From Punchlines to Politics: The Joe Rogan Experience as a Case Study of the Politicization of Apolitical Spaces in the U.S.

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Abstract

The Joe Rogan Experience (JRE), one of the most widely consumed media products in the world, has evolved from a podcast with comedic roots to a platform of political significance. The transformation of JRE exemplifies a broader trend of politicization of traditionally apolitical spaces in the United States that may have consequential political implications. To examine this shift and its effects on political outcomes, this paper presents findings from two studies: Study 1 is a content analysis of JRE episodes aired through December 2024 ($N = 2,175$) that demonstrates a rise in socio-political content on the show. Study 2 draws on a nationally representative survey ($N = 1,600$) to assess the relationship between JRE exposure and voting behavior in the 2024 presidential election. In light of these findings, we discuss the role of non-traditional media in contemporary politics.

Keywords: *Joe Rogan, content analysis, topic modeling, podcast, elections, popular media*

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Politicization of Apolitical Spaces in the U.S.

The Joe Rogan Experience (JRE) podcast has been consistently ranked as one of the most popular podcasts over the past years (Edison Research, 2025b). Having first aired in December 2009, the podcast has since amassed a massive fan base, with some episodes garnering up to tens of millions of views. These impressive statistics make the JRE podcast "one of the most consumed media products on the planet" (New York Times, 2022). However, what began as a lighthearted exploration of comedy and culture has grown into a significant force in public discourse, one that has become a routine topic of conversation in the context of politics. This transition became particularly evident in 2024 as Joe Rogan interviewed President Donald Trump and publicly endorsed him on the eve of the election, which, according to some political commentators, might have given Trump the momentum to engage young audiences (NBC News, 2024; Wolfson, 2024) and swing states (PodNews, 2024).

We argue that the evolution of the JRE exemplifies a broader trend of increasing politicization of traditionally apolitical spaces in the United States, where the lines between entertainment and politics continue to blur (Dagnes, 2019; Young & Gray, 2013). As Politico's Calder McHugh writes in reference to Rogan, "The future of American political engagement is barely political at all." (2024). To investigate how such politicization unfolds and with what consequences, this paper presents findings from two complementary studies. Study 1 is a content analysis of nearly 95% of JRE episodes aired till December 2024 (N = 2,175), designed to identify key themes and trace their prevalence over time. Study 2 builds on these findings using data from a nationally representative survey to assess the extent to which exposure to JRE correlates with voting behavior in the 2024 U.S. presidential election.

This study provides one of the most comprehensive analyses to date of the content of a media product that is garnering increasing cultural and political attention. It also offers preliminary empirical support for the plausible implications of the politicization of entertainment platforms. The findings contribute to an emerging conversation about the political influence of entertainment media figures, especially those who operate at the intersection of entertainment and ideological discourse. They also open up broader debates about a unique type of mediatization of politics in the U.S., one that is dictated by the logics of the entertainment medium.

Media Fragmentation and the Politicization of Entertainment

The last two decades have witnessed a profound fragmentation of the media landscape. Audiences are now presented with an unprecedented variety of channels, platforms, and content to choose from. In this fragmented environment, entertainment media have emerged as a prominent vehicle for political messaging. Programs that traditionally focused on comedy or cultural commentary now routinely include political issues in their scripts, blurring the lines between what used to be known as strictly political and entertainment content (Baum, 2003). This hybrid form of media, often referred to as political entertainment, leverages humor and storytelling to engage audiences who might otherwise be politically uninterested (Baum, 2002).

Scholars have documented that platforms that were traditionally considered apolitical— from comedy (Clarke et al., 2022; Feldman & Young, 2008; Moy et al., 2006; Sienkiewicz & Marx, 2024; Splendore & Domaneschi, 2017; Young, 2004), to dramatic narratives (Holbert et al., 2003; Mutz & Nir, 2010; Rasul & Raney, 2021), to Google app reviews (Wang et al., 2024), and pages of social media influencers (Harff & Schmuck, 2025)—increasingly act as arenas for political and ideological debates. This expansion of politics into everyday culture reflects what

Berelson et al. (1954) described as "total politics." According to them, this is a state whereby "politics would cut so deeply, be so keenly felt, and especially, be so fully reinforced by other social identifications of the electorate as to threaten the consensus itself" (p. 319). As more and more apolitical spaces become inundated with political messages, people are exposed to political content without them intentionally seeking it. This results in the blurring of boundaries between politics and popular culture and a shift of political influence from political commentators to entertainers (Kim & Patterson, 2025).

Extant research has demonstrated the ability of entertainment programming to shape people's political opinions, which can influence political outcomes (see Rasheed & Young, 2024). For example, Xiong (2021) reported that Ronald Reagan's tenure as the host of a television program in the 1950s translated into political support from voters almost two decades after his show aired. Similarly, Kim & Patterson (2025) outline how the television program The Apprentice might have enhanced Donald Trump's performance in the 2016 election.

Given the proliferation of political content into entertainment arenas, non-traditional media, such as TikTok, YouTube, and podcasts, have become critical sources of political information, particularly among younger (Edison Research, 2024a; Pew Research, 2024) and politically uninterested audiences (Gil de Zúñiga & Diehl, 2019). According to estimates, about half of Americans listen to podcasts (Pew Research Center, 2023), about three-quarters of podcast listeners trust podcast hosts (Deloitte Insights, 2023), and a majority (87%) believe that the news they hear on podcasts is mostly accurate, with a third (31%) saying they trust that news more than news from other sources (Pew Research Center, 2023). Unlike traditional media, podcasts have the ability to foster parasocial relationships with their audience through narrative

formats and perceived authenticity, all of which can build trust and enhance persuasiveness (Ferchaud et al., 2018).

The Joe Rogan Experience podcast is a unique and consequential case study of the increasing politicization of apolitical spaces in the U.S. What began as a casual, comedy-driven podcast featuring Rogan and his comedian friends has evolved into a platform of significant political discourse. Most notably, in the lead up to the 2024 U.S. presidential election, Joe Rogan publicly endorsed Donald Trump in a tweet, citing the influence of Elon Musk. In his victory speech, Trump included an unusual nod to the sports entertainment world by inviting Dana White, CEO of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC), to the podium. White thanked online streamer Adin Ross, comedian and podcaster Theo Von, and "the mighty and powerful Joe Rogan." Consequently, many have dubbed the election that took place in 2024 as "the podcast election" (Bloomberg, 2024b, 2024a; Edison Research, 2025a; The Hill, 2024).

The Joe Rogan Experience

The Joe Rogan Experience (JRE) has emerged as one of the most popular podcasts in the world. Having first aired in December 2009, the show has since then amassed a massive fan base, with some episodes garnering up to tens of millions of views. According to one estimate, JRE reaches an audience that is almost 30 times larger than prime-time CNN (The Economist, 2024). These impressive statistics have led observers to describe JRE as "one of the most consumed media products on the planet" (New York Times, 2022).

Rogan's fanbase consists predominantly of men (Edison Research, 2024c; Stecuła et al., 2025; YouGov, 2023), and younger audiences (Edison Research, 2024c; Stecuła et al., 2025). A majority of his fans are White (64%), whereas a quarter are Hispanic (Morning Consult, 2022). Politically, Rogan's fans are heavily Republican, but almost half of them reported not voting for

Donald Trump in the 2020 election (Morning Consult, 2022). However, Stecuła et al. (2025) argue that this political asymmetry in JRE's audience might be an artifact of a cultural ideology that comprises "skepticism of institutions, gender essentialism, and conspiratorial thinking" (Stecuła et al., 2025, p. 21). Their findings corroborate with other surveys that have found that JRE listeners tend to distrust mainstream media, with one survey reporting that only 12% of JRE fans believe that newspapers tell the truth (YouGov, 2023). A survey by Edison Research (2024c), however, showed a fairly equal distribution of JRE listeners, with 35% identifying as "Independent" or "something else", 32% as Republicans, and 27% as Democrats.

When it comes to the content of the show, the podcast follows "a long-form conversation" (Joe Rogan, n.d.) format where the host, Joe Rogan– a standup comedian for over 30 years–talks to a guest invited to his studio. On average, the episodes are about 2 and a half hours long (Joe Rogan, n.d.) and cover a variety of topics ranging from "banal commentary on current events to deep dives into "difficult" issues like evolution, psychedelics, technology, politics, free speech, UFOs, and conspiracy theories" (Bozzi, 2025, p. 75). These conversations do not have much of a formal structure, and oftentimes bounce between being focused on the guests' expertise and chatting nonchalantly about current events, personal experiences, and whatever else may come to mind at that moment. Rogan's approach to discussing these topics is from an "everyman" perspective (Bozzi, 2024, p. 75). The guests selected to be interviewed are hand-picked by Rogan himself. These guests include "comedians, actors, musicians, MMA fighters, authors, artists, and beyond" (Joe Rogan, n.d.), a vast majority of whom are male (89%) (Joe Rogan, n.d.). Rogan's high-profile guests include tech entrepreneurs Elon Musk and Mark Zukerburg, astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, and physicist Brian Cox, heavyweight boxing

champion Mike Tyson, as well as political figures such as Bernie Sanders, J.D. Vance, and Donald Trump.

