. Researchers Kline et al. examine the policy focusing on political detriments of health (2022). They discuss earlier findings of restrictive environments, stating "…existing research has shown that the US's racially stratified society results in a heightened stress response among people who are minoritized due to their race (Guidi et al., 2021). Over time, this stress response results in chronic stress and elevated allostatic load, leading to deleterious health outcomes and deepened health disparities (Duru et al., 2012; Thomas et al., 2019)" (p.1398).

When Kline et al. (2022) consider individual impacts, they disclose that exclusion is found to produce societal stressors and amplify existing stressors through, "instilling a sense of shame around one's own sexual orientation and gender identity" (p. 1398). Educational staff are unable to support their students in fear of the law and are therefore unable to foster a safe and inclusive environment for growth. In turn, societal stressors are amplified, potentially deepening the already present mental health disparities, and lessening the few options that are available for students to seek out social support. Stress produced by HB 1557 may also further stress-related comorbidities. Furthermore, "for people who are minoritized due to their sexual and gender identity and their race and ethnicity, social stressors related to anti-LGBTQ + legislation may be worsened" (p. 1398).

According to Kline et al., HB 1557 may also result in interpersonal consequences such as an elevated risk for LGBTQ+ members to experience hate crime violence and be less likely to report these crimes, emboldening individuals to act on homophobic or transphobic impulses (2022). Silencing conversations around LGBTQ+ in classrooms can do away with social support in schools and emphasize bullying (Day et al., 2020). Broader implications of the HB 1557 include the allowance for, "legal precedents around discussions and treatment of an entire group or category of people. Specifically, Don't Say Gay" laws create a de facto form of sanctioned discrimination that can lead to additional stigmatizing policies" (Kline et al., 2022). As a result, the law may cross into other institutions such as healthcare, academic research, the public health workforce, along with potentially effecting housing and employment. All of which play a role in shaping well-known social determinants of health.

Each of these three instances highlight that restrictive educational policies reinforce particular models of ideal "American education" and, as a consequence, can, and have, produce(d) detrimental physical and mental health effects on individuals targeted by such legislation, along with affecting health on a much larger scale.

Theoretical Approach: Terror Management Theory, Framing, and the "Death of America"

Terror management theory (TMT), according to the American Psychological Association, terror management theory (TMT) is, "a theory proposing that control of death anxiety is the primary function of society and the main motivation in human behavior. Accordingly, awareness of the inevitability of death (mortality salience) motivates people to maintain faith in the absolute validity of the cultural worldviews (i.e., beliefs and values) that give their lives meaning and to believe that they are living up to those standards, thus attaining a sense of personal value or self-

esteem that buffers them against the frightening recognition of their own mortality". The theory has been supported by numerous studies, "showing that self-esteem and worldviews provide protection against anxiety and death-related cognition, reminders of mortality instigate worldview bolstering and self-esteem striving, and threats to the worldview and self-esteem increase the accessibility of death-related thought (Greenberg and Arndt, 2012).

There are two basic hypotheses of TMT, the anxiety buffer hypothesis and mortality salience hypothesis. For the purpose of this research, I will be focusing on the mortality salience hypothesis. According to the American Psychological Association, "mortality salience, coupled with death anxiety, is a motivating force behind a diverse set of actions designed to defend oneself or one's social group when threatened". Mortality salience further suggests that when death is salient, we have an increased need as humans to prefer those who share similar beliefs to ourselves and dislike those with different beliefs from us. Studies have examined the direct relationship between mortality salience and politics. For example, Greenberg et al. (1992) conducted a study that consisted of American participants who were either reminded of death or were not reminded of death. The participants then evaluated an individual who wrote an essay in support of, or against, the United States. The study found that when primed with thoughts of death, the participants were significantly more likely to "like" Pro-American authors than Anti-American authors.

A meta-analysis conducted by Burke, B. L., Kosloff, S., & Landau, M. J. (2013) on how mortality salience effects political attitudes concluded, "the present analyses suggest that conservative shifting often gives way to worldview defense when additional components of a participant's worldview are rendered salient in some manner" (p. 196). In other words, when a

person's beliefs are validated, they are likely to defend their values and those who share them. Researchers also disclose that, "conservative shifting was a response to existential threat" (p. 196). Meaning that right-wing supporters are more likely to increase their support than left-wing supporters when there is a threat to their existence. These findings could potentially have implications for conservative support for Anti-CRT.

