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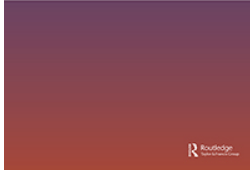
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# 'You're a warrior, right?': the manosphere, podcasts, and the strongman politics of Donald Trump in the 2024 United States Presidential election

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## ABSTRACT

In the run up to the 2024 United States Presidential Election, President Donald Trump, in continuing his disapproval, disavowal, and eschewing of 'mainstream media', increasingly turned to influencers and podcasters as mediums through which to speak to his followers and prospective voters. A core feature of this strategy was alternative media platforms not immediately related to the political sphere, but to sport-related podcasts and 'bro influencers' that cater to a predominantly male audience – such as *UFC Unfiltered* and *The Joe Rogan Experience*. Trump's efforts to fit within a media landscape where the capacities of sporting, fitness, and 'body building' subcultures (re)produce deviant masculinities also endorsed conservative and authoritarian political movements. This paper presents a discursive and contextual analysis of Trump's podcast appearances in the 2024 election cycle. We explore the growing inter-relationship between gender, masculinities, sport, and 'the manosphere' - the loose constellation of reactionary, anti-feminist and misogynistic movements often propagated in digital spaces by online influencers, reactionary conservative politics and, more specifically, Trumpism. We argue that within Trumpism, alternative sport and fitness media become sites whereby discourses of deviant and 'alpha' masculinity and the male body are constructed and activated as resources for political capital. We conclude by considering the importance of sport and leisure – such as the fitness and sporting subcultures embodied in conservative politics and the digital ecosystems through which they proliferate – in (re)shaping political movements in a digital age.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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## Introduction

I always looked at sports as a microcosm. You know, either you win or lose

(Donald J. Trump, 14th October 2024)

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Following the re-election of President Donald Trump in the 2024 United States Presidential Election, news and media outlets noted the success of his re-election campaign in making significant gains with several demographic areas, in particular male voters and especially younger men. Votes from young male voters increased from 41% of voters in 2020 to 54% in 2024 (Moore 2024). Podcasts, here, were one of the essential ways Trump courted and secured that vote by eschewing the mainstream media and cultivating an anti-establishment mantra that is central to authoritarian and populist political leaders. In the words of several media outlets, the 'Bro vote' or 'dude influencers' were part of Trump's 'Podcast Playbook' (Wendline 2024).

Trump's appearances included multiple social and political commentary podcasts and distinctively several sport-focused or related podcasts. We contend that Trump's podcast appearances represent a facet of his 'strongman' positioning, emphasising his toughness and masculinity to demonstrate his suitability for political leadership. His use of the sport-podcast medium, in particular, connects to the broad literature on the relationship between populist and authoritarian politics and sport (see, for example, Andrews 2019, Kusz 2019, 2023, Clift and Tomlinson 2021, Clift *et al.* 2023; Hartmann 2023). Additionally, Trump's podcast playbook is also articulated with discourses on masculinity in the media, and specifically the manosphere, a fragmented group of digital communities promoting anti-feminist discourses, misogyny, essentialist gender roles and narratives of male victimisation (Han and Yin 2023). Haslop *et al.* (2024) note that misogynistic influencers like Andrew Tate utilise the algorithmic economies of social media to cultivate transgressive identities that appeal to young men through 'lad banter' and appealing the traditional gendered hierarchies. In the context of sport, there has been some interest in the way in which the manosphere uses sport, muscularity, and body building as important vectors in advancing the masculine formations associated with the far right, as well as authoritarian 'strongmen' such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Vladimir Putin, and Viktor Orban (see Woolley and Luger 2023, Luger 2024).

This paper analyzes and contextualises Donald Trump's podcast appearances during the 2024 US Presidential election. We argue that Trump expresses a form of 'strongman' politics that through sport acts as a vehicle for appealing to male voters. We first discuss the manosphere as a space for fomenting certain forms of masculinity and particularly their relationship to reactionary and rightwing political ideologies. Building from this, and central to this special issue, we consider the associations among the manosphere, 'strongman' politics, authoritarianism, and sport. We then discuss the significance of the podcast medium, its relationship to sport, the manosphere, and masculinities. In our analysis, we first discuss the role of sport in Donald Trump's podcast appearances during the 2024 Presidential campaign. Fighting sports, such as the *Ultimate Fighting Championship* (UFC), are incorporated by Trump to valorise fighting as a performance of masculinities associated with strength, violence, and aggression that serve to reaffirm Trump's strongman political persona. Second, we discuss Trump's appeal to both his sporting prowess (notably in golf) and broader 'tough guy' persona to bolster his political image as an 'alpha' or a strongman. We articulate how Trump draws comparison between his business talents, natural ability and the notion of sporting talent to legitimate broader authoritarian, 'strongman' sensibilities. Finally, we (re)turn to the manosphere, considering the ways in which podcasts provide a platform for broadcasting messages that can be read as 'anti-

woke' to court voters and reach receptive audiences, particularly young men. In sum, we underline the political utility of sport in appealing to the 'anti-woke' sensibilities of the manosphere, particularly by valorising toughness, winning, fighting, and sports in ways consistent with 'alpha' masculinity.

### **The manosphere, sport and deviant masculinities**

Online communities dedicated to the interests of men and masculinities, or the manosphere, have become foci for an increased volume of research across the social sciences. With the ascendancy of social media as a viable and widely used news and knowledge source, a loose constellation of reactionary, anti-feminist, and misogynistic rhetoric propagated by online influencers has emerged (see Ging and Siapera 2018, Ging 2019, Han and Yin 2023, Haslop *et al.* 2024, Botto and Gottzén 2024). Specific online spaces and mediums such as *Reddit*, *4chan*, *YouTube* and, importantly, podcasts have become central to the formation of the 'manosphere' and online misogyny (see Massanari 2015, Nagle 2015). Central to the manosphere is the proliferation of the 'red-pilled' ideology (Ging 2019, Nagel 2019, Dignam and Rohlinger 2019, Van Valkenburgh 2021, Vallerga and Zurbriggen 2022). Drawing its analogy from the 1999 film 'The Matrix', wherein the main character, Neo played by Keanu Reeves, is offered a 'red pill' to see the true nature of reality; in the manosphere, taking the 'red pill' refers to an anti-feminist ideology that purports to 'awaken men to feminism's misandry and brainwashing' (Ging 2019, p. 640).