In a 2022 interview with podcaster Lex Fridman, Rogan emphasized that he was not a Trump supporter "in any way, shape, or form", and that even though he had had multiple opportunities to have him on the show, he declined every single time (New York Post, 2024b). However, by October 2024, Rogan's position had shifted. During his interview with Trump, he explained the change of heart. "Once they shot you," he said to Trump, "I was like 'he's gotta come in here.'" "It's all about the timing. I think the timing is perfect," he added (New York Post, 2024b). The resulting episode became one of the most viral episodes of the JRE, amassing 20 million views in the first 20 hours on YouTube (New York Post, 2024a). Throughout the interview, Rogan provided Trump with largely uncontested airtime, even entertaining several inaccurate claims (CNN, 2024), thereby giving Trump unfiltered access to JRE's massive listenership. Political commentators have argued that Rogan's interview with Trump and his subsequent public endorsement might have helped Trump win over young voters (NBC News, 2024; Wolfson, 2024), potentially swaying polling outcomes (Bloomberg, 2024a; PodNews, 2024). Rogan's journey from the "fear factor guy" to being dubbed a potential "presidential kingmaker" (Daily Beast, 2024; The Telegraph, 2023; Wolfson, 2024) is emblematic of the growing influence of entertainment platforms and media figures on political outcomes.

Taken together, JRE occupies a unique position at the intersection of politics and entertainment. As the show increasingly serves as a platform involved in the shaping of political discourse, understanding the nature and the evolution of its content becomes critically important. However, despite its outsized cultural and political influence, there has not been a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the JRE's content to date. Study 1 addresses this gap

and undertakes an endeavor to systematically analyze the contents of this widely consumed podcast and to examine its thematic shifts over time.

Study 1: Content Analysis

Study 1 aims to conduct a systematic content analysis of the JRE. The objective of the study is to identify the prevalent themes on the show and how the proportion of those themes has varied over time. Building on prior literature and observations of the show's increasing engagement with sociopolitical issues, we expect to observe temporal shifts in its content composition.

RQ1: (a) What are the most prominent themes in the Joe Rogan Experience? (b) How does the prevalence of these themes differ across time?

Study 1 Data

The data for the content analysis comprised of transcripts of episodes of the Joe Rogan Experience podcast, aired from December 2009 to Dec 2024 (N = 2,175; 95% of all transcripts). A list of the 112 missing episodes is available in the supplementary materials. Some episodes were split into multiple transcripts (e.g., part 1, part 2, etc.), which is why the total number of transcripts exceeds the total number of episodes they represent. It is important to note that the scope of our analysis is limited to episodes from the regular Joe Rogan Experience podcast only, excluding transcripts from other podcasts by Joe Rogan, such as the MMA show or Fight Companion. Figure 1 shows the number of transcripts per year included in the analysis.

Figure 1 here

Study 1 Analytical Strategy

To identify broader themes within the show, we followed the methodology outlined by Walter & Ophir (2019). This methodology combines topic modeling with network analysis to

inductively identify broader themes or classifications of large corpora of texts. Following this methodology, we first identified topics within the shows using Structural Topic Model (STM) analysis (Roberts et al., 2013). In STM, a topic is defined as a group of words that can be semantically interpreted as a theme (Roberts et al., 2014). The STM estimates the latent themes, or 'topics', that best characterize a given corpus of text, in this case, transcripts of the JRE. Details pertaining to data preprocessing, model evaluation, and model selection can be found in the supplementary materials. Next, we conducted a network analysis of the topics identified from the STM and applied the Louvain clustering algorithm (Blondel et al., 2008) to inductively extract clusters of topics that can be identified as themes within the podcast. The Louvain algorithm optimizes network modularity, which is a measure of how a group of nodes is densely connected to other nodes in the same community but weakly connected to nodes in other communities (Zhang et al., 2021).

Study 1 Results

STM: The selected STM model contained 45 topics. The labels assigned to each topic, as well as the top ten FREX words, topic proportions, and example excerpts associated with each topic, are given in Table 1.

Table 1 here

The top ten discernible topics in the transcripts were: personal narratives, Duncan Trussell (actor and comedian who is a long-time friend of Joe Rogan), stand-up comedy, crude humor, ideological constructs, electoral politics, fitness, Joey Diaz (Cuban American comedian and actor, and long-time friend of Joe Rogan), and pets and animal humor, respectively. The prominence of these topics reflects the multifaceted nature of the show: On the one hand, it

highlights the general interests of Joe Rogan, with his comedic roots and interest in combat sports; on the other hand, it demonstrates the growing presence of sociopolitical content.

Network Analysis: To examine and visualize the connections between the topics, we constructed a topic co-occurrence network of the 45-topic STM (see Figure 2). The nodes in the network represent the individual topics, with the size of the node representing the proportion of the topic. The edges represented the cosine similarity between topics, such that topics that frequently co-occurred within a transcript have stronger edges than topics that were unlikely to co-occur within the transcripts.

Figure 2 here

The network reveals a complex yet interpretable structure, wherein certain topics act as integrative hubs that link otherwise distinctive topics. Hubs are nodes that score highly on network centrality and tend to integrate otherwise distinct regions of the network. Table 2 reports various indicators of centrality that were calculated to identify such network hubs (Table 2). By degree centrality—the number of connections to other nodes/topics—personal narratives is the clear outlier (degree = 30), followed by stand-up comedy, U.S. electoral politics, and foreign policy (each degree = 9).

Table 2 here

Across all calculated metrics (degree, closeness, radiality, and betweenness), the personal narratives topic emerged as the global hub of the network. The centrality of this topic underscores its structural function within the show. Intimate accounts of family life, childhood experiences, and trajectories of successes and challenges, provide a recurring thread to the show and link otherwise heterogeneous discussions. In this sense, the JRE's thematic diversity is organized around a core narrative framework.

Community Detection: We then applied the Louvain community detection algorithm (Blondel et al., 2008) to identify clusters of topics that could be interpreted as themes within the JRE podcast. The algorithm revealed six major communities in the transcripts, each corresponding to broader thematic domains within the JRE corpus. These themes were interpreted as follows: personal narratives and lifestyle (12 topics), socio-political topics (9 topics), comedy and entertainment (8 topics), fitness and fighting (6 topics), conspiracies and consciousness (6 topics), and animals and hunting (4 topics). Figure 2 depicts these themes, with the color of the nodes representing the community they belong to.

The largest Louvain community identified in the network was the personal narratives and lifestyle cluster (12 topics). The topics included in this cluster relate to lifestyle (Personal Narratives, Crime, Music, Food, Cars, Academia and College Life, and Books/Films & Conspiracies, Boxing Narratives) but also the show's production-related talk (JRE Branding, Radio Shows, Sponsorships, and Adspeak), thereby pointing to the structural function of the cluster. Figure 3 illustrates the prevalence of this cluster over time, showing an initial increase in the personal narratives topic that then fades into relative temporal stability. More broadly, this cluster reflects the foundational role of personal storytelling and lifestyle-oriented discussions in shaping the long-form conversational format of the JRE, where episodes frequently extend up to several hours.

Figure 3 here

The second largest cluster was the socio-political cluster (9 topics), which encompasses the following topics: U.S. Electoral Politics, Economy, Gender & Sexuality, Free Speech, Technology, Foreign Policy, Ideological Constructs, Global Conflicts, and Current Events. Figure 4 illustrates a marked increase in the prevalence of this theme over time. Especially since

2016, we see a marked increase in electoral politics-related discussions on the show. A regression analysis with the proportion of the electoral politics topic as the dependent variable and year as the independent variable shows a significant increase in the proportion of this topic with time (b = .003, SE = .001, p < .001). This temporal shift coincides with the 2016 U.S. presidential election in which Donald Trump was elected. Other topics in this cluster that show a significant increase in prevalence over time are foreign policy (b = .004, SE = .001, p < .001), free speech (b = .001, SE = .001, p < .001), ideological and social constructs (b = .002, SE = .001, p = .02), and intuitively current events (b = .009, SE = .001, p < .001).

Figure 4 here

In contrast, the comedy and entertainment cluster (8 topics) demonstrates a gradual decline in proportion over time (Figure 5). The cluster reflects Rogan's network of comedians and the show's comedic origins, spanning the topics: Stand-Up Comedy, Sex, Crude Humor, Gambling & Games, Duncan Trussell, Comedy Friends, Esports, and Joey Diaz. While discussions about stand-up comedy remain a stable part of the show, content pertaining to sex and crude humor sharply declines. The downwards trend of this cluster suggests a thematic shift within the show from stereotypical "locker room" talk to substantive conversations.

Figure 5 here

A fitness and fighting cluster (6 topics) captures the sports and performance spine of the podcast, including the topics: MMA & UFC, Combat Sports, Diet, Boxing, Vaccines & Medicine, and Fitness. Figure 6 shows the temporal trends of the topics in this cluster. As illustrated in Figure 6, there is a visible decline in MMA and combat sports-related content after 2017, likely reflecting the launch of the JRE MMA Show, which segregated discussions about combat sports to a dedicated platform (and was excluded from this content analysis).