The threat of mortality is, at times, emphasized by charismatic political leaders to gain support, as seen in the study conducted by Landau et al. (2004). Landau, Solomon, and Cook conducted four studies focused on investigating how thoughts about death and the 9/11 terrorist attacks influenced the attitudes of American citizens towards (then) current President George W. Bush. In Study 1 it was found that there was increased support for Bush and his counterterrorism policies when people were reminded of their mortality, invoking mortality salience. Study 2 found that, "subliminal exposure to 9/11-related stimuli brought death-related thoughts closer to consciousness" (2004). In Study 3, reminders of both mortality and 9/11 demonstrated an increase in support for President Bush. In Study 4, participants became more favorable to President Bush as a result of mortality salience, claiming to vote for him in the upcoming presidential election. Alternatively, the participants became less favorable to then presidential candidate John Kerry.

Within their discussion, Landau et al. (2004) center the conversation around how terror management plays a role in political decision making and effecting citizens' allegiance to charismatic leaders. From a terror management perspective, political allegiances are based on the need to manage concerns about one's mortality, leading to individuals to rely on their leaders for protection. Researchers speculate that the reminders of 9/11 and terrorism united citizens through

a common cause, resulting in integrating their identity into a singular one where they rally to support current President George Bush. This speculation is rooted in earlier research conducted by Gaertner & Dovidio (2000), Darley & Morris (1975), Piliavin et al. (1969), Sherif (1966), and Sherif et al. (1961). This research revealed that facing or anticipating a common threat can cause subordinate identities while increasing ingroup solidarity. Additionally, findings that demonstrate an increase in disdain for and distancing from people with different values and beliefs than oneself are discussed (e.g., Arndt, Greenberg, Schimel, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 2002; Florian & Mikulincer, 1997; Greenberg et al., 1990; Rosenblatt et al., 1989). Notably, these politicians share their messages with distinct word choices, utilizing "framing" to appeal to their audience.

The "framing effect" refers to how information about issues is presented to audiences, either making the information more or less appealing to the listener, producing bias. Negative framing, in terms of promoting health-related messages, tends to be associated with "loss" while positive framing tends to be associated with "gain" (van 't Riet et al., 2010). Loss or gain-framed messages can both influence persuasion. van 't Riet et al. (2010) found that gain-framed messages related to health issues resulted in a greater amount of information acceptance, attitude, and positive affect (emotions). Loss-framed information produced more negative affect, which in turn increased the participants' intentions to engage in the "healthy" behavior (van 't Riet et al., 2010). This study shows that negative framing, along with negative affect, of a health-related issue increases the likelihood of the audience to support and embody the behavior deemed to be healthy. Ledgewood and Boydstun (2013) found negative, or loss-framed, messages to be cognitively "stickier" than gain-framed messages. Meaning that negativity bias from loss-framed messages tend to have long-lasting effects when compared to gain-framed messages, making it

more difficult for individuals to revert to a positive perception of an idea when primed with negative perception(s).

A particular type of framing, issue framing, is "a basic component of political persuasion campaigns, but also surfaces in more objective political communication" (Nelson and Oxley, 1999). Nelson and Oxley disclose that most political messages have the ability to shape beliefs and attitudes, with framing significantly affecting judgements about the importance of beliefs on topics such as the environment and the economy. The researchers further acknowledge that framed messages can act as primes to, "bring latent cognitions to the forefront of consciousness" (1999). In addition to issue framing, there is valence framing, which focuses on framed preferences in opposition versus support. Research by Bizer et al. (2011) has found that negative framing does seem to enhance attitude strength. Bizer et al. (2011) reveals that, "simply encouraging people to think of themselves as opposing one side of an issue, rather than supporting the other side, can strengthen attitudes, making them more resistant to change and more likely to impact behavior" (p.77).

Collectively, the literature on terror management theory and framing illustrate how fear remains a common framework in politics to influence attitudes and behavior related to politics. Accordingly, I draw on this framework to analyze recent Anti-CRT policies while also extending the terror management framework in new directions by considering how activating salience around the death of an idea – a fleeting America – characterizes policy and political discourse around CRT.

