

Articles

Culture Wars: Now Small Businesses Are Being Affected

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The term “Culture Wars” was coined by James Davison Hunter in 1991 referring to the intense conflict in the U.S, between conservative and progressives where each side believes their values, positions, morals, and actions as morally correct and view their opposites as morally bankrupt, un-American, ill-informed and to be discredited. Large organizations have been pulled into these culture wars over their products, practices or postures related to issues such as abortion, employee benefits, contraception, library books, and LGBTQ+ rights. Now small businesses are falling victim to culture conflicts that can force upon them unwanted changes or face ruin. Small businesses need to think strategically about the larger socio-political forces involved in the culture wars to manage their responses to such eventualities.

INTRODUCTION AND OUTLINE OF THE PAPER

This paper starts with a critical look at the term culture wars where sociologists like Hunter found deep and diverse divisions between the extreme right and left. Current research found that some of the polarization can be attributed to the different pace of acceptance by the right and left. Whatever sociologists eventually call this phenomenon, businesses find themselves caught in the middle with increasingly virulent and disruptive attacks from numerous stakeholders including employees, outsiders, communities, activists, investors, and consumers using boycotts, social media campaigns, investor pressure, and social media. The paper provides numerous examples of these attacks against large corporations followed by examples of attacks against small businesses. A summary of the case of Masterpiece Cake Shop is presented with legal resolution of issues involved in the dispute involving this small business. This is followed by examples of other small business cases where the Lower Courts either followed or did not follow the Supreme Court ruling in the case of Masterpiece Cake Shop. Several of the lower court rulings were overturned by the Appeals courts.

This paper does not take sides; it objectively views the polarization, identifies the types of attacks and attackers, and examines the legal issues and their resolution. The paper ends with the recommendation that small businesses use strategic planning tools to align their responses with their values. Some strategic options are offered.

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH ON CULTURE WARS

Early Sociological Studies

James Davison Hunter’s seminal book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America* (1991) placed the term ‘culture

wars’ into the American psyche. A large sociological literature has explained, expanded or critiqued the term (Florina et al., 2005; Florina & Abrams, 2008; Wolfe, 1991; and current writers Anthony, 2021; Baldassari & Gellman, 2008; Baldassari & Park, 2020; Deighton, 2023; Murray, 2023; Park, 2018). While other societies are more concerned with their politics, according to Hunter, American are more interested in cultural issues. Historically, conflict appeared between religions or between diverse groups, now Hunter sees this as a different conflict with different religions jointly attacking those they see as morally opposite. As a sociologist he sees the conflict as much deeper and addresses questions such as ‘how we live together,’ ‘what a citizen is,’ what is the morally correct action,’ and ‘what does it mean to be American.’ Some sociologists view the conflict as so deeply entrenched as to be irreconcilable (Hunter, 1991; Hunter & Wolfe, 2006; Murray, 2023). The conflict is most vivid between the extremely far right and extremely far left.

Hunter’s book incited a host of subsequent questions: what is culture, what level of conflict is beyond disagreement such that it constitutes polarization or a culture war, what is a culture war, is it real or exaggerated, and what are the underlying forces (e.g., age, gender, geography, religious or political affiliation, etc.) influencing it? If it is one of these, what are the issues and who are the protagonists?

Wildavsky (1987) defines culture as the set of boundaries of legitimate opinions within a society. Tocqueville saw it as liberalism tempered by democracy (Tocqueville quoted in Jacoby, 2014). Perhaps it is a combination of individual value choices where there is a continuum of societies from those which address basic human needs to those with higher levels of socioeconomic well-being that enable individuals to pursue self-fulfillment (Almond & Verba, 1963). Douglas and Wildavsky (1982) define it as a combination of

two groups, one which sees themselves as individual members of a collective society and the other group of individuals who see themselves as autonomous and limited by “externally imposed constraints.” William Jacoby (2020) sees values as the common thread through these definitions. His seminal study of public opinion and values (below) continues this thread.