Interestingly, discussions about vaccines were inductively grouped with the fitness and fighting cluster, indicating that discussions about vaccines and health were framed in terms of fitness, rather than, say, current events or politics. This aligns with Rogan's controversial remarks regarding the COVID-19 vaccination, in which he suggested that people who are "fit" don't need to take the vaccine.

Figure 6 here

The animals and hunting cluster (4 topics) brings together themes of wildlife and nature, including topics: Wildlife & Cryptids, Pets & Animal Humor, Hunting, and Tropical Wildlife. Figure 7 shows a temporal rise in the prevalence of the theme, with the highest prevalence seen from 2016 to 2019. This rise was largely due to the increase in the hunting, and pets and animal humor topics. Discussions about tropical wildlife, however, seem to have temporal stability, suggesting it to be a persistent topic on the show. This theme reflects Rogan's personal interests in wildlife, animals, and survivalism which frequently surface across episodes.

Figure 7 here

Finally, a drugs and consciousness cluster (6 topics) integrates altered states, speculative science, and well-being, encompassing the topics: Ancient Civilizations, Psychedelics, Theoretical Physics, Mental Health, Space, and Drugs. The relative temporal stability of the topics in this cluster can be seen in Figure 8. Conversations regarding psychedelic experiences exhibited the highest prevalence in 2011, after which they gradually declined to a smaller yet steady proportion. Discussions about space, which include fringe theories, such as UFOs, alien abductions, and the moon landing, declined in prevalence from 2010 to 2016, after which they garnered a steady increase in popularity on the show. In a similar fashion, the theoretical physics topic increased in proportion after 2016.

Figure 8 here

Study 1 Discussion

Study 1 provides a comprehensive analysis of the thematic composition of the JRE and the shifts of the themes over time. The six themes that emerge from the Louvain clustering reveal the show's major thematic skeleton that includes discussions about personal narratives, comedy, sports, nature, and sociopolitical debate.

The results point to two overarching patterns. Firstly, the personal narratives node, emerging as the global hub of the network, acts as the structural backbone of the show. Guests' life stories and first-person anecdotes anchor and connect otherwise heterogeneous discussions across domains and facilitate thematic transitions across the hours-long episodes. This narrative-focused structure reflects a broader feature of long-form podcasts, which follow a more casual, conversational, and unscripted format. This "talkier" characteristic of long-format podcasts may also have the potential to cultivate strong relationships between the host and the listener over time (McHugh, 2016). Higher instances of self-disclosure, afforded by the long format, have the potential to evoke feelings of intimacy and authenticity in the minds of the listeners (Ferchaud et al., 2018), thereby facilitating parasocial relationships with the host (Schlütz & Hedder, 2022). This, in turn, can reduce psychological reactance and counterarguing towards the messages, potentially increasing their persuasiveness (Breves et al., 2021; Moyer-Gusé, 2008).

Secondly, we find empirical support for a significant thematic shift in the content of the show over time. The simultaneous rise of sociopolitical themes alongside the decline in crude humor signals the increasing politicization of the show and its shift from a comedy-centric platform into a hybrid forum that increasingly engages with political and current affairs. As

Jacobin's Ryan Zickgraf describes, JRE has evolved from "a show where matters of the state once ranked lower than extraterrestrials, martial arts, and weed" (Jacobin, 2025).

This transformation is not unique to the JRE but reflects the wider structural changes within the U.S. media environment. With the fragmentation of media environments, traditional boundaries between news and entertainment have blurred, and platforms that were once perceived as apolitical are increasingly functioning as hybrid forums where hot-button topics and pop culture talk converge with discussions about elections and foreign policy (Holbert, 2005; Young & Gray, 2013). JRE exemplifies this shift. By embedding political discourse into informal conversations, the podcast can reach politically uninterested audiences, thereby further amplifying its influence.

These findings have important implications for media effects research. Extant literature demonstrates that entertainment messages trigger psychological processes that can bypass barriers to persuasion that traditional political media cannot (see Rasheed & Young, 2024). In this context, JRE's blend of personal narratives, humor, and political discourse, embedded within long-format conversations, might render political messages especially persuasive.

Study 2: Survey

To better understand the potential influence of the JRE on political outcomes, we complement the findings of our content analysis with a second study using survey data from a nationally representative sample. The purpose of this study was to test whether exposure to JRE correlated with voting behavior.

We expected to see a positive correlation between listening to JRE and voting for Trump in the 2024 U.S. presidential election (H1). This expectation was informed by several considerations. Firstly, building off of the findings from our content analysis, JRE's thematic

shift towards more sociopolitical topics, especially an increase in discussions about electoral politics, likely primed a heightened interest of his audience in topics pertaining to the election. Moreover, Rogan's high-profile interview with Donald Trump and his public endorsement in the weeks leading up to the election likely amplified Trump's visibility and appeal among JRE's audience, since Rogan provided Trump with largely uncontested airtime and gave him unfiltered access to his audience.

Secondly, the format of the show, which is conversational and unscripted, creates an atmosphere of authenticity in the minds of the viewers, which might be why a majority of people report trusting the podcast hosts they listen to (Deloitte Insights, 2023). These feelings of authenticity and trust can, in turn, foster parasocial relationships and reduce counter-argumentation on the part of the audience (Ferchaud et al., 2018; Maloney Yorganci & McMurtry, 2024). Moreover, Rogan's self-presentation as someone who is just curious can further dampen motivations to counterargue. The rhetorical strategy of "just asking questions" (The New York Times, 2025b; Vox, 2025) implicitly delegitimizes a claim without appearing overtly threatening (Lyons et al., 2019), which can further enhance the persuasiveness of Rogan's messages.

The combination of pro-Trump messages before the election and the engaging format of the show could have rendered the political messages in the show more convincing, thereby enhancing support for Trump in the 2024 election. However, we are cognizant of the role of confounding variables that might be at play here. As discussed earlier in the paper, according to some sources, the demographic composition of JRE skews Republican, and almost half of listeners reported voting for Trump in 2020 (YouGov, 2023), which means that party identification and past voting behavior could be the underlying factors responsible for the

relationship between listening to JRE and support for Trump. Also, JRE listeners are more likely to tune into conservative media (Stecuła et al., 2025), which may shape political preferences. Since we expect JRE exposure to independently correlate with support for Trump, we controlled for demographic (age, gender, education, income), media (Newspapers, Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, social media), and political (political interest, political party identification, voting for Trump in 2020) variables.

Study 2 Data:

The data for this study comprised a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults collected by YouGov between February 27 and March 5, 2025 (N = 1,600). The respondents were matched to a sampling frame on gender, age, race, and education, which were weighted to the sampling frame using propensity scores (see supplementary material for more details on data collection and weighting).

The unweighted demographic makeup of the final sample was as follows: A majority of the sample was white (68%), with an equal representation of Black (11%) and Hispanic (11%) participants. There was an almost equal split between males (47%) and females (53%). Most of the participants were employed full-time (39%), and a fifth were retired (20%). A majority of the participants were high school graduates (36%), with some (4%) indicating that they had not completed high school; 18% had attended some college, 9% attended 2-year college, 21% attended 4-year college, and 12% had a postgraduate degree. The oldest participant was 92, whereas the youngest was 19. The mean age of the sample was 49.48 years. The majority of respondents (44%) were married, 31% reported never being married, and 11% were divorced. As for income, 14% made less than $20,000 a year, 26% earned between $20,000 and $49,000, 17% made between $50,000 and $99,000, 18% earned from $100,000 to $199,000, and 6% earned

more than $200,000. The remaining 9% refused to report their income. When asked about their

religious beliefs, 28% said they were protestant, 21% Roman Catholic, 2% Jewish, 1% Muslim,

6% atheist, and 8% agnostic.

Study 2 Measures:

Media use: Participants were asked how often they "listen to, watch, or read any of the

following": (In random order) National newspapers like the New York Times, Washington Post,

or USA Today (online or in print) *(M = 2.42, S.D. = 1.31)*, Fox News Channel *(M = 2.52, S.D. =*

1.47), CNN *(M = 2.38, S.D. = 1.32)*, MSNBC *(M = 2.12, S.D. = 1.22)*, Social media platforms

(M = 3.76, S.D. = 1.23), and Podcasts *(M = 2.58, S.D. = 1.37)*. Options ranged from Very often

to Never on a five-point Likert scale. Variables were coded so that a higher value meant higher

media use.

Joe Rogan: Participants who reported listening to podcasts (at least rarely) in the above-

mentioned item were asked an open-ended follow-up question: "Which podcasts would you say

you listen to most often? (List up to 4)." If participants listed The Joe Rogan Experience or Joe

Rogan in the open-ended responses, they were coded as 1, whereas all others were coded as 0 *(M*

= .10, S.D. = .30).

Voting for Trump in 2020: Participants were asked, "Who did you vote for in the election

for President in 2020?" The options were: (In random order) Joe Biden, Donald Trump, Jo

Jorgensen, Howie Hawkins, Other, and Did not vote for President. Participants were coded 1 for

voting for Trump and 0 for others *(M = .30, S.D. = .46)*.