The 'red pill' ideology of the manosphere fits within the 'war on woke' that has bolstered reactionary and authoritarian political movements across the global north (see Cammaerts 2022, Amery and Mondon 2025, Mondon and Winter 2020, Nagle 2017). Moral panics about 'wokeness' are a surrogate for any progressive politics, LGBT+ advocacy, feminism and anti-racism (Nagle 2017, Mondon and Winter 2020; Cammaerts 2022). In the context of sport, this can be seen by the moral panics about transgender women participating in women's sport or viral rebuking of anti-racist protests. Indeed, sport, and women's sport in particular, have come to play a prominent role in the manosphere more generally as a way for manosphere influencers to provoke anger and (re)produce hyper masculine formations (Finlay and Wenner 2025).

Some scholars have suggested that instrumental sporting practices – specifically those geared towards self-improvement or the 'body' as a craft (see Gibbs *et al.* 2022) such as bodybuilding or gym cultures – become fertile grounds for far-right infiltration. Luger (2024) noted that hardcore gyms geared towards bodybuilding have a 'propensity to catalyse authoritarian atmospheres that have made them such fertile ground for infiltration by the far-right' (p.13). Similarly, Edmonds (2023) contextualises CrossFit through its prominence not only within the emergent neoliberal subjectivities with regard to health and fitness but also developing populist sentiments in the US. This can be seen through the creeping 'military entanglements' which 'taps into, and capitalizes on, the current cultural power of military-centered nationalism' (p. 67).

Correspondingly, understanding the role of the manosphere contributes the cultivation of what we might term deviant masculinities. That is, the formation of masculinities that embrace anti-wokeness – a response to anti-racist, anti-sexist, pro-LGBTQ, or broadly progressive views, can contribute to explicating their political significance (see Cammaerts 2022). The technological affordances of the manosphere, fitness influencers,

or certain physical cultures such as the UFC appear to provide fertile ground for an alternative form of political campaigning rooted in sport and leisure. While there is an emerging body of scholarship exploring the reactionary politics of sport and leisure (see Clift *et al.* 2023, Clift and Tomlinson 2021, Cousineau 2023, Hartmann 2023, Thangaraj *et al.* 2018), little work has expanded this further by exploring the ‘manosphere’ and its digital media landscape.

### **‘The bro vote’: strongman politics, podcasts and the reactionary politics of sport**

There has been growing interest in the way sport has been incorporated into populist or reactionary politics, and the sporting personas of ‘strongman’ political leaders (Koch 2017, Alabarces 2023, Andrews 2019, Tomlinson *et al.* 2021, Clift, Fabian and Andrews 2023, Gruneau 2021, Hartmann 2023, Kusz 2019, Molnar and Whigham 2019). In part, sport has long been recognised in reproducing and contesting dominant associations of masculinities with athleticism and muscularity that is an important conduit for ‘strongman’ leaders political positioning (Messner 1995, Wellard 2009, Adams *et al.* 2010, Carrington 2013, Kidd 2013). Strongman leaders, like Vladimir Putin, Jair Bolsonaro or Donald Trump are often characterised by displays of strength, muscularity, and sporting prowess (see Koch 2017). In situations where political legitimacy is yoked to the merits of a leader through *desirable* characteristics such as power, strength, and domination (see Adorno *et al.* 1950), appealing to sporting prowess represents an ‘ideal way’ for political leaders to ‘illustrate to citizens that he possesses all these desirable attributes’ (Koch 2017, p. 94).

In the context of Donald Trump’s 2016 campaign, ‘Trumpism’ marked a departure from the typical use of sport by US presidential candidates (Andrews and Carrington 2021). While candidates have typically used sport as a chance to gain cultural capital by associating with, or being endorsed by, popular sporting figures, Trump’s communications were frequently the opposite – attacking specific sports or sporting figures in which appeal to his broader reactionary political agenda. This expresses what Andrews (2019) called the *uber-sport* assemblage through which sport emerges as a:

‘material-expressive-affective’ site for enacting the neoliberal, meritocratic, and authoritarian populist imaginary. This can take the form of normalizing, and to a certain extent enabling, particular practices, views, and values (the sanctioning of everyday racisms sexism, androcentrism and militarism, not forgetting consumer individualism) (p.154)

In condemnation of, for example, the apparent ‘softness’ of sports like the *National Football League* (NFL) (see Andrews and Carrington 2021) or anti-racist protests made by athletes like Colin Kaepernick (Boykoff and Carrington 2020, Gruneau 2021), sport fits within the broader politicking associated with the ‘anti-woke’ backlash that bolstered populist, authoritarian and reactionary political movements (Trimbur 2019, Dickerson and Hodler 2021, Kusz 2023, Gregory and Alsarve 2023, Henry 2024). As Hartmann (2023) articulated, the wave of athlete activism and sporting protest during the previous decade has given rise to a right-wing ethnonationalist engagement with sport that includes criticism of activists, athletes, and populist/authoritarian mobilisations surrounding sport.

Trump’s use of sport, however, cannot be confined to the confrontational encounters with ‘wokeness’. Rather, Trump also appeals to fighting sports and sporting personalities

such as UFC, Mixed-Martial Arts (MM) or Boxing to bolster his appeal. For example, in March 2024 President Trump hosted Irish MMA fighter Conor McGregor to celebrate St Patrick's day (O'Carroll 2025). Similarly, shortly after winning the 2024 election, then President-elect Trump appeared at a UFC event at Madison Square Garden where he was greeted and celebrated by UFC President Dana White, and commentator and podcaster Joe Rogan.

These events can be read as part of a deliberate strategy employed by Trump to appeal to men and the 'bro vote' by courting the manosphere (see Wendline 2024, Nicolaou 2024). Previous research suggests that Trump drew support from digital right-wing spaces, such as the manosphere, during his previous 2016 presidential campaign (Dignam and Rohlinger 2019). In the 2024 election campaign, President Trump more explicitly sought to appeal to men through the 'manosphere' by appealing to forms of sport and appearing on podcasts frequently associated with the manosphere or sports, like the UFC.