Building on the definition of culture, scholars disagree whether this conflict between America’s conservatives and progressives warrants the term culture wars. DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson (1996) do not believe so, Davis and Robinson (1996) think the term is exaggerated, and Florina, Abrams, and Pope (2005) see it as a myth. Christina Smith et al (2003) argue it is not a culture war since Americans in the political middle are not involved. Conversely, Hunter (1991), Baker, Hurwitz, and Nelson (2008), and Baker and Tinnick (2006) see the conflict rising to a war of values and opinions. Brownstein in 2008 saw it as a Culture War between the political parties.

Supporters of the term believe that there have always been culture conflicts citing examples of the Roman empire’s change from paganism to Christianity, wars fought over the wording of a prayer, and the puritans escape from England (Anthony, 2021). Conversely, Christina Smith et al (2003) believe that the term has been exaggerated because the vast number of Americans in the political middle are not involved.

Whatever this conflict between the far political right and far political left is, the term Culture Wars is stuck in the American psyche, especially the media.

Current Sociological Research

Earlier, Hunter and Wolfe (2006) lamented the lack of analytical tools to study the phenomenon. Currently, researchers using multilevel models with 30 years of public opinion data and social diffusion concepts were able to discern different trends for public opinion on civil rights and the economy versus public opinion on moral issues (Baldassari & Park, 2020; Park, 2018).

Baldassari and Park (2020), using two longitudinal data bases with 30 years of data, found that aggregate American public opinions about civil rights and the economy are generally stable and rarely change by large amounts. Their descriptive graphs show that while the aggregated data is fairly steady, there are differences between Democrats and Republicans on economic issues such as government spending, social security, health insurance, federal support for childcare and government versus the free markets (see Appendix 1 for their list of variables).

Conversely, public opinions on moral issues follow a different trend. In general, aggregate data on public opinion on issues such as gender equality, women’s role in society, premarital sex, extramarital sex, gay rights, gay parenting, and gays in the military follow a “usual secular S trend” as public opinions as a whole trend to more liberal positions (Baldassari & Park, 2020: see Appendix 1 for a list of these variables). However, the Democrats as a group adopt more liberal views at a faster pace than Republicans.

Therefore, some of the polarization can be explained by the faster pace of acceptance by Democrats and a slower acceptance to liberal views by Republicans. The general upward trend is not explained away by generational replacement or demographic changes and is not a historical attribute of top-down influencers but coming from the base and bottom up (Baldassari & Park, 2020).

Interestingly, two issues show different trends of acceptance, LGBTQ+ and abortion. (Baldassari & Park, 2020). For these issues, the authors found that public opinion about LGBTQ+ is moving to more liberal positions faster than public opinions on other topics with acceptance by both parties but with Republicans at a slower acceptance pace. They concede that they do not have the analytical tools to understand this microdynamic social infusion process but theorize that many in the public have LGBTQ+ family, friends, or acquaintances giving this issue more exposure creating the faster pace of acceptance. Secondly, abortion is not following the other trends because, while the aggregate trend is upward, it is caused by faster Democrat acceptance which overpowers a clear downward Republican trend. (Appendices 1 and 2).

Jacoby’s (2014) seminal study determined the extent of the conflict, which answers the question whether this phenomenon is a simple disagreement or rises to the level of a culture war. His geometric method was also able to determine what variables such as age, sex, religion, or politics were significant.

As mentioned above, Jacoby (2014) starts with the understanding that many of the definitions of culture and conflict within cultures were based on values. Jacoby (2014) notes that a limitation of previous studies was that they examined values separately. His method forced individuals to compare the values and rank order them leading to personal value hierarchy structures. His results show visually and empirically the extent of public opinion disagreement over what values are important and the extent of that value to various groups.

Unfortunately, Americans do not have a widespread consensus of fundamental principles. Instead, he found diametrically opposing values in American society, and that the disagreements do not take place within narrow limits of “reasonable acceptable discourse” (Jacoby, 2014).

Neither religious affiliations nor the extent of religious commitment were factors (Jacoby, 2014). The variables of race, gender, income levels, and geographical location were not significant. The significant variables were age, higher education, and personal value hierarchies. His results suggest that individuals’ structure of personal values direct their political orientations and therefore their choice of political parties. The study found significant differences between Democrats and Republicans, which agrees with Baldassari and Park’s (2020) study. But most importantly it adds to their study by determining the size of the differences. This leads Jacoby (2014) to conclude that culture wars do exist.