III. Contemporary Context: Scope of Anti-CRT Policies

A prominent, modern, issue that has been plaguing the United States for years now is increasing political polarization or what is sometimes called the "Political Divide", which refers to the national tension produced by differences in the political beliefs of the two-party electoral system. This division amongst political parties has moved beyond voting for a presidential candidate to voting on policies within education reform. One controversial topic within educational policy includes Anti-Critical Race Theory policies. According to Education Week, "Since January 2021, 44 states have introduced bills or taken other steps that would restrict teaching critical race theory or limit how teachers can discuss racism and sexism, according to an Education Week analysis. Eighteen states have imposed these bans and restrictions either through legislation or other avenues" (Schwartz, 2023).

In terms of defining Critical Race Theory itself, the intellectual framework emerges out of legal scholarship, particularly by scholars such as Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw, the latter of which is widely viewed as having coined the term. According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Critical Race Theory, is a "radical legal movement that seeks to transform the relationship among race, racism, and power" (p. 144). The theory has been employed across a range of disciplines including sociology and ethnic studies to understand ongoing racial inequalities, particularly within the criminal legal system. An interesting inquiry includes the extent to which the ways scholars have developed and employed the theory defined as Critical Race Theory compared to how it is invoked in anti-CRT legislation.

According to Janel George of the American Bar Association, Critical Race Theory (CRT), "critiques how the social construction of race and institutionalized racism perpetuate a racial caste system that relegates people of color to the bottom tiers. CRT also recognizes that

race intersects with other identities, including sexuality, gender identity, and others. CRT recognizes that racism is not a bygone relic of the past. Instead, it acknowledges that the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the imposition of second-class citizenship on Black Americans and other people of color continue to permeate the social fabric of this nation" (2021). Anti-Critical Race Theory policies are being proposed to rule out Critical Race Theory curriculum, which these policies are defining as racist teachings. Policies also include ruling out the mention of ethnicity, sexuality, and gender differences. The focus of many bans, however, has been the K-12 level. The dispute has often been made in terms of a concern for the mental health of students – while the students of concern vary per stance. A common claim among politicians is that discussions of the impact of racism in American history would be detrimental to the mental health and well-being, particularly of white students. As a result of this nationwide dispute, there have been "Anti-CRT" policies put into place to rid of any discussion of race, slavery, genocide, segregation, sexuality, gender identity, and other topics deemed as potentially harmful to students.

IV. Methods

Research Questions

Ultimately, this research is focused on the following questions: How is Critical Race Theory being framed within social media by political proponents (Governor Ron DeSantis) of anti-CRT legislation? How is Critical Race Theory being framed within legislation? What do stances against "CRT" imply about the theoretical ideology? How could these influences produce a change in attitudes among citizens?

Data and Variables

I have conducted a content analysis focused on the Stop W.O.K.E. legislation, more specifically known as the Individual Freedom Act, in Florida and Governor Ron DeSantis' tweets on the subject. Specifically, I will be taking a deductive approach to examine positive and negative framing. I chose to focus on Florida given that it was the first state to pass such legislation, setting the tone for other states to follow. To analyze the content within both the tweets collected from DeSantis and Florida House Bill 7 (see Senate Bill 2524) on the subject of Individual Freedom, phrases or words were sorted by positive or negative connotations, in accordance with positive and negative framing. The unit of positive framing is defined as words or phrases using positive connotations, promoting positive associations, or provoking positive affect. The unit of negative framing is defined as words or phrases using negative connotations, promoting negative associations, or provoking negative affect. For example, when a glass of water is described as half "full", the audience will feel more positive toward the glass than when the glass is described to them as half "empty".

To collect data, I began by using the advanced search tool on Twitter and entered the terms, "woke, CRT, critical race theory, students, children, schools, indoctrination, dei". Each of these terms have been used in the debate over House Bill 7 or are connected to education. These keywords resulted in 12 tweets in total, the earliest ranging from March 28, 2022, and the latest on January 21, 2023. Each tweet was then transcribed, including embedded videos and images, each being read through carefully and phrases/words being categorized depending on positive or negative framing. This process was repeated for Florida's House Bill 7: Individual Freedom. Each positive or negative quote was documented within a Google Spreadsheet.