The intersections among Trumpism, the manosphere, and sport and fitness cultures overlap with conservative politics, 'strongman' politicians, and 'deviant' online subcultures. The recent chauvinistic turn is 'visible in authoritarian strong-man politics (such as Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro, Vladimir Putin, Viktor Orbán) and virtual spaces like the manosphere' (Woolley and Luger 2023, p. 146). At the same time, 'one of the key facets of the new far-right has been the positioning of masculinity, notably white heterosexual masculinity, and within that the strong, muscular male body, as a crucial aspect of identity, culture and ideology' (p.151). Thus, there is an emergent symbiosis between the manosphere and strongman political leaders, which coalesce around the positive associations with the strong, muscular male body as a focal point in (re)producing reactionary conservative political discourses.

We suggest that extending this line of thinking to media platforms, like podcasts, contributes to examining reactionary politics and sport and fitness (sub)cultures that are, at times, adjacent or aligned with the manosphere. Indeed, in the context of the 2024 US Presidential Election, podcasts emerged as a vital tool for engaging specific segments of voters (Clark 2024). There was a myriad of media reporting both before and immediately after the 2024 election explicitly linking Trump's electoral success with his podcast appearances and 'bro' podcast influencers (see Glaveski 2024, Kurtzleben 2024). For Trump, podcasts presented an opportunity outside of the mainstream media, which he regularly rebukes, to reach different segments of the electorate, such as – in Trump's case – young male voters. Here, we address the relationship among podcasts, politics, the manosphere, and sport by exploring how Donald Trump mobilised the medium to produce a 'strongman', masculine political image and effectively court male voters in the 2024 election.

### **Podcasts and analysis**

Sixteen podcasts (see Table 1) between 1 June 2024 and 5 November 2024 (Election Day) were located on which President Donald Trump was a guest, and which are widely available on common international audio and visual media platforms. Notable are those on which Trump chose to appear, as each one, their host(s), and intended audience carry sporting, cultural, and political orientations. Podcasts, particularly those

**Table 1.** List of Trump's podcast appearances.

Show	Host	Date of President Trump's Appearance	Duration
<i>Dr. Phil Primetime</i>	Phil McGraw	June 6, 2024	1 hr. 7 mins.
<i>The Dr. Phil Podcast</i>	Phil McGraw	Jun 12, 2024	2 hrs. 7 mins.
<i>Impulsive with Logan Paul</i>	Logan Paul & Mike Majlak	June 13, 2024	53 mins.
<i>All-In</i>	Chamath Palihapitiya, Jason Calacanis, David Sacks, & David Friedberg	June 20, 2024	1 hr. 20 mins.
<i>UFC Unfiltered</i>	Jim Norton and Matt Serra	July 24, 2023	38 mins.
<i>This Past Weekend w/ Theo Von</i>	Theo Von	August 20, 2024	57 mins.
<i>The Shawn Ryan Show</i>	Shawn Ryan	August 26, 2024	1 hr. 12 mins.
<i>The Monica Crowley Podcast</i>	Monica Crowley	August 29, 2024	33 mins.
<i>Phil in the Blanks</i>	Phil McGraw	August 27, 2024 (released September 3rd)	56 mins.
<i>The Lex Friedman Podcast</i>	Lex Friedman	September 3, 2024	1 hr. 5 mins.
<i>Flagrant</i>	Andrew Schulz	October 9, 2024	1 hr. 28 mins.
<i>Full Send Podcast</i>	Kyle Forgeard & Bradley Martyn	October 14, 2024	42 mins.
<i>Bussin' with the boys</i>	Will Compton and Taylor Lewan	14th October, 2024	2hrs. 10 mins.
<i>Six Feet Under</i>	Mark Calaway	October 21, 2024	1 hr.
<i>The Joe Rogan Experience</i>	Joe Rogan	October 25, 2024	2 hrs. 58 mins.
<i>The Tucker Carlson Show</i>	Tucker Carlson	November 1, 2024	2 hrs. 10 mins.

with a focus on combat or fighting sports, or sporting content more generally, can be viewed as part of the manosphere (or manosphere adjacent) digital landscape. Podcasts such as *The Joe Rogan Experience* are commonly cited as 'bro-podcasts' and 'manfluencers' associated with the masculinist politics of the mansphere while cultivating a largely male audience (O'Sullivan 2025; Gerrand et al. 2025). Podcasters like Rogan, Jim Norton and Matt Serra on *UFC Unfiltered* (henceforth, UFCU), or Mark Calaway's *Six Feet Under*, then, promote 'violent physical activity such as combat sports and martial arts become ways to remasculinise the male body to its supposedly rightful place as patriarch and breadwinner' (O'Sullivan 2025, p. 4). Previous research demonstrated the masculine performance associated with the 'bro talk' across sports broadcast media (re)affirms a broad commitment to 'traditional' masculinities (see Messner et al. 2000, Nylund 2012) and at times racial and gendered politics (Kusz and Hodler 2022). Nonetheless, what makes the manosphere-sport podcast nexus unique is how it fits within a broader 'culture-war', positioned against a clear enemy – 'wokeness' and the perceived threats to masculinity itself (Nagle 2017, Cammaerta 2022, O'Sullivan 2025). Podcasts are unique not just in how they connect with the broader discursive and political trajectories of the manosphere and the rise of manfluencers such as Andrew Tate, but also in how they articulate with the political possibilities of the uber-sport assemblage (see Andrews 2019). That is, in a landscape wherein sport and muscularity can be vehicles for cultivating 'authoritarian atmospheres' that serve as fertile ground for the far right (Woolley and Luger 2023, Luger

2024); podcasts provide a platform through which this link is discursively activated for political capital.