THE RHETORIC FROM THE RIGHT AND LEFT

The Right

The right believes that the liberals have the upper hand. They have class, education, advantage, wealth and can exert more influence (Hunter, 1991; Hunter & Wolfe, 2006). Weyrich, a religious conservative, believes that the left has won the culture wars but states the culture wars are not over. The New Apostolic Reformation in its Seven Mountain Mandate argues that Christians should become leaders in government, family, religion, business, education, media, arts, and entertainment (*The Seven Mountain Mandate*, 2024).

The Left

The left sees the religious right as attempting to promote their religious and cultural policies and agendas by intervening with governments to reduce separation of church and state (Whittle, 2003). Wolfe (1991) believes that the conservatives want us to become one nation under their value system (Wolfe, 1991). A liberal nonprofit foundation sees the right's involvement in politics as the problem and sees the right continuing to fight the liberals (The People for the American Way quoted in Anthony, 2021; Tornoe, 2022).

The middle

Some writers argue that while the right and left are concerned about these issues, most Americans in the middle are more concerned with crime, the economy, and public education (C. E. Smith et al., 2003; Wolfe, 1991).

Summary

Wolfe and Hunter (2006) say that the issues continue to be deep such as what is an American, what does it mean to celebrate, what is life, what does it mean to live in American. The far right and far left see the other as extremists, intolerant, blasphemous, morally incorrect, or illegal and use the Bill of Rights and Constitution to justify their positions. Therefore, the conflict runs deeper because each sees themselves on the moral high ground and that the others should be marginalized, defeated, or, by some extremists, even eliminated.

This finding that culture wars exist leads to the questions: what are some examples of the culture war attacks against businesses and do they support the sociologists' findings?

EXAMPLES OF CULTURE WAR ATTACKS

While the term culture wars, whether it is the correct term, and the causes of polarization are being researched, businesses are caught in the crossfire. As the list below shows, the trigger for these attacks can be anything from a company's products, personnel practices, and marketing campaigns.

- Home Depot was criticized by employees for offering benefits to employee's spouses but not to gay employees' partners (Greene & France, 2005).
- Microsoft lost some valuable employees when it supported gay rights, received backlash from conservatives, discontinued its support, and then reinstated its support when it received an internal petition. Interestingly, there were 1,741 employees arguing for gay rights and only 197 employees arguing for neutrality. However, conservatives vowed to continue pressuring Microsoft (Greene & France, 2005).
- Dixie executives were pushed by shareholders to include sexual orientation in its nondiscrimination policy (Greene & France, 2005).
- Activists used an email campaign against Safeway because it advertised on the show *Desperate Housewives*. The attack by the Americans for Families and the American Decency Association of Fremont also attacked Lowe's, Tyson foods, Kellogg, and Johnson and Johnson (Greene & France, 2005).
- Americans for Families launched a letter writing campaign against Kraft Foods for supporting the Gay Olympics (Greene & France, 2005). Similarly, P&G's Crest toothpaste, Tide detergent, and baby diapers were targeted for supporting the Gay Olympics (Greene & France, 2005).
- A boycott against General Electric occurred because of its intent to use embryonic stem cell research (Greene & France, 2005).
- The culture wars were the reason that the National Education Association's (NEA) budget was cut (Stern, 2017).
- Many companies such as Anheuser-Busch, Kohl's, Alphabet, Microsoft, Under Armour, Walmart, JCPenney and Target have introduced ads, products, and initiatives for Pride Month (Deighton, 2023; Lee, 2023). And these companies have faced attacks.
- Anheuser Busch was subject to a consumer boycott by conservatives when it used a transgender influencer to promote Bud Light commercial. When it released the marketing executive responsible for the promotion, it was criticized by liberals. It suffered an 18% drop in its stock price during this episode (Lee, 2023).
- Kohl's marketed Pride Month merchandise and was attacked by conservatives using a social media blitz and a boycott which had 280,000 views on TikTok (Lee, 2023). Kohl's stock fell 5.1% because of the attack (Deighton, 2023).
- Target sold pride month merchandise and was criticized in social media (Deighton, 2023; Lee, 2023).
- North Face had a summer campaign using a drag queen and was accused by a congresswoman of sexually targeting children (Murray, 2023).
- Murray mentions Nike, Adidas and Ford as the latest companies attacked by LGBTQ+ activists (Murray, 2023).
- Catholics were divided on the Dodgers' Pride incident (Crory, 2023).