V. Findings

The results show that Governor DeSantis' tweets use more negative framing than the legislation. It was noticed that the legislation used more neutral language overall, but negative framing was used more than positive framing. Specifically, there were 29 instances of positive framing and 32 instances of negative framing in DeSantis' tweets. Within HB 7: Individual Freedom, there were 8 instances of positive framing and 24 instances of negative framing. Both DeSantis' tweets and the legislation specifically use the terms, "indoctrinate", "freedom", "fundamental", "discrimination", "parents", "rights", and "students". Yet, House Bill 7 did not once mention "Critical Race Theory".

Framing Used
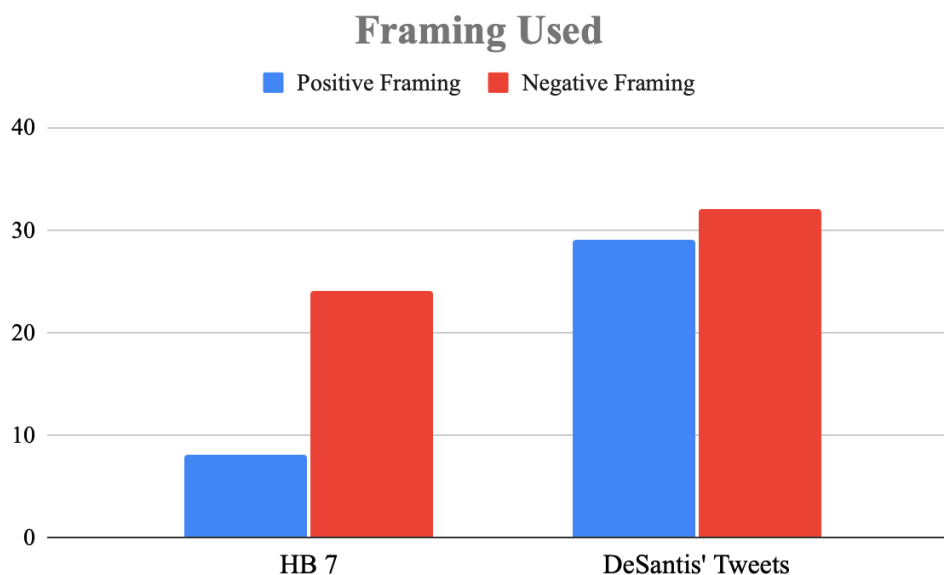
The first theme I noticed across both the Individual Freedom Act and Governor DeSantis' twitter posts is the idea that false teachings are present within public school classrooms with the goal of persuading students. This can be seen in HB 7 in lines 533-536, "…classroom instruction and curriculum may not be used to *indoctrinate* or persuade students to a particular point of view

inconsistent with the *principles* of this subsection or state academic standards." DeSantis posts, "In Florida, we require the *truth* about American history to be taught in our classrooms. We will not allow schools to twist history to align with an ideological agenda". Negative framing is utilized within both of these statements, specifically through the words or phrases, "may not be used", "indoctrinate", "inconsistent", "not allow", and "twist history". These terms work together to form this idea that falsified information is being taught to helpless children is likely to invoke anger and fear that there is an opposing source working to brainwash children. It is implied that the opposing force here is CRT and supporters of CRT. This is further asserted in the video posted alongside the earlier quoted tweet by DeSantis where he exclaims, "That's what those people who want CRT want to do, they want to change history". Ultimately, the idea of indoctrination – the process of teaching a person or group to easily accept a set of beliefs – is being displayed by both the bill and the tweet. It is notable that "indoctrination" is often a vocabulary employed during war time and in reference to propaganda. Accordingly, this framing, like wartime, presents an "us versus them" mentality, a threat to America as it has been known, ignoring traditionally "American" values in the process. This insinuates that America is dying, and American ideals are being threatened, potentially appealing to terror management's mortality salience hypothesis.

Accompanying the idea of an opposing, brainwashing, force is the idea of a force pursuing justice. In this case, the Individual Freedom Act is being portrayed as the force ensuring that students are free to think for themselves by protecting students from "indoctrination". This portrayal is evident in lines 36-37 of HB 7, "requiring instruction to be consistent with specified *principles* of individual *freedom*". DeSantis also speaks of freedom, tweeting, "*Freedom* includes the *freedom* from *indoctrination*. We, therefore, reject teaching kids to hate our country or to

hate each other through concepts such as CRT". The positive framing of the legislation here paints CRT as negative and threatening, with the solution being HB 7. The term "freedom," also appeals to our very idea of America, as it was freedom Americans sought when fleeing from Europe. The term "hate," invokes a strong sense of resentment towards the idea of CRT, with the theme of both the policy and the tweet being freedom from indoctrination.