Voting for Trump in 2024: Participants were asked, "Who did you vote for in the election

for President in 2024?" The options were: (In random order) Kamala Harris, Donald Trump,

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., Jill Stein, Cornel West, Chase Oliver, Other, and Did not vote for President. Participants were coded 1 for voting for Trump and 0 for others *(M = .39, S.D. = .49)*.

Party ID. Party ID was measured by asking participants, "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a...?" The options were Democrat, Republican, Independent, Other, and Not Sure.

This question was then followed up with the following questions: If Democrat was selected, they were asked, "Would you call yourself a strong Democrat or a not very strong Democrat? With the possible options being: Strong Democrat, and Not very strong Democrat. If Republican was selected, they were asked, "Would you call yourself a strong Republican or a not very strong Republican?" Options were Strong Republican and Not very strong Republican. If they selected Independent, Other, or Not sure, they were asked, "Do you think of yourself as a closer to the Democratic or the Republican Party?" With options being The Democratic Party, The Republican Party, Neither, and Not sure.

Based on their responses, participants were then placed into one of the following 8 categories: Strong Democrat, Not very strong Democrat, Lean Democrat, Independent, Lean Republican, Not very strong Republican, Strong Republican, and Not sure. This variable was coded so that a higher value (7) meant Strong Republican *(M = 3.98, S.D. = 2.21)*.

Political Interest: To measure participants' interest in politics, they were asked, "Some people seem to follow what's going on in government and public affairs most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government and public affairs...", with the options ranging from Most of the time to Hardly at all on a four-point Likert scale *(M = 3.13, S.D. = .97)*.

Study 2 Results:

Overall, 9.7% of the sample reported listening to the JRE (non-weighted n = 155). This estimate is somewhat conservative compared to other surveys (e.g., Stecuła et al., 2025) in which around 11%-12% of the participants reported listening to the podcast at least occasionally. Chi-square analyses showed that JRE listeners were predominantly male (73%) (χ^2 = 42.96, p = <.001), and less likely to identify as democrats (17.4%) than Republicans (45.8%) or Independents (36.8%) (χ^2 = 24.66, p = <.001). Pearson correlations are presented in Table 3.

To test our hypothesis, we ran a binary logistic regression using SPSS (Version 29.0.2.0) with the variable Voting for Trump in 2024 as the dependent variable (Yes = 1, No = 0). The first block of variables had demographic variables (age, male, white, education, and income), political variables (political interest, political party, and voting for Trump in 2020), and media use variables (newspapers, Fox News, CNN, MSNBC, and social media). The second block had only one variable: listening to Joe Rogan. Data were weighted prior to running the analyses.

The output of the regression is given in Table 4. The model explained between 52% (Cox & Snell R^2) and 71% (Nagelkerke R^2) of the variance and correctly classified 88% of cases. All three of the political variables—political interest, party, and voting for Trump in 2020—showed significant and positive association with voting for Trump in 2024. As for the media use variables, Fox News showed a positive whereas CNN showed a negative relationship with the dependent variable. Finally, listening to Joe Rogan emerged as a significant positive correlate of voting for Trump in 2024, thereby supporting H1. Overall, listening to Joe Rogan was the second strongest correlate of voting for Trump in 2024, after past voting behavior (voting for Trump in 2020).

Study 2 Discussion

Study 2 provides preliminary empirical support for the potential implications of the politicization of entertainment spaces. We found that listening to JRE was a significant correlate of voting for Trump in the 2024 presidential election, even after controlling for demographic, political, and media use variables. The strength of the association of Joe Rogan with voting for Trump was second only to that of past voting behavior (voting for Trump in 2020), higher than traditionally strong political predictors such as party identification and political interest.

While our data cannot establish causality, these correlational findings are especially interesting in the light of some post-election observations published by The New York Times (2025a). In focus groups consisting of 13 undecided young voters, conducted both before and after the election, two of the participants pointed to Rogan having influenced their vote in favor of Trump. One participant, a 24-year-old white male high school teacher who reported voting for Biden in 2020, explained his switch to Trump, "I voted for Trump. I made the decision after he appeared on "Joe Rogan." He just seemed more normal than the other side." Similarly, another participant, a 22-year-old white male from New York, who also reported voting for Biden in 2020 but voted for Trump in 2024, told the group that, "The Joe Rogan interview was huge for me. Trump enthusiastically said yes to a three-hour, open, honest conversation with Joe Rogan, who was a former Bernie bro. I think it's very telling about which candidate is authentic and which candidate is not." Anecdotes like these illustrate how the conversational long-format might have shaped listeners' perceptions of the authenticity of Trump, alongside a myriad of other factors.

These dynamics are particularly important when it comes to young, undecided voters. Before the election, more than half (55%) of 18-34-year-olds reported not identifying with Democratic or Republican candidates (Edison Research, 2024b), leaving them open to being

swayed. At the same time, almost 48% of 18-34-year-olds reported listening to podcasts on a

weekly basis (Edison Research, 2024b). Unlike traditional media, which is trusted by only a

quarter (26%) of 18-49 year olds (Gallup, 2024), a majority of listeners trust their podcast hosts

(Deloitte Insights, 2023) and believe they get accurate news from podcasts (Pew Research

Center, 2023). Taken together, these statistics made podcasts a uniquely powerful medium for

reaching and influencing a large pool of undecided voters.

Recognizing this, Trump appeared on two of the three most tuned-in podcasts during the

election week—The Joe Rogan Experience and This Past Weekend w/ Theo Von (with the third

being The Tucker Carlson Show) (Wolfson, 2024). His extensive podcast presence could be one

of the many reasons as to why, according to NBC News exit polling, he was able to win "a larger

proportion of voters under 30 than any Republican presidential candidate since 2008" (NBC

News, 2024).

Conclusion

Taken together, studies 1 and 2 illuminate a broader transformation in the American

media landscape, where the boundaries between what was once considered political and

apolitical continue to erode. As entertainment platforms become home to themes related to

power, culture, gender, or current events, understanding their role in shaping public opinion and

democratic discourse is essential. Our findings underscore the need to view podcasts like the JRE

as critical sites of political socialization in a fragmented media landscape. Future work should

employ experimental and longitudinal designs to study the causal effects of exposure and explore

the psychological mechanisms responsible for the processing of information in long-form

narrative-based media products like JRE. What features of podcasts foster perceptions of

authenticity and trust, and how, if at all, do they influence resistance to political messaging?

While our data points to the politicization of entertainment spaces through the case study of JRE, they open up the debate about the mediatization of politics in the U.S. Strömbäck (2008) argues that as commercial media becomes more responsive to audience demands than to those by political figures and institutions, political elites adapt to what are called "media logics" or "market logics" in an effort to regain control over political narratives. This involves political elites and institutions increasingly accommodating the requirements of the media, rather than following their "political logic."

The U.S. presidential "podcast election" of 2024 exemplifies a unique form of mediatization of politics in the U.S., one that is dictated by the logics of the entertainment medium. The ability of media figures like Rogan to decide when and whether political elites can access their audience underscores the shift in political influence from institutional media gatekeepers to entertainment figures operating outside the bounds of traditional journalism. Moreover, to appear for an interview on the JRE or other podcasts with similar formats, elites have to adapt to the show's informal, spontaneous, and authentic conversational style—its "media logic." Those who are unable or unwilling to risk being pushed to the margins of traditional media interviews. While in the age of mass media, political actors sought to become "newsworthy" to stay relevant, in today's fragmented media environment, they must strive to become "entertainment-worthy."