- Conservative state officials in Florida and Alabama are attempting to ban lab grown red meat believing that it was a Democratic authoritarian goal (Confino, 2024).
- Ron DeSantis stated that he will use the culture war issues in his run for President (Cook & Niquette, 2024). The Democrats will also use the culture wars (Andrews, 2024).
- Companies are being attacked for their ESG positions by shareholder activists (Crowley & Eccles, 2023; Nassauer & Francis, 2024).
- The culture wars are affecting campuses (Belkin & Korn, 2023), CHATGPT (Chafkin & Zuidijk, 2023), and occurring in other countries since Hunter's book in 1991 (Harding, 2021).

Some interesting points can be teased out of the above list. First, all but one of the attacks are about sexual orientation which includes transgender, LGBTQ+, and same sex partnership benefits about which Baldassari and Park found an upward trend of acceptance. While the list is clearly not exhaustive, only one of the attacks is about abortion (embryonic stem cells). Third, the attacks are from all types of stakeholders: inside, outside, investors, politicians, and activists.

WHAT DOES THIS REALLY MEAN FOR SMALL BUSINESSES?

We now know the culture wars exist, there are deep divisions among the public's deeply held value structures, and both the extreme right and left believe they are right, the others are wrong, ill informed, morally bankrupt, and should be marginalized, or at least defeated. While we can applaud sociologists for better understanding the issue, it is small comfort to small businesses caught in the middle. So now, what should be their response?

The list for large businesses shows that attacks originate due to a business's advertising, market offerings, values, mission statements, and causes they support or do not support. Attacks can come from employees, customers, management, outside activists, or their community. What is the appropriate response? They must prepare to face these kinds of attacks, or avoid them in the first place, so as to not fall into the legal traps that the following small business experienced.

Legal Issues: The Case of Masterpiece Cake Shop

Dave Mullins and Charlie Craig approached Jack Phillips, the owner of the Masterpiece Cake Shop, requesting a cake for their gay wedding (Masterpiece Cakeshop, 2018). Mr. Phillips refused stating that "...I cannot participate in such a ceremony based on my sincerely held religious belief." He believed that his cakes were works of art protected by the Free Speech Clause. Mr. Phillips stated that he would make birthday cakes, shower cakes, cookies, or brownies but not a wedding cake that violated his religious principles. The gay couple applied to the Colorado Civil Rights Commission who ruled against Mr. Phillips. The Colorado Court of Ap-

peals agreed, and the case was appealed to the US Supreme Court.

Colorado's anti-discrimination statute includes prohibitions against discrimination based on sexual orientation and applies to large and small businesses (CRS section 24-34-601(2)(a) (2017). The legal issue places the rights of small business owners who have strongly held religious beliefs about marriage against the rights of LGBTQ+ members to receive products or services from all Colorado businesses. The case pitted conservative evangelical Christians against the LGBTQ+ community.

In arguments before the Supreme Court, Mr. Phillip's lawyers claimed that his works of art were protected by the Free Speech clause. His lawyers did not strongly pursue Justice Scalia's suggestion that anti-discrimination laws would be invalid if they were 'not neutral or generally applicable' (Justice Scalia in *Employment Division v Smith*, 1990). The Supreme Court held for Masterpiece and against the gay couple by ruling that the adjudicatory body, the Colorado Civil Rights Commission was "hostile" and "antithetical" to Jack Phillip's religious beliefs and "...were unequal in their treatment of him" (Masterpiece, 2018). The court stated that his creation of custom wedding cakes was 'expressive' and a form of free speech. Although Masterpiece is a for profit business, the for-profit motive did not hinder his right to free speech.