This does suggest that sporting podcasts or digital media are inherently conservative or adjacent to the manosphere. There are, indeed, progressive sport-related podcasts – for example, *The End of Sport*, *The Dan Le Batard Show* or, in the context of Mixed Martial Arts itself, *Southpaw*. Yet, Trump's appearances on *The Monica Crowley Show*, Phil McGraw's several podcasts, or *The Tucker Carlson Show* are explicitly right or far-right in political orientation. *All-In* with Chamath Palihapitiya, Jason Calacanis, David Sacks, & David Friedberg, though, presents with both left and right-leaning perspectives. Further, Andrew Schulz, who hosts *Flagrant*, does not align himself with a party but his anti-establishment and independent positioning along with voting for Trump sees him often labelled on the right. Although not exclusively right in political orientation, Trump's appearances are far more commonly associated with right to far-right shows, hosts, and audiences. Among Trump's podcast appearances, there exists an overwhelmingly male presence among hosts and audiences: All hosts were male, with Monica Crowley on *The Monica Crowley Show* the exception; audiences were overwhelmingly male where data is available (Kurtzleben 2024), some as much as 91% like *Full Send*.

Our point here is twofold. First, that the rise of 'manfluencers', 'bro-politics', the 'manosphere' overlaps with conservative and reactionary politics and authoritarianism by performing and promoting certain masculine formations. Second, that there is a political significance to this overlap, particularly as the digital landscapes of the manosphere provide an opportunity to engage or court predominately male voters, as Trump demonstrated by engaging with 'bro-podcasts' like *The Joe Rogan Experience*, *Bussin with the boys* and *Impulsive*. Drawing on cultural studies (Johnson *et al.* 2004) and discursive (Fairclough 2001) approaches, we 'read' the sixteen podcasts as texts for meaning and power in relation to gender, masculinity, and their political significance. In doing so, we use a critical conjuncturalism (Grossberg 2019) to situate Trump's podcast appearances in three specific ways: 1) his valorisation of masculine forms in and through sport and affinities with strongman leaders; 2) his use of sport to express an authoritarian personality; and 3) how his podcast appearances appeal to young male voters and the manosphere by appealing ideological sensibilities of 'the people' against the 'woke' elite.

### **'You're a warrior, right'? Valorising fighters, pugilism, and masculinity**

The 'man talk' or 'bro talk' by 'talking sports' is an important aspect of Donald Trump's masculine performance and courting of male voters. This is, perhaps, unsurprising given the techno-political cultural conditions under which the 2024 election took place. Namely, a digital era where the manosphere and conservative 'manfluencers' such as Andrew Tate, or more mainstream yet still manosphere adjacent podcasters like Joe Rogan reached unprecedented levels of popularity – particularly among young men (Marsales 2023, Haslop *et al.* 2024, O'Sullivan 2025). Podcasts provide an important discursive forum for promoting deviant masculinities that are presented in opposition to 'wokeness' through valorising a patriarchal gendered hierarchy, sustained in part through sport, fitness and muscularity (see Ging 2019, Woolley and Luger 2023, Luger 2024).

The cultural significance of sport is evident both in its prominence as a topic of discussion for Trump in his podcast appearances (and indeed as the rationale for the

podcasts he appeared on) but also as material-affective force (see Andrews 2019) that carries with it an ideological and political significance for the Trump 2024 election campaign. When taken together, it is clear that ‘bro talk’ or engaging in sporting discussions with manosphere-adjacent figures or sporting figures themselves is tantamount to a form of political communication in itself, one that contours an algorithmically mediated cultural-political landscape in which both the ‘manosphere’ and sport become vehicles for promoting authoritarianism or right wing populism.

Through his appearances on sporting podcasts, and UFC Unfiltered in particular, Trump consistently valorised fighting and pugilism by emphasising the ‘brutality’ of fights and the ‘toughness’ of those who compete in them. Additionally, when sport became a focus, Trump consistently drew on historical and contemporary fighting figures (e.g. Muhammad Ali, Colby Covington, Khabib Nurmagomedov, Mike Tyson, etc.) for discussion. For example, Trump discussed his admiration for UFC fighter Daniel Cormier and boxer Evander Holyfield with Jim Norton:

Donald J. Trump (DJT): Well, Cormier is another fighter. [...] he was a great fighter, and he was shorter.

Jim Norton (JN): Yeah

DJT: But he had a tremendous heart and he had tremendous strength, right. But he was a – he’s a terrific – he’s a terrific guy, but he’s a terrific fighter

JN: Double champ, too, light heavyweight.

DJT: Yeah. He was tough. You knew you were in a fight. You know, a fighter that I found was incredible was Evander ‘The Real Deal’ Holyfield, right? And I watched him because he was really a light heavyweight. And the most he ever weighed was like 218. And he’s fighting guys 260. [...] no matter how big they were, they were in for a hell of a fight.

While valorising such figures, who represent the archetypal hyper-masculine figures and ideals and are racially and ethnically diverse, notable are the absences of sports or athletes not associated with these types (e.g. women’s sport, or less physically imposing sports like tennis or swimming). Trump draws upon narrow and selective sports and figures that express physical aggression and dominance with which to associate. Beyond valorising hyper-masculine figures, Trump spoke frequently about his association with the UFC and his fondness for UFC CEO Dana White. For example, he shared this on *The Past Weekend with Theo Von*:

DJT: [...] We all get along great. We have a good family. And – but I love you, I see we – you talk about a great guy. How about Dana White, the job he does, right?

Theo Von (TV): Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I want to thank Dana, too, for helping get us set up together.

DJT: Yeah, that’s right.

TV: He makes it happen. I like Dana. He’s – he’s – he doesn’t waste words. He doesn’t waste time. He likes to, I think, be efficient. And he likes – he has a – seems like a strong sense of integrity for himself.

DJT: Yeah. Nobody like him, actually. It’s – you know, there’s an expression that everybody is replaceable. Not Dana.

White, and figures like Von or Norton, are important connections for Trump socio-politically. White in particular donated more than \$1 million to Trump's various campaigns and funds. White has been frank about connecting Trump to the millions of young men made accessible through bro-casters and the manosphere, stating in *The New Yorker*, 'You're getting conversations in these podcasts, and you yourself, as a young kid, get to really see who Donald Trump is, not the bullshit you hear from the far-left media' (Eagan 2024). The manner of Trump's access to potential male votes is achieved without a journalistic presence that would incur scrutiny or challenge, thus enabling him to more freely engage in the bro-talk that resonates with young men and appeals to what Berlant (2017) referred to as 'Big Man-style sovereign sovereignty' – the unapologetic freedom of masculine performance that denies judgement or constraint by progressive norms.