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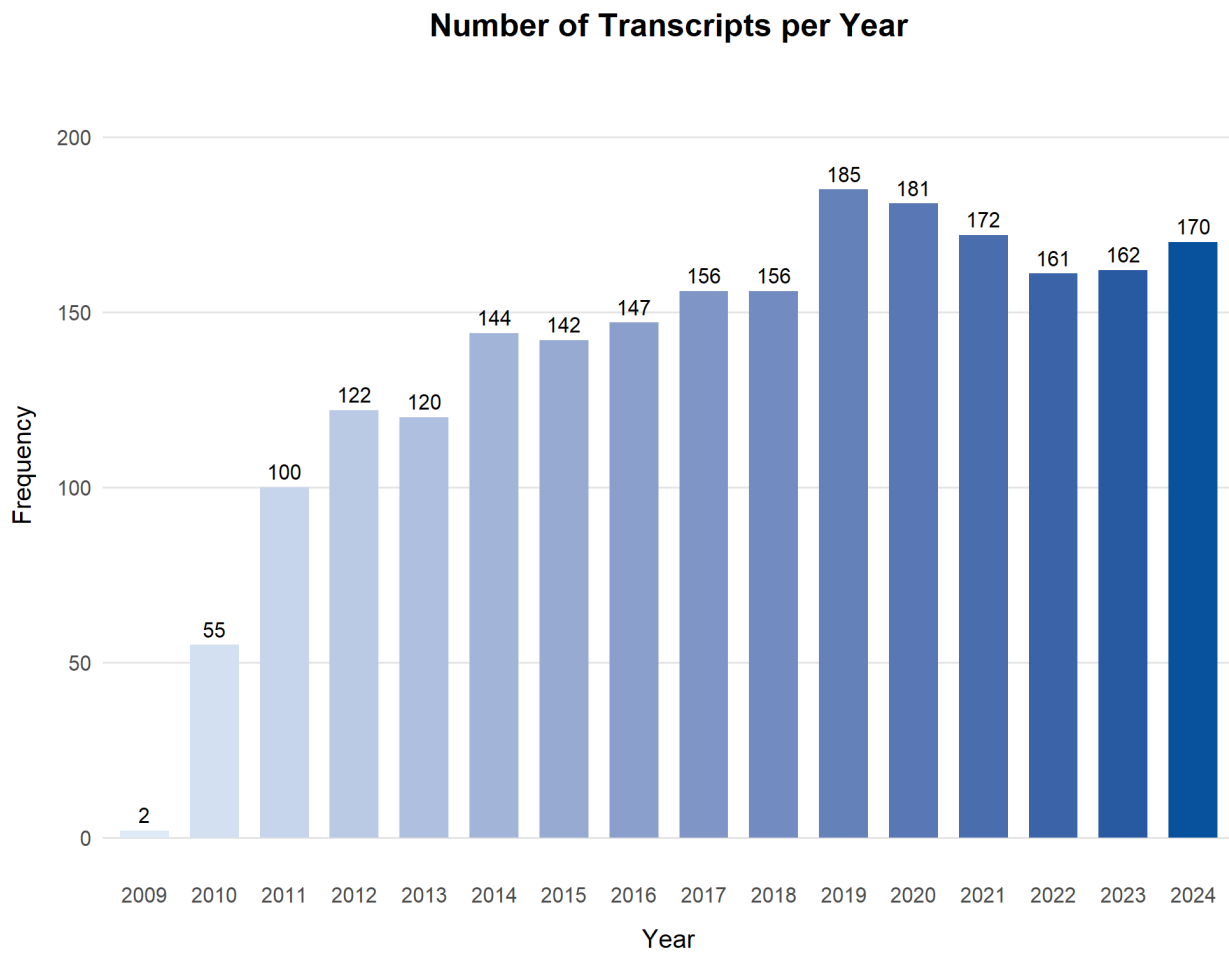
Number of Transcripts per Year

Figure 1: Number of transcripts per year included in the content analysis ($N = 2,175$).
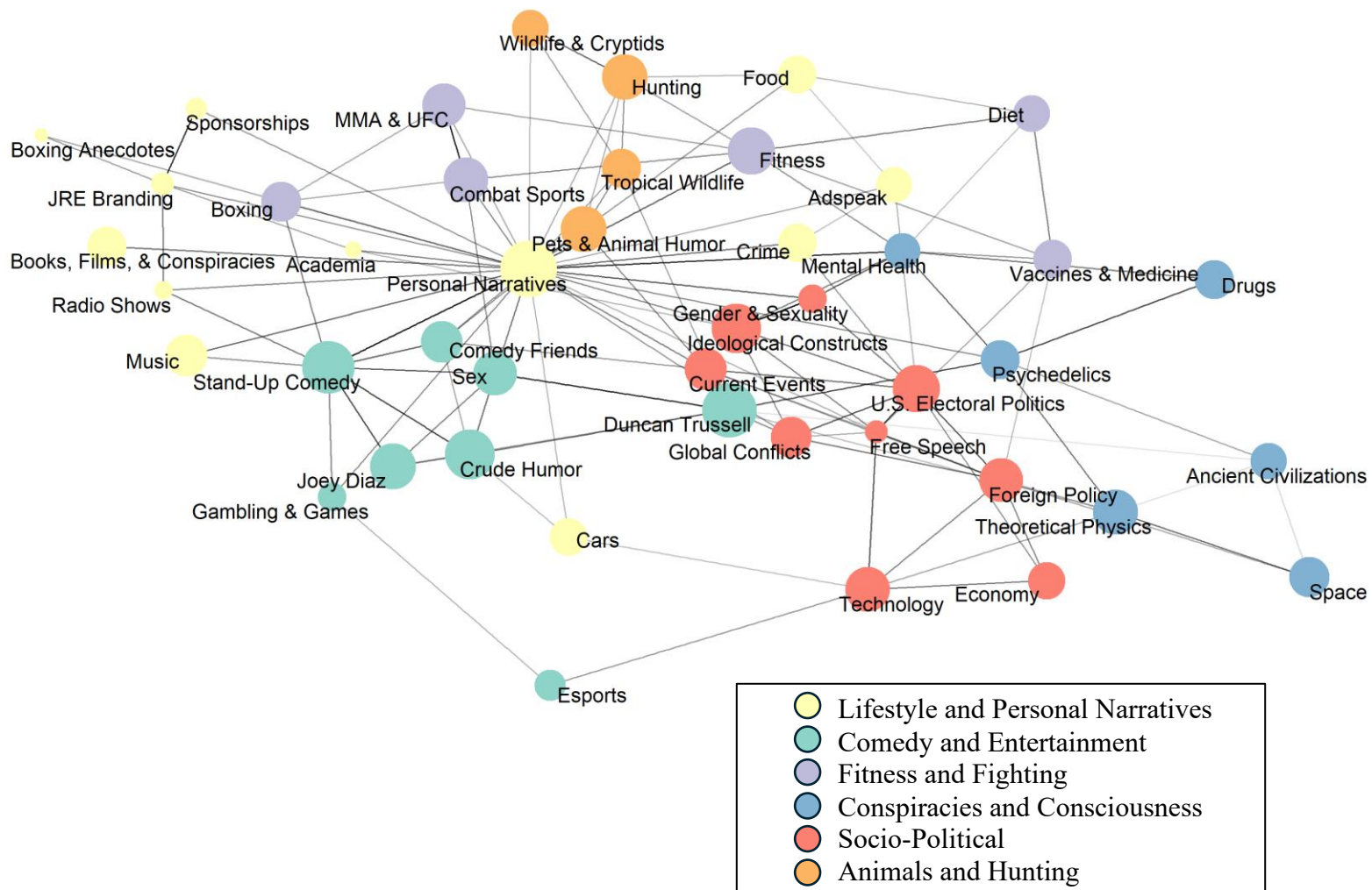
Figure 2: Topic network of the Joe Rogan Experience. (Note: Nodes represent individual

topics, with node size indicating their relative prevalence across the episode transcripts.

Edges represent topic co-occurrence, and edge thickness reflects the strength of these co-

occurrences. Node colors correspond to Louvain clusters.)

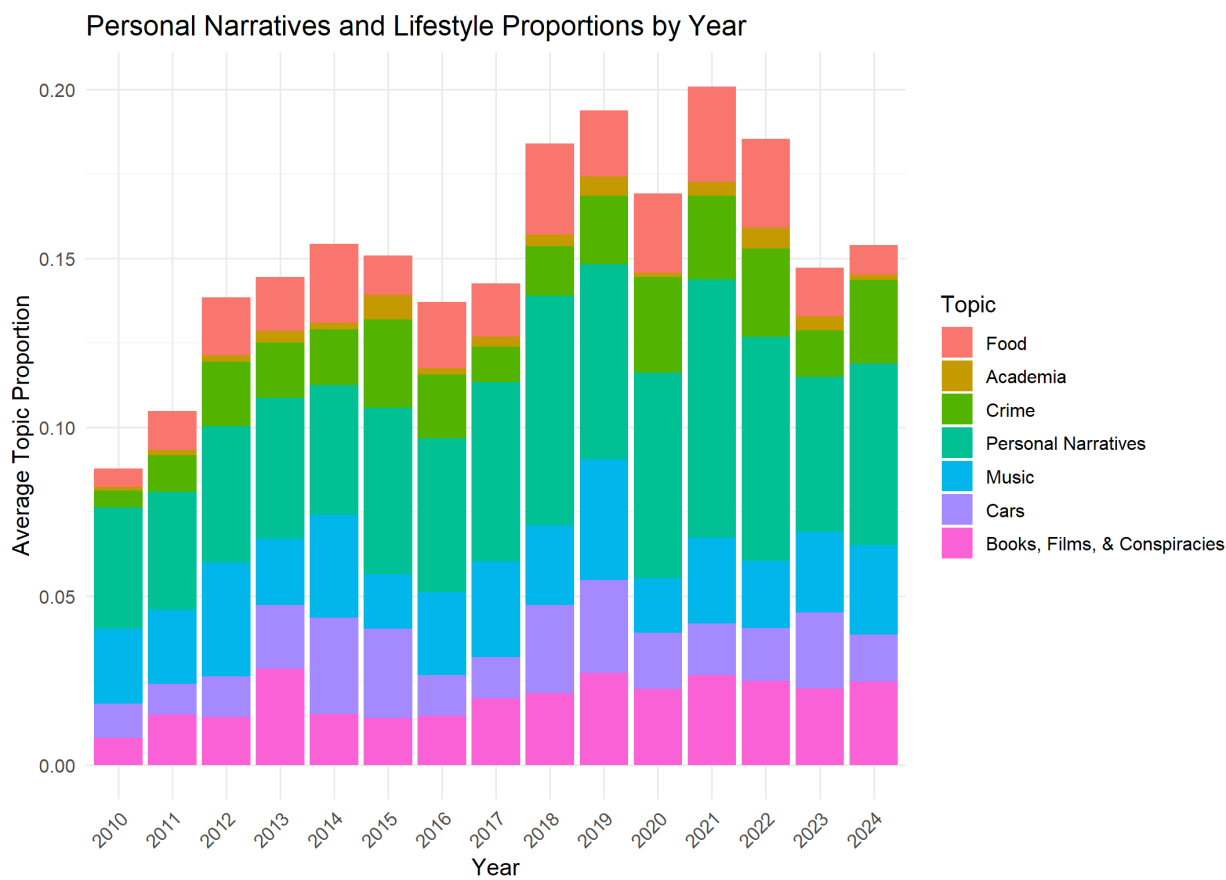Figure 3: Proportion of topics within the personal narratives & lifestyle cluster over time.