The third theme revolves around the idea of discrimination. In lines 89-92 of the Individual Freedom Act, it is declared that "An individual, by virtue of his or her race, color, sex, or national origin, should (not) be *discriminated* against or receive adverse treatment to achieve *diversity, equity, or inclusion*". In an infographic shared by DeSantis through a twitter post, it is mentioned that "Florida is leading the anti-woke fight: protected K-20 students against *discriminatory* educational practices due to Critical Race Theory and *indoctrinating* instruction". The legislation, while its language is relatively neutral, frames the restrictions it is setting in a positive light. This positive framing of restrictions is reiterated by DeSantis. In another tweet, DeSantis shares that new higher education reforms will be built off of, "elimination of *DEI/CRT* bureaucracies" along with mentioning other standards that, "ensure higher education is rooted in the *values of liberty* and the *western tradition*". Both DeSantis and the policy refer to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). However, the policy refers to DEI briefly, expressing that no one should be subjected to discrimination on behalf of achieving diversity, equity, and inclusion. DeSantis on the other hand discusses completely eliminating DEI, using DEI interchangeably with CRT, which he has negatively framed. The legislation implies that all should be free of discrimination, that all are to treat each other equally, and receive equal treatment. The prohibition of discrimination in terms of reaching an environment of diversity, equity, and inclusivity seems to be a means for ending any presence of DEI, as DeSantis exclaims.

As an ideology, color-blind racism furthers injustice and shifts the blame, by taking the form of four distinct frames (or ways of talking about race): abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization. The anti-CRT policies being passed seem to utilize two out of the four frames. Abstract Liberalism refers to an appeal to the vague notion of "equal opportunity" as a way to avoid acknowledging how existing structures do not represent "equal opportunities." In the case of anti-CRT legislation, politicians appear to utilize this frame by ignoring that not all histories are being taught or acknowledged, neither oppression nor racism itself are being discussed in the classroom. Minimization, the acknowledgement of racism as once important, but no longer of importance, can be seen as implemented throughout the policy by the restrictions on any discussion of racism, discrimination, superiority, or privilege as relevant to contemporary society.

As Bonilla-Silva argues, color-blind racism uses language that appears to be race-neutral but invokes further injustice. Specifically, the legislation seems to coincide with Bonilla-Silva's abstract liberalism frame of colorblind racism, the vague notion of "equal opportunity" as a way to avoid acknowledging how existing structures do not represent "equal opportunities."

Notably, Critical Race Theory is not mentioned within House Bill 7 and is therefore not framed, at least not directly. DeSantis' social media posts suggests that the bill directly does away with CRT and frames CRT as "indoctrination" of children. DeSantis' portrayal of CRT and opponents of Anti-CRT is derogatory, using numerous instances of negative framing to describe the two subjects. The themes of indoctrination, freedom, and abstract liberalism were found to be present in both the policy and DeSantis' tweets.

VI. Conclusion

The negative framing by Governor DeSantis could have swayed attitudes among Florida residents, given the findings from Bizer et al. (2011) on negative framing enhancing attitude strength, resistance to change, and behavioral impacts. Such negative framing could have increased the likelihood that supporters are to engage in similar beliefs and behaviors, in accordance with the research conducted by van 't Riet et al. (2010). Furthermore, DeSantis' more prominent use of negative framing could have lingering effects, causing his audience to have longer lasting negative views and feelings towards the idea of CRT, analogous to Ledgewood and Boydstun's (2013) findings. The positive framed messages shared by DeSantis could have fostered support through high information acceptance and positive emotions towards his stance in accordance with van 't Riet et al. (2010).

Nelson and Oxley (1999) acknowledge that framed messages can act as primes to, "bring latent cognitions to the forefront of consciousness," can be interpreted to mean that the more a person hears that Critical Race Theory is "indoctrination", the more it will be on their mind. Alternatively, the belief that anti-CRT policies are crucial to prevent "indoctrination" and maintain "freedom" will be more prominent the more they are discussed in a promotive way. However, Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley's (1997) argument on frames as primes is to establish one's priority opinion suggests that people must already place importance on these issues beforehand.