The focus on fighting may not be surprising given the focus of the podcasts, but it is, nonetheless, compelling to observe a former and then running President's involvement in such discussions. Trump's sporting knowledge provides legitimacy and credibility that enable engagement with sports content producers that are, in Remy's terms (1990, p. 45) expressive of how men are enabled to have the self-interested freedom to do as they please. Rather than speak to policy, his campaign, or issues of political significance, which he does on other non-sporting podcasts, Trump engages in the banter about fighting sports that creates an association among men, maleness, and masculinity. As is the banter-like atmosphere of podcasts wherein Trump can engage in the performance of the Big Man sovereign. In doing so, Trump participates not only in violent sporting spectacles that emphasise toughness and masculinity to bolster his appeal with predominately hosts and audiences, but also revels in the (White) patriarchy (Remy 1990) expressed in other sport media forms (e.g. Falcous *et al.* 2019, Kusz and Hodler 2022).

Additionally, there is cultural-political significance to Trump's discussion of fighting and his appreciation for fighting sports. Trump extended his association with fighters and fighting by aligning himself with similar characteristics and the figure of the strongman. On *Impulsive*, Trump draws comparison between his interactions with other world leaders, fighting, and being a 'warrior' or a 'fighter':

DJT: I get along with the tough ones. You know, there's a very tough one, Viktor Orban, and he's the prime minister of Hungary. And he said that the reason the world is blowing up because Trump isn't president. When Trump was there, everybody respected Trump. He said he was afraid of Trump. I don't want to use that term because that's – you know, I don't want to say, oh, they were afraid like a child would say, but they respected me. [...] They couldn't figure Trump out. And they all listened, and they did listen. And we had no wars. We had no nothing. I defeated ISIS, got rid of the biggest terrorists ever, maybe just about ever. But we defeated – think of that. We knocked out ISIS, 100% of the ISIS caliphate and started no wars. I wasn't in any wars. Now, that – I don't know how you may feel about that because, you know, you're a warrior, right? [...] you're a real fighter, by the way.

Trump seeks to display his 'strength' as a leader in two clear ways. First, by 'defeating' ISIS without 'starting wars' whereby Trump's implicit strength is presented as a conduit for international stability and advancing US foreign policy. Second, and importantly, Trump seeks to demonstrate his political prowess by claiming that he earned the 'respect' of 'tough ones' – namely, authoritarian political leaders like Viktor Orban. Trump draws on

'fighting' and 'toughness' to align himself with other authoritarian, strongman leaders. Thus, Trump establishes a relationship between fighting and his style of political leadership, which creates a discursive articulation with fighters, strongmen, and other authoritarian political leaders.

There is, then, a discursive overlap between valorising fighting and 'bro talk' as evidence by Trump's discussions on his 2024 election podcast appearances and the cultivation of deviant, anti-woke masculinities by influencers in the broader manosphere. Social Media influencers like Andrew Tate, for example, cultivate deviant masculinities that appeal to aspirational and frustrated men by appearing to transgress the perceived cultural dominance of 'wokeness' and the mainstreaming of feminism (Haslop *et al.* 2024, Renstorm and Back 2024; Roberts, Jones and Maloney 2025). Where 'Tate eulogizes men that fight, build, go to war' (Haslop *et al.* 2024, p. 8), Trump's bro-talk connects with the masculinities cultivated within the manosphere that similarly valorise fighting and toughness.

Valorising fighting and 'toughness' became part of a broader masculine performance through which Donald Trump sought to present an image of himself as both a 'strongman' while aligning himself with other authoritarian leaders. Following Moffitt (2016), this gendered populist performance is used to create and navigate the political fields of power from the formal domain of political governance through everyday life. In crafting this persona as a means through which to speak to male voters, Trump appears to have been successful. Compared to his running counterpart, Kamala Harris, Glaveski (2024) estimated that Trump reached 25 times more viewers than Harris in this medium with an overwhelmingly male audience; half of this was attributable to *The Joe Rogan Experience*, alone. We extend this analysis further to explore how this strongman image is cultivated not just in the passive enjoyment of violent sports but also construed through a broader sporting and 'tough guy' persona which broadcasts his 'natural ability' and suitability for political leadership.

### **'You're just much better': sporting talent, naturalness and the authoritarian personality**

Beyond engaging in 'bro talk' or valorising fighting, Trump also sought to communicate his own 'natural ability' or suitability for political leadership. He did so by presenting his own sporting prowess, and by cultivating a broader 'tough guy' persona. On *Bussin' With the Boys*, Trump spoke about what motivated his entry to politics:

DJT: [...] well you know, I think I'm a very natural businessman, like you guys are natural athletes. You're always the best at what you your sport, you always did well. I mean in high school you guys were dominant, right? And even in in college you were ...

Will Compton (WC): Oh yeah.

Taylor Lewan (TL): You could say that.

DJT: You take a player at your level, in high school, you're in a different level, you know, you're just much better. [...] You could run right through that line guys wouldn't even ... right?

WC: All-state.

DJT: Yeah I know how it works. And then it gets tougher and tougher as you go up. Right?

TL: Yeah.

DJT: Then all of a sudden, they get bigger and faster and you say let me go back to high school.

TL: You say this is the ultimate equalizer.

DJT: But no, you were always dominant in what you did, and I was always a good businessman and I'm an athlete, too. I was always good at sports. I was good . . . I was a really good, good golfer, good baseball player. I love sports. I always love sports, it's sort of a microcosm of life.

Just as sporting knowledge provides legitimacy for Trump's participation on sports-related media, so too does Trump's perceived sporting ability enable his inclusion in sport-related discussion. This has a political significance through which Trump presents both his sporting and business 'success' in somewhat bio-essentialist terms – the result of innate 'talent' or natural abilities. The idea of natural talent or ability is central to meritocratic notions of 'success' in capitalist societies in the global north. Sport is particularly useful as an ideological force that valorises individualism, competition and 'merit'. As Andrews (2019, p. 154) notes, the *uber-sport* neoliberal assemblage plays an important role in 'normalizing, and so perpetuating, the neoliberal meritocratic and authoritarian populism shaping the attitudes of many living within the contemporary US'.