Legal Interpretations of the case

Legal scholars disagree on the implications of the case. Some argue that religious values should not outweigh anti-discrimination laws (Holbrook & Chen, 2024). Some scholars argue that the case has limited application because the ruling was based on specific facts that have limited possibility of being repeated resulting in a very narrow ruling (Moulding, K, 2018; Harrell, 2019; Liptak, 2018). Their argument is based on the Supreme Court's focus on the Colorado Civil Rights Commission's (i.e., the relevant adjudicatory body's) hostile remarks about Masterpiece Cake Shop (such as that Mr. Phillip's position was 'despicable.'). Future adjudicatory bodies will be more diligent to avoid repeating this mistake. Other legal scholars believe that the decision left most of the pressing legal questions unanswered (Sequist et al., 2019; Volokh, 2018). Others warn that the rights of LGBTQ+ individuals may be altered as a result of the ruling (Dias, 2017) or that LGBTQ+ is going after youths (Dykstra & Litwiller, 2021)

Taking a broader approach to interpreting the decision, Laycock (2019) argues that the case has much wider implications for religious objectors and the impact on the gay community. He forecasts that Masterpiece will create questions of what the exemptions to this decision should be and argues that the Supreme Court will therefore have to limit the ruling in a previous case, *Smith*, and expand Scalia's concept that the conflict between religious objectors' rights and antidiscrimination statutes should be resolved by ascertaining whether those anti-discrimination statutes are neutral or generally applicable (Scalia in *Smith*, 1990). According to Laycock (2019) this expansion of Scalia's comment would provide more exemptions, more rights to religious

objectors, limit the reach of anti-discrimination statutes, and limit the rights of LGBTQ+ community (Laycock, 2019).

Autumn Scardina, an LGBTQ+ attorney who portrays herself as a passionate supporter of LGBTQ+ rights, has continued to pursue Masterpiece Cake Shop by repeatedly sending testers and by repeatedly requesting products. On her first request, Masterpiece declined to perform the service requested and the Colorado Civil Rights Commission pursued Mr. Phillips. Mr. Phillips responded with a federal lawsuit against the Colorado Civil Rights Commission which was settled. However, Scardina repeated with a request for a cake that was blue on the inside and pink on the outside to celebrate her gender transition (Laycock, 2019). Ultimately Mr. Phillips stopped making wedding cakes and lost 40% of his business.

Unresolved Legal Issues

In a recent follow up case, *State v. Arleen Flowers, Inc.*, the small business had served flowers to a customer knowing that it was for the customer's gay partner. However, the small business refused to provide wedding flowers and referred him to another florist who would serve him. The Washington Supreme Court ruled that there was no free speech exemption for creative or artistic goods because flower arrangements did not constitute free speech. In addition, the Washington antidiscrimination law was neutral and generally applicable. While this case was pending, the Supreme Court decided Masterpiece. On review, the Washington Supreme Court unanimously reaffirmed its ruling based on the Washington adjudicatory body's neutrality. The US Supreme Court denied certiorari (144 S. Ct. 2884 (2021)).

Some Lower Court Cases Not following Masterpiece and siding with anti-discrimination statutes

- The New Mexico Supreme Court ruled against a wedding photographer who refused to shoot a same sex wedding (Dias, 2017; Elane Photography v. Willock, 309 P.3d 53 (N.M.2013)).
- The ACLU sued a Washington florist in 2015 for refusing to sell an arrangement for a gay customers' wedding (State v. Arlene Flowers, No 91615-2, 2019 WL232063 (Washington, June 6, 2019)).
- A Colorado web designer (303 Creative LLC v. Elenis, no 16-cv-02372, 2019 WL 2161111 (District Colorado May 17, 2019) refused to create wedding websites for same-sex marriages and brought a suit against the Colorado Civil Rights Commission and Attorney General arguing that they violated her free speech rights. The District Court held that her Equal Protection, due process, Free Speech, and Free Exercise rights were not violated.
- A Hawaii Bed and Breakfast was sued (Cervelli v. Aloha Bed & Breakfast, 415 P.3d 919 (Hawaii Court of Appeals 2018), certiorari rejected, 2018 FW13358586 (Hawaii July 10, 2018) certiorari denied 139 S. Ct. 1319 (2019). The lower court held that the refusal

by the bed and breakfast's sole proprietor violated the Hawaii public accommodations law, the proprietor did not have an exemption, the law did not violate the owner's right to privacy, free exercise of religion, or the right to have intimate associations.