To further consider the implications of my findings in regard to DeSantis' influence, I gathered previously published surveys. As of March 16, 2022, according to Politico's Gary Fineout, 40% of national respondents reported that they supported a ban on Critical Race Theory in schools, while 43% opposed it. Fineout reported that responses, "broke largely along partisan

lines, with 65% of Republicans in favor of banning critical race theory in schools while 61% of Democrats were opposed". NBC's Marc Caputo and Jonathan Allen share a poll where 250 voters from each of the 6 "battleground states" of Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin are surveyed by the American Federation of Teachers. The survey, published in May 2022, discloses that 44% of respondents are more likely to, "Support legislation that would ban the teaching of critical race theory or 'CRT' in public schools", 35% are less likely to support such legislation, while +11% are differential.

These surveys show a slight increase in favor of anti-CRT legislation over the span of a few months. The difference in support for anti-CRT legislation across political parties is consistent with Nelson, Clawson, and Oxley's (1997) findings that one's opinion can be influenced by framing, but their beliefs on the issue are already present and considered to be important. However, in future research endeavors, a more consistent and reliable collection of data should be gathered from surveys with the same set of questions distributed to the same participants across time to show trends more accurately in personal attitudes. As of now, I am unaware of any recently published or updated surveys.

According to the Social Identity Theory, individuals form perspectives of themselves at both individual and group positions, such as those of gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and economic status. Social Identity has been found to influence mental health, self-esteem, Imposter Syndrome, and stereotype threat, all of which have direct effects on academic performance. As a result of social identity – which impacts self-esteem, mental health, Imposter Syndrome, and stereotype threat – being dependent on identifiers such as race, assuming that Anti-Critical Race Theory policies could be damaging is justifiable. Furthermore, investigations into the potential

mental health and self-esteem effects, with respect to social identity, of Anti-Critical Theory policies would provide insight into the specific consequences such policies can have on students.

The use of mortality salience by charismatic political figures to gain support can be seen by former President Donald Trump in his "Make America Great Again" campaign (Cohen et. al, 2017). Somewhat similarly, Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis uses his platform to announce that Critical Race Theory ideologists are threatening the freedom, a core American value and belief, of students and parents. DeSantis invokes the idea of freedom to gain support from Floridian citizens, instilling a fear that America is changing, and freedom is no longer guaranteed. Landau et al. (2004) mentioned that political allegiances are also based on "the operation of nonrational forces of which we are not always aware" (p.1146). Perhaps research into the relationship between valence framing and mortality salience in terms of fostering support for political candidates should be explored given that Governor DeSantis' approval ratings have significantly increased since July of 2020. Future research should also explore the relationship between mortality salience and support for political leaders, in terms of threatening beliefs. For example, Governor DeSantis' approval ratings have increased by 14% over the span of 3 years (from 45% in June 2020 to 59% in April 2023), which coincides with his endorsement of Anti-CRT policies.

Altogether, there were three themes identified across both the Individual Freedom Act and tweets from Governor Ron DeSantis: Indoctrination, Freedom, and Abstract Liberalism. This analysis concludes that there is a prominent usage of negative framing, or loss-framed messages, by political proponents of anti-CRT policies, implying that CRT is indoctrinating K-12 students, yet there was no mention of the theory within the Individual Freedom Act. The loss-framed messages may be interpreted as utilizing mortality salience. Further research should be conducted to discriminate whether the fear of mortality is invoked by the fear of one's beliefs no

longer being prioritized. From this analysis, I pose the following questions: Can threats to, or the "death" of, a cultural set of beliefs result in effects similar to those found for mortality salience? Does anxiety worsen when one's beliefs are threatened, therefore influencing behavior and attitudes?

Any investigation into anti-CRT policies would be beneficial since there have not yet been any sociological or psychological publications on the matter. As previously mentioned, educational settings have a known relationship with overall health, self-esteem, and social identity – all of which could be greatly affected by Anti-Critical Race Theory policies. This content analysis sets the foundation for future research conducted on the framing effects of Anti-CRT policies and political social media, the presence of color-blind racism in policy, along with the use of mortality salience by charismatic political leaders and the relationship to political attitudes.

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