There is also a connection to the essentialist epistemologies of the manosphere the manosphere that covet evolutionary perspectives, genetic determinism, and natural hierarchies (Ging 2019, Vallerga and Zurbriggen 2022). Trump's emphasis on being 'dominant' appeals to essentialist sensibilities, which draws parallels between sporting success and his business and political success. Trump expanded on this on *The Joe Rogan Experience*:

DJT: For me, it's good. Fresh air, exercise. [. . .] I play fast, real fast, and I'm in, I'm out. But you know, it gives me – I was never one that could, like, run on a treadmill. And I can do it. You know, when passing a physical, they ask me to run on a treadmill, and then they make it steeper and steeper and steeper. And the doctors said, it was at Walter Reed, they said, 'It's unbelievable'. I could have gone – I'm telling you, I felt I could have gone all day. But I said, 'Doc, I can do this all day long. I'm not – I have no problem'. But it's boring to me. Do you understand? It's just boring. But I did it for so long. They couldn't believe it that I did it. [. . .] So with golf or something, you know, or tennis or whatever, golf, as you get older, there's something really good about it. And you have competition with your friends.

Joe Rogan JR: Competition, concentration.

DJT: And it's a great handicap sport.

JR: And it's also a thing, I think, that's a – It clears your mind, because when you're looking at a shot, that's all you can think of when you're executing.

DJT: [. . .] With golf, you can play with a lousy guy and give him a stroke a hole or two strokes a hole or something. You know, it's a good handicapping sport. But it gives me a little exercise. But I haven't played in a long time. I won a lot of – I won 32 club championships.

Drawing on Adorno's work on 'authoritarian personalities', Koch (2017) notes how autocratic leaders such as Vladimir Putin or Chairman Mao cultivate sporting personas that (re)imagine political leaders as 'no ordinary men' but rather possessing extraordinary talents or attributes. Through the prism of 'athletic autocrats', authoritarian, strongman leaders harness their apparent sporting prowess to cultivate personas that legitimate their authority and display their suitability for political leadership (Koch 2017). For Trump, there is a similar posturing in extolling his sporting abilities in relation to golf, but also baseball or the more nebulous claim that he has 'always been good at sports'. The manosphere, then, provides a digital mediascape through which 'athletic autocrat' personas can not only be cultivated, but also repackaged along with 'bro talk' and broader sporting fandom as a form of political communication. By cultivating authoritarian affects through the discursive linking of sport and natural ability, Trump is able to position himself as both 'strongman' political figure and natural leader.

Beyond specific sporting activities, Trump also aligned himself with other strongman characteristics. In discussing Trump's entry into the Presidency with Rogan, Trump articulated how the Presidency is a dangerous business, like fighting. Within that exchange, Trump casts himself as a target:

DJT: You make yourself a target and it's a very dangerous business. But if you just look at statistically, so I said, I said a thing, I don't know if it's right, but one 10th of 1% for a race car drive. Yeah. It's pretty dangerous business. One 10th of 1% for a bull rider. I tell you, to me, these guys that ride the bulls is worse than UFC. These guys, you see these big monster bulls and you see it in slow motion where the foot is like, you know, an inch away from the head of it hits him, the guy's gone. But they die. You know, they die.

JR: So one 10th of 1% die.

DJT: Yeah. One 10th of 1% die.

JR: Right.

DJT: And they certainly get hurt badly. Really. I mean, they can't walk after a certain period of time. But with a president, if you look at the amount of assassination and attempts to attempt, no, it's a very dangerous position. I never thought of that, by the way, when I did it, you know, you don't, you don't tend to.

UFC fighters, bull riders, or race car drivers here are used to incorporate the image of Trump himself as a man taking risks, living on the edge, or risking his life. The danger of the Presidency, assassination attempts, and indeed the assassination attempt on his life are used to pivot into Trump as a tough guy. The scar that Trump developed from an assassination attempt on 13 July 2024, during the election became a focal point for the physical proof and truth of his tough guy image:

JR: No. No. I was – Once they shot you, I was like, 'He's got to come in here'. It's all about timing. It's all about the timing. Timing's good. I think our timing's perfect. Do you even have a scar on your ear? You got anything on there?

DJT: I do.

JR: Let me see. Let me see. What do you got there?

DJT So, right over here.

JR: On the tiny little mark. See?

DJT: It zicked right there.

JR: It healed up pretty fucking good.

DJT: Yeah, it's pretty good. It's not like some of the wrestlers, some of the UFC fighters. No. It was sort of like a top shot. The point of the bullet was over the edge. But you see, the thing's taken off a little bit, but it makes me a tougher guy.

Trump mobilises the experience, timing, and result of the assassination attempt as a resource for the construction of his political persona. The scar, akin to a battle wound in combat or a sign of damage from fighting, enables him to claim a dimension of survivorship, one that has made him 'a tougher guy'. In doing so, Trump creates a personal association with the dominant forms of masculinity associated in high profile fighting sports. Trump's rhetorical link with toughness and masculinity, and his broader valorising of fighting and strongman leadership, appeals to the deviant or 'alpha' masculine formations associated with the manosphere. For potential voters, and in Koch's (2017) words, Trump illustrates to potential voters that he possesses the 'desirable' attributes of a strong leader. To that end, the final section focuses on the political possibilities of this masculine association by courting male voters through the manosphere and online culture wars.

### **Courting men through the manosphere: podcasts, populist authoritarianism and the culture wars**

To return to the nature of the alternative media forms used by Donald Trump throughout the 2024 election campaign, podcasts provided an ideal outlet for broader populist and authoritarian sentiments through, but by no means limited to, physical cultures. On this basis, it is clear to see broader populist sentiments are readily apparent Trump's podcast appearances. For example, Trump speaks of the 'people's support' on his appearance on *Dr Phil Primetime*:

Phil McGraw (PM): You've taken every shot you can imagine. You've been criticized, attacked, called every name in the book. They've turned the judicial system against you. [...] The media has turned against you: print, TV, radio, internet, in the streets. Not campaigning Donald Trump, just real Donald Trump, how do you deal with that stress in your most private moments?