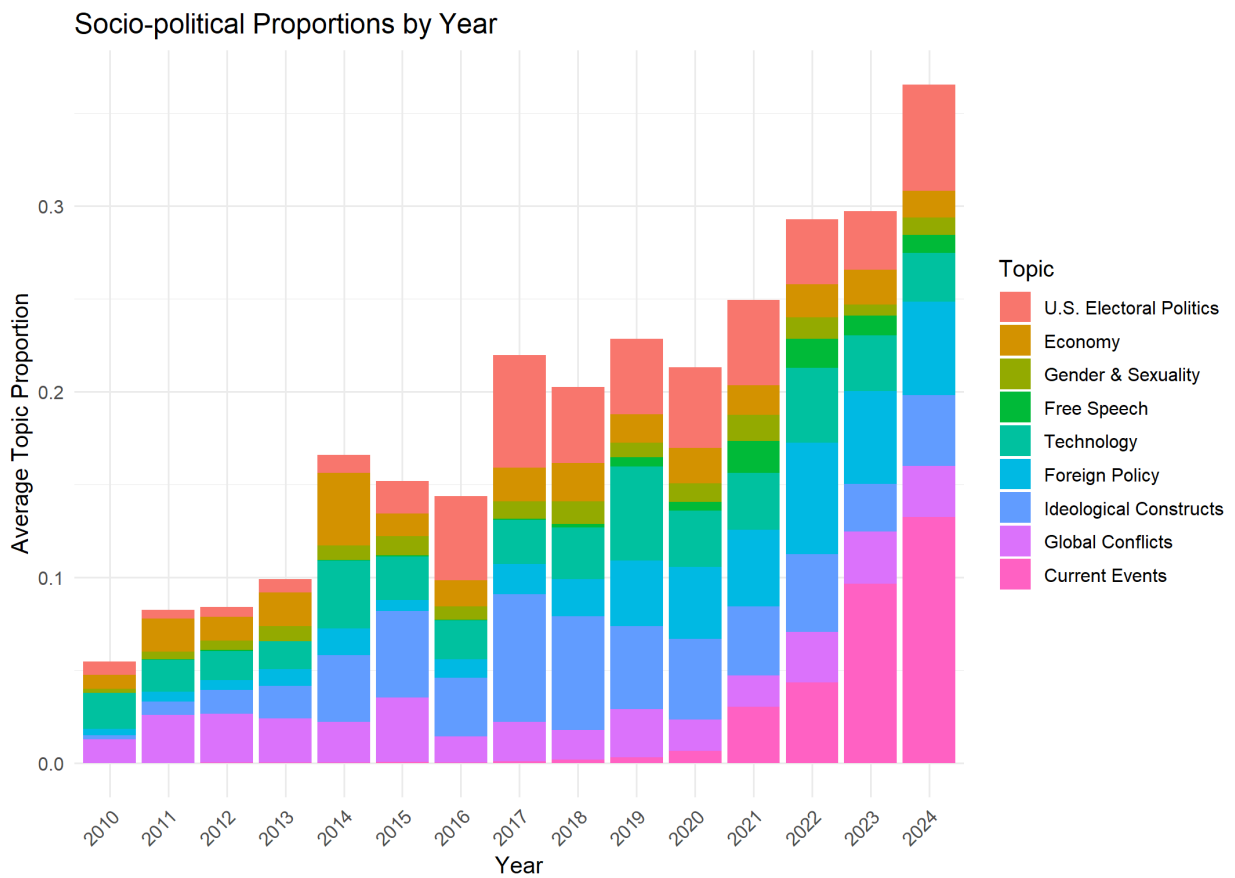Figure 4: Proportion of topics within the socio-political cluster over time.
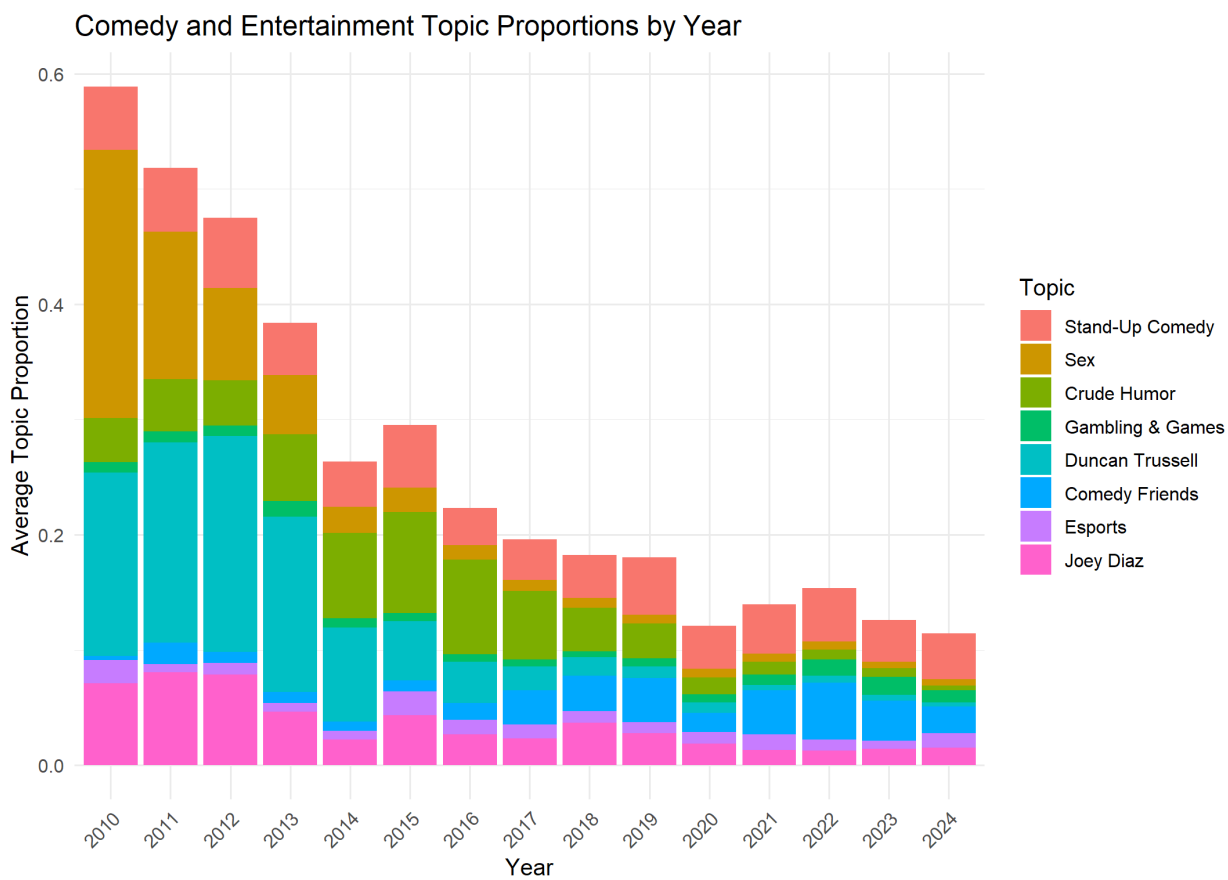
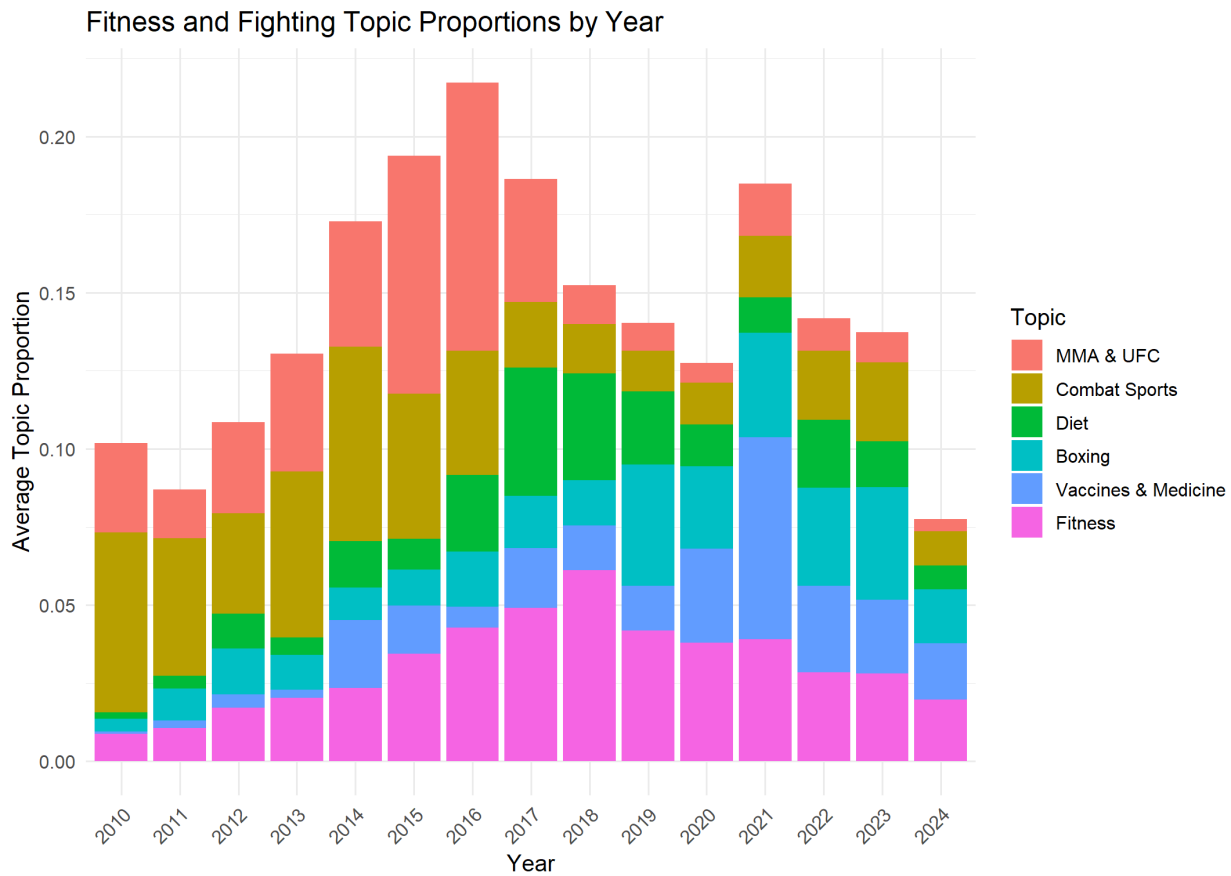Figure 5: Proportion of topics within the comedy & entertainment cluster over time.