- In a wedding venue case (*Gifford v. McCarthy*, 23 N.Y.S. 3d 422 (Appellate Division 2016)) the court held that the operators of wedding facilities were within the public accommodations law, they discriminated against a same-sex couple, their religious freedom First Amendment rights were not violated, and they had to pay compensatory damages and a fine.
- In (*Telescope Media Group v. Lindsey*, 271 F. Supp. 3d 1090 (District of Minnesota, 2017) appeal pending No. 17-3352 (8th Circuit) the court held that the Minnesota public accommodations law did not violate their First Amendment rights, free exercise of religion, equal protection nor due process rights by requiring them to serve same-sex couples.
- The Arizona Supreme Court overturned *Brush & Nib Studio, LC v. City of Phoenix*, 448 P.3rd 890 902, 2019) where the lower court used an anti-discrimination ordinance requiring a custom wedding invitation designer to service a customer.
- A Washington Circuit Court upheld the ban on conversion therapy by licensed providers by arguing that the ban did not violate the therapist's First Amendment free speech rights. (*Tingley v. Ferguson* 47 F.4th 1055, 1086+ 9th Cir Wash. 2022).
- A Colorado Federal court upheld Colorado's anti-discrimination statute where a web designer refused to create custom wedding websites for same sex marriages (*303 Creative LLC v. Elenis* 10 Cir. Colorado, 2021).

Some Lower Court Cases following Masterpiece

- The Arizona Supreme Court overturned *Brush & Nib Studio, LC v. City of Phoenix*, 448 P.3rd 890 902, 2019) where the lower court used an anti-discrimination ordinance requiring a custom wedding invitation designer to service a customer.
- In *Meriwether v. Hartop* 992 F. 3d 492, 512 (2019) a professor refusing to comply with a public college's gender pronoun policy was granted free speech protection.
- In *Chelsey Nelson Photography LLC v. Louisville/Jefferson County Metro Government* Y479 F. Supp. 3d 543, 549+, 2020) a wedding photographer's photographs were seen as speech under the First Amendment.
- Oregon ruled a Christian cake baker to pay \$135,000 in damages after the small business refused to sell a wedding cake to a lesbian couple (*Klein v. Oregon Bureau of Labor and Industry* 410 P. 3d 1051 (Oregon Court of Appeals 2018) review denied and then vacated 2019 WL 2493912 (U.S. June 17, 2019)).
- In *Lexington Fayette Urban City Human Rights Commission v. Hands on Originals* held a nonprofit promoting LBGT+ issues lacked standing to require a

printer to print its promotional materials. The appeals court denied certiorari.

While many of these cases have mixed outcomes, the litigations are expensive to small businesses.

THE SMALL BUSINESS DILEMMA

WHY ENGAGE IN STRATEGIC PLANNING

Because small businesses are being pulled into culture wars by activists, customers, and even employees the question becomes how should they prepare? The answer should start with the small business's strategic plan, values, mission, and vision. How could strategic planning help them prepare for different situations?

Strategic planning provides clear direction to an organization, clarifies its goals and objectives, and provides better tools for decision making. The process requires an in-depth analysis of the organization's macro environment and its internal environment. The environmental analysis determines the state of the organization's industry, the major political, legal, economic social and technological issues, and challenges in that organizations' current and future environments. The internal analysis determines the organization's strengths, weaknesses, and overall internal challenges.

The advantages of strategic planning include planning for a rapidly changing environment with different scenarios of the organization's reaction to external and internal events, analysis of emerging trends, realistic goals, engaged employees, better decision making tools, boundaries for decision makers, a roadmap to deal with different trends and scenarios, and requires good collaboration and decision making throughout the organization (Cote, 2020; King, 2023).