DJT: [...] I have tremendous support. I have the people's support. I think if I didn't, I wouldn't be able to handle it so easily. When a judge who has conflicts like nobody's ever had wants to put me in jail, when he puts a gag order and say, 'If you talk about these things, we're going to put you in jail'. And I'm the Republican candidate, I was president, I'm leading the Democrats by a lot. He wants to put me in jail. I like not to think about it.

Gruneau (2021), like Mudde and Kaltwasser (2022), notes that while the term 'populism' has an amorphous and contested meaning, one articulation refers to 'a distinctive mode of governing in power, where a charismatic leader claims to speak on behalf of "the people"' (p. 27; Mudde 2004). Of course, this elides the way in which 'the people' is often

constructed in ways which reflect, rather the challenge of subvert, a patriarchal, classist, and white supremacist status quo by appealing to the ‘threat’ posed by minority groups (Mondon and Winter 2020). Trump demonstrates several hallmarks of populist rhetoric, including a broad appeal to the ‘people’ and a claim to being both in contrast to, while persecuted by, the ‘elite’. The podcast medium amplifies Trump’s messages by connecting political leaders to digital spaces that work to cultivate an anti-establishment ethos outside of the ‘mainstream’ media landscape. The positioning of Trump as an ‘outsider’ against the mainstream ‘elite’ becomes a spectacularized production to be consumed in conservative or manosphere digital spaces. In this way, the ‘transgressive identities’ associated with hegemonic masculinities, sporting subcultures or ‘red-pilled’ ideologies in the manosphere become subsumed into reactionary authoritarian political discourses through the figure of the ‘strongman’ political leader.

These podcasts provided an opportunity for Trump to appeal directly to voters, and young voters in particular. When asked about his recent podcast appearances on *Bussin’ With The Boys*, Trump speaks specifically about their popularity with young people:

WC: Why do you go the podcasting route? I feel like it’s something you’ve leaned into again, all the pods and streamers.

DJT: It started off . . . it all began with, it’s got a little bit to do with all of my sons. You know, they’re young [. . .] and this is a young world. You’re in young world and I’ve done a few of them and they’ve done well.

Similarly, and more explicitly, Trump used his appearance on the *Full Send* podcast to send a more direct message to specifically young and first-time voters:

Kyle Forgeard (KF): [. . .] I always say this too, we can’t just talk about it and tweet about it. We got to actually get out and vote. That’s good any young people that are watching right now, too. If you guys aren’t registered to vote, you guys can go to send the vote.com and it has everything you need to make sure that your votes actually going to be counted, too. So we need everybody to get up and vote, and not just, you know, I think a lot of young people like to talk about it, and they’re passionate. But how important is it that people actually get out and vote?

DJT: Well it’s so important, and it’s November 5, but in every place, just about you can vote early and see I’d like same day voting like it used to be one day, even if you declare like a holiday one day. This way, a lot of things can’t happen. But we don’t have that system. We have a system where you can vote at a leisurely pace, and we just hope that everybody goes out. We’re going to make our you know, I have a little statement. It’s called Make America Great Again, Maga, which is the biggest political movement in the history of the country, and we’re going to make America great again, and we have to start. We did it, and then we had an interlude. We were rudely interrupted, and now it’s happening again at a level that nobody’s ever seen before

The conversation between Donald Trump and Kyle Forgeard combines both a call to action, by highlighting the need for ‘passionate’ young people specifically to vote, with the broader conspiratorial narrative promoted by Trump about ‘stolen elections’ which has been commonplace since losing the 2020 election to President Joseph Biden. Podcasts offer a political utility in connecting political leaders with target audiences, particularly those in the broader manosphere or conservative or ‘alt-right’ digital spaces less reachable through traditional media channels. Trump’s significant gains with young

male voters in the 2024 election appear to give further credence to this. While this cannot *in toto* be attributed to the political potential of podcasts, it certainly represents the strategic importance of appealing to this voter demographic.

In a political environment where authoritarian leaders across Europe and North America have focused on 'anti-woke' politics and the abnormalization of progressive politics – whereby anti-racist, anti-sexist or pro-LGBTQ views become constructed as 'deviant' (Cammaerta 2022) – Trump courted male voters by appearing to speak with men in non- or anti-woke ways. Here, Trump's podcasts were presented as a safe space whereby a deviant masculinity could be articulated – one that is at odds with the apparent insanity of 'woke ideology' or progressive politics. Indeed, Trump's podcast appearances offered a platform for specific political issues that can be located in the broader 'culture wars' often propagated online by 'alt-right', or conservative, political figures associated with the manosphere (Nagle 2017). Take, for example, the 'issue' of transgender women's participation in sport, and the concomitant moral panics that often proliferate (see Cohen 2011, Amery and Mondon 2025, Nauright, Ratcliff and Zipp 2025, Travers 2022). Trump explicitly framed Transgender women athlete's as 'men participating in Women's sports' - a framing that intentionally misgenders transgender women. For example, in Trump's appearance on the *Monica Crowley Show* he sets out his broader pitch to voters:

DJT: They have to vote for me. Look, I look at polls where we're even I don't understand how we could be not it has nothing to do with me. I have strong borders. I have strong on crime. I have all these different things. I have low taxes. *I have no men and women sports, which is a different kind of a thing.* But how ridiculous is it? (emphasis added)

For most of her career Crowley has been a news commentator and political analyst, most extensively for *Fox News*. Her ideological alignment with Trump was met with open arms and she was rewarded by Trump in her appointment as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for Public Affairs during Trump's first term and then Ambassador, Assistant Secretary of State, and Chief of Protocol in Trump's second. After signing the 'No Men in Women's Sports Executive Order' in 2025—an attempt to ban transgender women athletes and based competition on male and female definitions by threatening to rescind federal funding from public institutions that allow transgender girls or women to play on girls or women's teams – Crowley responded by thanking the President. Shortly after, in the summer of 2025, the U.S. Olympic & Paralympic Committee (USOPC) implemented a policy that effectively banned transgender women from competing in the women's category at the Olympics that was promoted and celebrated by Trump in the run up the Los Angeles 2028. Crowley posted to her social media followers a one-word response, 'LEADERSHIP'.