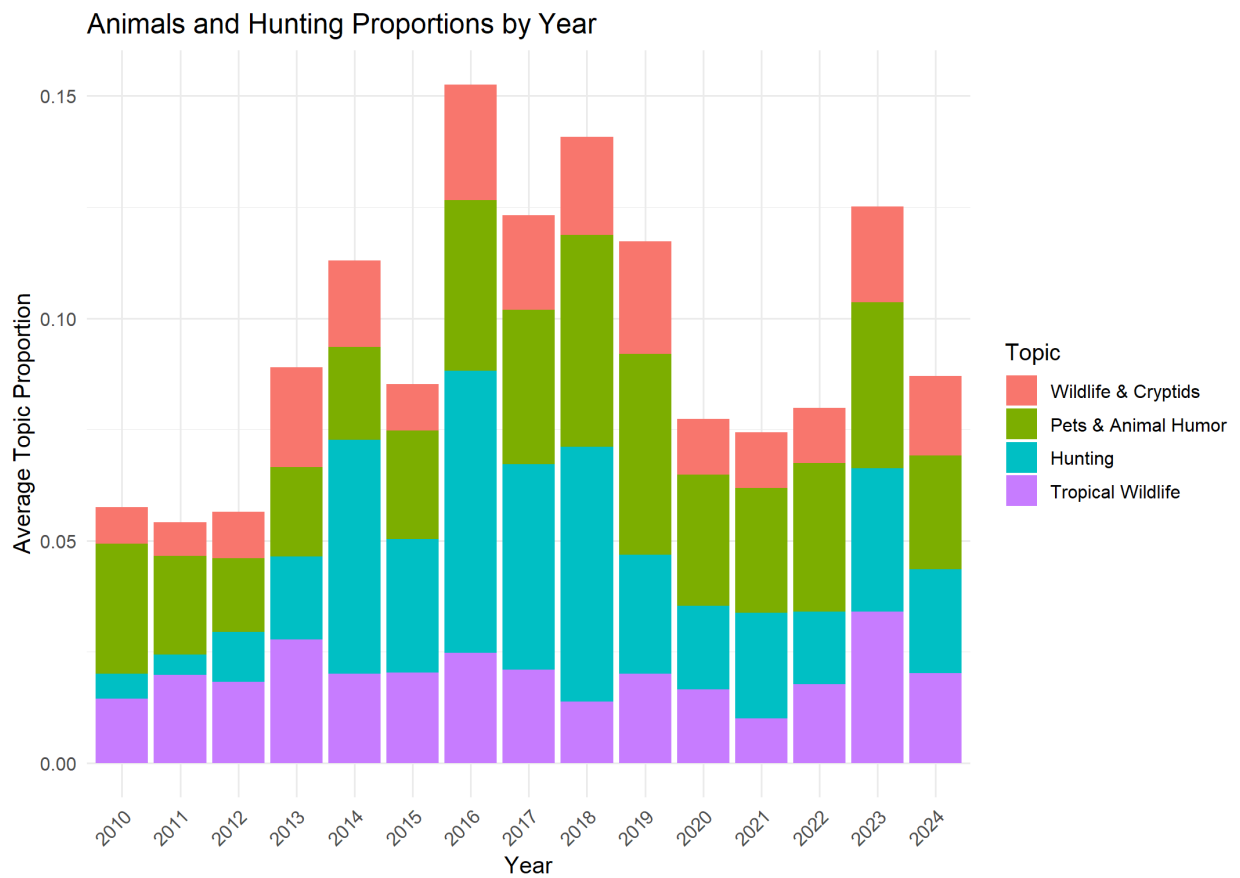Figure 6: Proportion of topics within the fitness & fighting cluster over time.

Figure 7: Proportion of topics within the animals & hunting cluster over time.
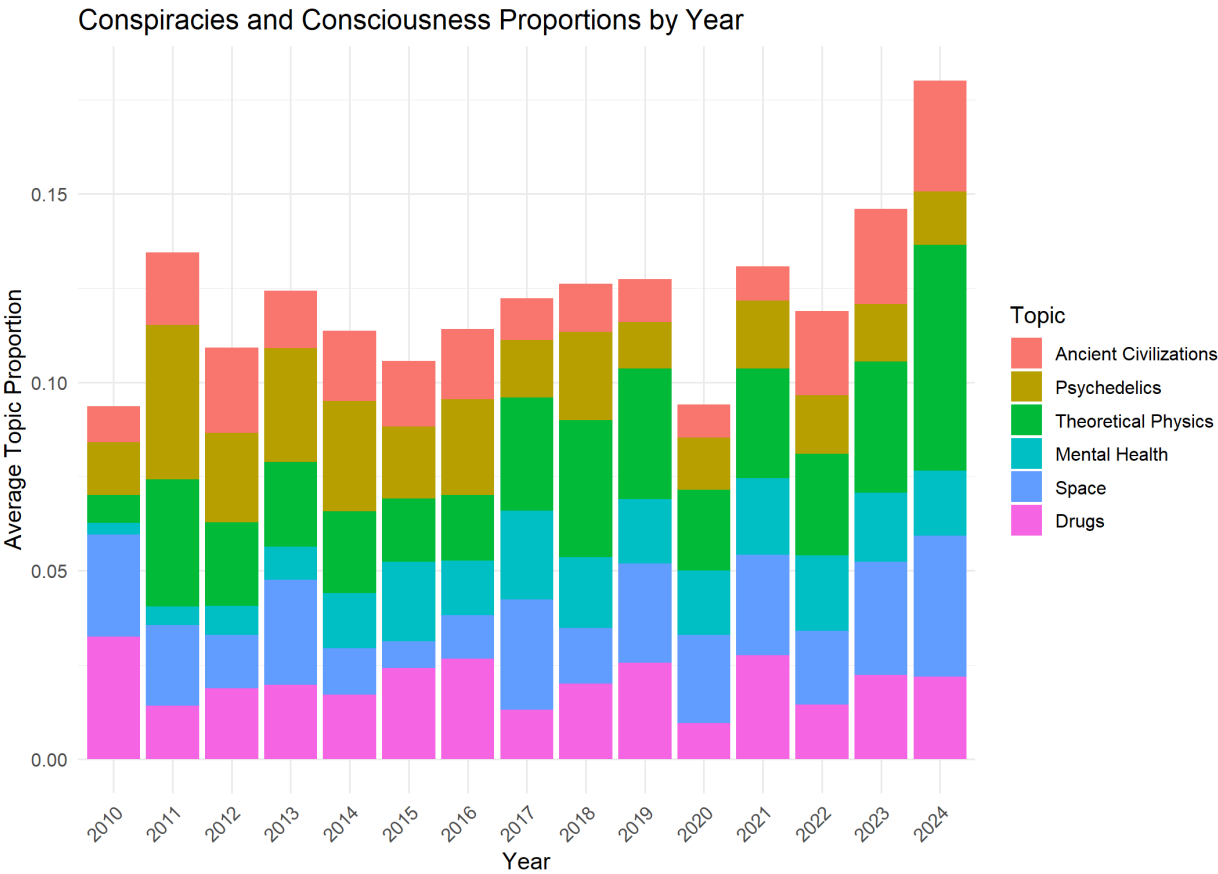
Figure 8: Proportion of topics within the conspiracies & consciousness cluster over time.