If done correctly the process should engage both management and the employees in the organization's shared vision, mission, values, and goals (Boncheck, 2013). At the end, the process should set realistic goals, plan for different scenarios, pre-plan certain decisions if some scenarios occur and thereby provide a clear path for the future environment.

Culture wars present difficult dilemmas for small businesses both externally and internally. For example, two-thirds of consumers want companies to be engaged in sociopolitical issues (Rainey, 2020). An international study found that 63% of consumers in 35 different countries want the organization to clearly explain their position on current issues (Sadler, 2023). The dilemma is that taking such a position would engage some of their consumers and internal employees and alienate others. As mentioned previously, Microsoft's initial support of Pride Month led to an attack by conservatives, which pushed Microsoft to withdraw its support, that resulted in an employee backlash that forced the company to flip flop to support Pride Month. So, their final stand received support from some consumers and negative reactions from others. In addition, while most Microsoft employees wanted the company to back Pride Month a small conservative minority did not.

The pre-planning process should examine each potential cultural issue and balance their response to the strategic plan's vision, values, and mission. The questions that should be asked are what will be the impact on each of the organization's stakeholders in addition to what will be the impact on the organization's customers and employees?

POSSIBLE STRATEGIES/OPTIONS

Strategic Option number 1: Avoidance - the main purpose is to survive, serve their customers, provide employment to employees

Because small businesses have limited resources in staff, time, energy, and money, they should do everything they can to avoid getting involved in culture wars (Torrenzano, 2023; Trickle, 2021). This is particularly true of those small businesses in states with strong antidiscrimination laws. If they do not have a strong religious conviction, they should focus on profitability and their customers. This could include most small businesses such as restaurants, dry cleaners, pizza places, tire shops, automotive repair shops, appliance outlets, and malls to name a few.

To accomplish they need to do the following:

- Avoid supporting causes in general and, particularly, those that will invoke the wrath of one side or the other (i.e., Gay Pride Events or their opposite events).
- Avoid supplying products or services that could be weaponized by one side or the other.
- Clear out any messages in their social media accounts relating to taking positions on issues, particularly controversial, culture wars related topics.
- Have an attorney and health or insurance carriers review their employee benefit programs to avoid the contraception/abortion/Viagra controversies.
- The big disadvantage is that 65% of large corporations' customers want them to take a stand on current issues. Is it not clear that the public has the same requirement for small businesses.
- Another disadvantage is the reaction of employees who feel strongly about a cause.

Strategic Option number 2: Take a stand- their religious/spiritual motives and values outweigh their profit objectives

This would include small businesses like Jack Phillips from Masterpiece Cake shop who had strongly held religious convictions. An opposite example is Victoria Secrets who openly supports Gay events, and has models of all sizes, shapes, sexual orientations, and disabilities (see S. Smith, 2023).

To accomplish either the Jack Phillips or Victoria's Secret position, they need to do the following:

- Support causes they deeply believe in such as not being open on Sunday, or expressly providing or not providing products or services associated with one side or the other in culture wars.

- Ensure that their social media platforms provide a consistent message.
- In their strategic plan or business plan, have detailed plans ready for an attack by either side. The most important action is to stick with their convictions and not flip flop.
- Have attorneys on retainer and proactively discuss their plans with these attorneys ahead of time.
- Prepare for the loss of business resulting from engaging in culture wars related activities. Financial projections should include decreased sales and revenue from negatively impacted constituencies as well as, perhaps, take into account increased sales to other constituencies who support the business's position.
- Complete a stakeholder assessment to determine whether any other stakeholders (e.g., suppliers, financiers, government agencies, etc.) may cease or limit doing business as a result of the position taken.
- Set aside an annual budget for public relations to manage any culture wars related backlash and/or take advantage of culture wars related momentum.