Commentary about transgender participation in sport is not limited to Crowley. On the Joe Rogan Experience when discussing voter ID laws, Trump seems to more explicitly link Transgender athlete's participation in sport to a conspiracy that the democrats want to cheat:

Because they want to be able to cheat. Because you know what? Who's going to vote for somebody that wants to have men playing in women's sports? You know, I have never had one person come up to me and say, 'President, you've got to do something to allow men to play in women's sports'. Have you ever? It's like I've never been called by a pollster. I told you

my little theory on pollsters, okay? I'm getting myself in trouble with some of these things, but I don't really care. Nobody's ever come up to me and said, we want to have men play in women's sports.

It is clear, here, that the 'issue' of transgender women participating in women's sport is located within a discursive assemblage of traditionally conservative and reactionary ideas, such as the neoconservative law and order politics of being 'tough on crime', or discourses about border security. In doing so, the broader discourses about transgender women in participation in sport are yoked together with broader populist sentiments by those who claim to speak on behalf of 'the people' against an elite – in this case the 'woke' elite and trans activists (Amery and Mondon 2025). Indeed, Trump expanded on this point in more depth during his appearance on *Bussin' With The Boys*:

WC: If you're elected in November, how will you look to unite everybody through your communication, your behavior?

DJT: It's a great question. That's a great question. So you want to see the country united, but you have two very different sides. You have a very conservative side, and a conservative side, and then you have people that want to see an open border and thinks, I mean you know I don't ... a lot of it's so far out like for instance they want men playing in women's sports. I don't think I could ever say I'm thrilled about that okay? I've seen it, I've seen people really hurt. In the Olympics, you had two boxers that transitioned to women and in the women's boxing they both won gold medals and you saw the one, the young Italian girl got hit a bout of times and oh I'm bye-bye, I'm out of here ...

The issue of transgender women participating in sport is presented as alongside the 'border' and migration as evidence of his opponents' policies being 'far out'. This taps into a reactionary sentiment whereby conservative political figures can appeal to ordinary commonsense, against the apparent mainstreaming of ostensibly progressive politics propagated by a nefarious 'elite' (e.g. Mondon and Winter 2020). Trump alludes to the controversy during the Paris 2024 Olympics involving Algerian Boxer Imane Khelif's, a cisgender woman, fight against Angela Carini – who is Italian, and not Spanish as claimed during the clip (BBC 2024). In other instances, such as on the *Full Send*, co-host Kyle Foregard – a Canadian YouTuber who has become an advocate for right-wing political causes who supported Trump's 2024 campaign – explicitly echoes Trump's own framing in trying to appeal to young male voters:

KF: Boys, I know a lot of you guys are thinking like me, you're seeing what's happening in this country. Everything's just getting really, really weird. You got men playing and women in sports. The borders wide open. This election might be the most important election in US history. I know you guys feel the same way.

This echoes, then, the broader politics of the 'red pill' ideology found in the manosphere whereby taking the 'red pill' is inextricably linked to broader 'anti-woke', anti-feminist politics and anti-LGBTQ discourses (Ging 2019). Trump leverages examples of transgender women participating in women's sport to appeal to the political sensibilities of the predominately young male audiences, in this case podcasts, in ways consistent with the ideological regularities of the manosphere by discussing ubiquitous online 'culture war' topics.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we examined and contextualised President Donald Trump's podcast appearances during the 2024 US Presidential Election. In line with what became a truism in media coverage, we argue that 'new' media forms, such as podcasts, must be viewed as important incubators of cultural and political discourses. Podcasts fit within the sport-politics relationship and more specifically in this paper reactionary or authoritarian politics by bridging political leaders with broader cultural movements and specific voting populations, particularly those who have little connection to legacy media forms. Exemplifying this is Donald Trump's utilisation of podcasts to court a particular audience, namely young male voters.

It seems, here, that podcasts – particularly podcasts that were sport-related or adjacent to the manosphere – provided a form for connecting with voters. It appears that simply talking sports provides a cultural currency that can be exchanged to bolster popular political appeal. This can be seen in the manner through which Donald Trump would talk, at length, about his fondness for sports such as UFC and Boxing, but also communicate a broader awareness about current events in the relevant sporting worlds. In addition to this, Trump also draws on his own sporting prowess and natural ability. Lastly, and in keeping with both the uber-sport assemblage (Andrews 2019) but also the bio-essentialist politics of the manosphere (Ging 2019), Trump also draws comparison between natural sporting ability and the natural ability or suitability for political leadership. Such engagement evinces the connection of a white patriarchy within emergent sports media (Falcous et al. 2009; Kusz and Hodler 2022) with authoritarian political sensibilities.

Trump sought to cultivate a specifically masculine, 'strongman' sporting persona through valorising fighting, emphasising his own sporting prowess, and appealing to populist sentiments of the 'people' against a nefarious 'elite'. In doing so, Trump fostered an 'anti-woke' sentiment by appealing to broader online cultures wars discourses that demonstrate the 'deviance' of liberal or progressive politics (Nagle 2017, Cammaerta 2022). This is evident in his discussion of transgender women participating in sport through which the apparent absurdity of the 'far left' is presented as antithetical to the commonsense of 'ordinary' people. Trump also positioned himself as a strongman political leader by drawing rhetorical connections between sport and politics to construct a vision of his political leadership in which he emphasises toughness, fighting, and defeating enemies. In doing so, he both valorises and aligns himself with other authoritarian 'strongman' political leaders, notably Viktor Orban or Vladimir Putin.

This paper contributes to debates on the phenomena of 'strongman sport' by exploring how Donald Trump used his fondness for sport, connection to UFC, and sporting and sport-derived podcasts to construct a masculine persona with which to appeal to young male voters within and beyond the manosphere. We contribute to debates about the manosphere by exploring how Trump drew on masculinity, particularly around toughness, fighting, and alpha masculinity, to appeal to specific 'culture war' issues, young male voters, and affinities with 'red pill' ideology. Finally, we contribute to debates about the relationship between sport and authoritarianism or the 'far-right' by exploring how podcasts provide a platform to valorise deviant if not toxic masculinities, the anti-woke agenda, and strongman political leadership.

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