Topic#	Label	Proportion	FREX Words
1	Stand-Up Comedy	0.0435	comic, comedi, comedian, stage, club, sitcom, stand-up, joke, laugh, mic
2	Boxing Anecdotes	0.0031	antonio, hogan, burton, t, sullivan, galileo, tyson, barri, y, dusti
3	MMA & UFC	0.0267	m, connor, holli, aldo, nate, mcgregor, anderson, ronda, rhonda, silva
4	JRE Branding	0.0054	joe, podcast, rogan, adam, roggan, rogin, june, royal, danni, corolla
5	Food	0.0188	wine, steak, pasta, cook, chef, bread, restaur, grill, chees, flavor
6	U.S. Electoral Politics	0.0333	trump, hillari, clinton, donald, berni, democrat, obama, republican, vote, presid
7	Radio shows	0.0037	stern, opie, radio, norton, xm, howard, anthoni, uh, voss, um
8	Sponsorships	0.0047	cool, awesom, sponsor, coolest, websit, skeleton, luci, logo, justin, pari
9	Sex	0.0275	porn, chick, fleshlight, pussi, cock, tattoo, brian, retard, dvd, flashlight
10	Economy	0.0178	bitcoin, tax, insur, economi, bank, incom, currenc, wage, debt, market
11	Ancient Civilizations	0.0168	sphinx, archaeolog, archaeologist, egypt, pyramid, graham, egyptian, hancock, ancient, excav
12	Academia	0.0034	campus, colleg, spain, scholarship, portland, student, semest, pom, graduat, faculti
13	Crime	0.0194	polic, cop, convict, gun, crime, prosecutor, firearm, prison, crimin, attorney
14	Personal Narratives	0.0532	dad, mom, felt, famili, parent, learn, wife, relationship, success, happi
15	Gender & Sexuality	0.0089	transgend, tran, gender, women, feminist, male, sexual, men, femal, woman
16	Psychedelics	0.0199	dmt, psychedel, iowasca, shaman, medit, mckenna, mushroom, spiritu, conscious, mystic
17	Theoretical Physics	0.029	quantum, particl, artifici, infinit, simul, univers, galaxi, physicist, ai, atom
18	Crude Humor	0.0378	aids, fart, cigarett, racist, yum, b, boner, cosbi, prostitut, hiv
19	Adspeak	0.0165	dotcom, ok, twenti, rogen, l.a, thirti, checkout, woop, fifteen, cbd

20	Free Speech	0.0053	censorship, censor, fauchi, disinform, misinform, q, platform, substack, amendment, lockdown
21	Mental Health	0.0163	depress, anxieti, trauma, dopamin, mental, therapist, therapi, disord, reward, traumat
22	Combat Sports	0.0289	graci, jiu-jitsu, wrestl, judo, wrestler, submiss, hickson, techniqu, karat, kickbox
23	Music	0.0247	song, album, guitar, music, sing, lyric, musician, band, record, hip-hop
24	Space	0.0222	ufo, ufos, moon, mar, nasa, propuls, graviti, alien, orbit, craft
25	Gambling & Games	0.0091	pool, gambl, golf, cue, billiard, tournament, player, gambler, hustler, poker
26	Wildlife & Cryptids	0.0173	dolphin, coyot, bigfoot, bison, whale, wolv, marin, shark, orca, nativ
27	Technology	0.0286	apple, iphon, android, phone, app, youtub, googl, softwar, facebook, algorithm
28	Foreign Policy	0.0274	administr, china, agenc, nuclear, congress, climat, polici, chines, senat, democrat
29	Diet	0.0171	carbohydr, ketogen, glucos, cholesterol, keton, diet, satur, calori, vegan, protein
30	Ideological Constructs	0.0372	racism, racist, religion, islam, evolutionari, religi, oppress, moral, jew, hierarchi
31	Pets & Animal Humor	0.031	dog, cat, pet, coyot, puppi, squirrel, tiger, bite, pit, titti
32	Global Conflicts	0.0229	iraq, afghanistan, israel, isis, palestinian, iran, hama, terrorist, korea, syria
33	Drugs	0.0201	cannabi, marijuana, mdma, hemp, fentanyl, heroin, opioid, drug, cocain, opiat
34	Duncan Trussell	0.048	duncan, cunt, rape, brian, silli, asshol, ridicul, squad, trussl, bitch
35	Comedy Friends	0.0242	bert, ari, sober, tom, october, norman, shane, tommi, cigar, booz
36	Hunting	0.0303	hunt, elk, bow, deer, arrow, grizzli, archeri, moos, hunter, bear
37	Cars	0.0184	gt, horsepow, porsch, mustang, corvett, tesla, turbo, brake, ford, ferrari
38	Boxing	0.0214	heavyweight, furi, floyd, boxer, yo, mayweath, ali, champ, canello, franci
39	E-Sports	0.0111	uak, vr, olympic, oculus, virtual, game, gregori, twitch, lanc, graphic
40	Current Events	0.0243	wanna, ai, ha, ukrain, tiktok, mothership, pandem, austin, wild, elon
41	Vaccines and Medicine	0.0199	vaccin, diseas, studi, cell, covid, effect, test, virus, immun, health

42	Fitness	0.0329	workout, squat, lift, climb, stem, muscl, marathon, breath, sauna, strength
43	Tropical Wildlife	0.02	bee, crocodil, malaria, chimp, allig, snake, python, chimpanze, eleph, jungl
44	Joey Diaz	0.0311	ch, joey, cuban, jersey, coke, diaz, boulder, cuba, o'clock, mother-fuck
45	Books, Films, & Conspiracies	0.0209	scientolog, oswald, manson, fiction, thompson, director, book, kennedi, film, scientologist

Table 1. STM Topic names, Proportions, and FREX words. (Note: FREX words are stemmed)

Topic	Degree	Closeness	Radiality	Betweenness
Personal narratives	30	.733	.988	.601
Stand-up comedy	9	.484	.964	.037
U.S electoral politics	9	.427	.955	.039
Foreign policy	9	.444	.958	.061
Free speech	8	.524	.970	.044
Mental health	8	.512	.968	.051
Duncan Trussell	8	.440	.958	.047
Ideological constructs	7	.506	.967	.016
Fitness	7	.484	.964	.026
Sex	6	.478	.964	.024

Table 2. Measures of network centrality for the top ten topics with the highest degree

centrality.

	Age	Male	White	Educ	Income	Party	Pol Interest	Trump 2020	Trump 2024	News paper	Fox	CNN	MSNBC	Social media	Joe Rogan
Age	1														
Male	-.039	1													
White	.183**	-.001	1												
Education	.013	-.040	.125**	1											
Income	-.027	.057*	.151**	.441**	1										
Party	.137**	.045	.214**	-.107**	-.008	1									
Pol Interest	.201**	.152**	.117**	.207**	.252**	-.005	1								
Trump 2020	.261**	.085**	.245**	.015	.107**	.623**	.190**	1							
Trump 2024	.154**	.098**	.221**	-.001	.115**	.662***	.172**	.707**	1						
Newspaper	-.215**	.091**	-.043	.314**	.254**	-.285**	.294**	-.173**	-.152**	1					
Fox	.015	.107**	.069**	-.025	.084**	.416**	.184**	.382**	.400**	.134**	1				
CNN	-.188**	.052*	-.116**	.171**	.124**	-.282**	.203**	-.206**	-.201**	.571**	.228**	1			
MSNBC	-.045	.026	-.107**	.149**	.083**	-.349**	.208**	-.233**	-.239**	.491**	.065**	.635**	1		
Social media	-.277**	-.100**	-.055*	.073**	.121**	-.053*	.065*	-.043	-.002	.240**	.127**	.195**	.131**	1	
Joe Rogan	-.071**	.165**	.044	.035	.063*	.151**	.077**	.113**	.218**	.027	.183**	.028	-.040	.091**	1

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3. Correlation matrix.

	β	S.E.	Sig	Log Ratio
(Constant)	**-5.072**	**.641**	**<.001**	**.006**
Age	-.007	.006	.272	.993
Male	.184	.188	.326	1.203
White	.282	.198	.155	1.325
Education	-.004	.068	.950	.996
Income	.053	.028	.053	1.055
Pol Interest	**.297**	**.104**	**.004**	**1.346**
Party	**.552**	**.055**	**<.001**	**1.736**
Trump 2020	**2.619**	**.228**	**<.001**	**13.725**
Newspaper	-.049	.094	.601	.952
Fox	**.267**	**.077**	**<.001**	**1.306**
CNN	**-.217**	**.103**	**.035**	**.805**
MSNBC	-.067	.105	.524	.935
Social Media	.070	.078	.368	1.072
Joe Rogan	**1.275**	**.282**	**<.001**	**3.580**

DV: Trump 2024

$\chi^2(14, N = 1,600) = 1025.02$, $p = <.001$. -2 Log Likelihood = 850.85. Nagelkerke $R^2 = .71$.

Table 4: Binary logistic regression coefficients.