Strategic Option number 3: Align their actions with their purpose

As small businesses increase diverse employment, provide products across state lines, or have diverse customers there is a higher probability that culture wars related attacks can come from inside or outside or both. Yet, small businesses face increasing pressure to do good in the world or support causes in which they believe. In other words, to give consumers a reason to shop with them. In so doing, however, they need to perform strategic planning and prepare their response. To accomplish this, they need to do the following:

- The environmental scanning part of strategic planning should examine the possibility of an attack and how it would affect their survivability.
- Plan for attacks.
- Determine in advance what their reaction will be to an attack- only they can balance these competing objectives.
- Review their social media content.
- Avoid rousing the ire of any side by carefully reviewing their branding message, causes and the products and services they offer.
- Be prepared with a planned response.
- Make intentional choices to affirmatively support causes that are universally accepted or, at a minimum, are not a focus of culture wars warriors.
- Be prepared to communicate with employees and other stakeholders about why these choices have been made.
- The big point here is not that the small businesses should, in general, avoid supporting causes that their owners believe to be important but rather to be very intentional about choosing to support causes that limit the threat of culture wars related attacks on the business.

- Choose causes related to the business's core business practice. In other words, ensure there is a connection between the social issue the business supports and its operations.

It is imperative that the small business's values and its message remain consistent. This tactic works well if the company has made prosocial stands in the past (Salas et al., 2019) and is consistent in the prosocial issues it undertakes (Zheng, 2022). However, each response is another opportunity for the senior management to reflect on its actions, (Salas et al., 2019). An example is Target's backtrack on its initial refusal to sell a book by a conservative author, Mark Levin, because of their concerns about consumer reactions. They communicated that they had been offering the book for pre-sale and in a reversal stated that the stores would carry the title (Wulfsohn, 2023).

It is essential that the company's purpose be authentic and again in line with the company's values. Negative and positive examples are Gillette and Patagonia. Gillette's advertising campaign had the slogan "Be the Best Man You Can Be", which many consumers viewed as only a marketing campaign. A positive example was provided by Patagonia who has historically been viewed as positive on environmental activism. The public viewed Patagonia's actions as authentic and Gillette's as not. The most important ingredient is that their stand, messages, and action are authentic and especially in line with company's values and operations (Salas et al., 2019).

CONCLUSION

In summary, strategic planning aligned with a small business's business plan provides the mechanisms for analyzing the external and internal environments and invites the strategic planners to envision the company's potential liability for an attack and the possible impact on customers, employees and its bottom line and prepare an authentic and consistent response (Mehlman, 2023).

The examples in this paper raise some significant research questions. First, what is the role played by factors in the business's environment? For example, it will be useful to identify if there is a relationship between the stakeholder group attacking the business, response of the business – fight vs. compromise, and a positive vs. negative result for the business. It will also be useful to explore any mediating role played by environmental factors such as State anti-discriminatory legislation or absence thereof. Second, is there a legal advantage for a sole proprietor who claims religious values as a basis for refusal to sell products or services when compared to an organization that is not a sole proprietorship? Since U.S. legal system recognizes personhood of a corporation, is it possible for a corporation to declare "religious values"?

Considering that culture wars or polarization are part of the socio-political-legal forces, the issues created by this phenomenon are not likely to be resolved soon (although some writers see hope (Eshew, 2023). Businesses, and particularly small businesses due to their vulnerability, may need to engage in conducting a Culture War/Polarization

Risk Analysis. It may reduce the uncertainty of attacks by connecting the vulnerability dots.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Baldassarri and Park's Variables and S Curve of Acceptance

Baldassari and Park's (2020) list of public opinion on moral issues variables

Role of women, men better politicians, child suffer mom work, women home, less qualified women job, spec.eff.women (?), abortion necessity, extramarital sex, laws on pornography, premarital sex, sex education in the schools, teen birth, abortion necessity, extramarital sex, pornography laws, premarital sex, sex education in the schools, teen births, gay discrimination, gay adoption, gays in the military, gay teachers, same sex wrong, gay marriage, legal marijuana, capital punishment murder, easier divorce, euthanasia, suicide, spanking, defense spending crime, space science, foreign aid, urban unrest, USSR cooperation)

(Note this is an attempt to understand the shortened names for their variables,

Baldassari and Park's (2020) list of public opinion on economic issues

Guaranteed jobs and income, government spending, social security, health insurance, environment, public schools, childcare, welfare, immigration, food stamps, poor, aids, assistance for blacks, government versus the free market, government involvement, aid for college, homeless

Baldassari and Park's (2020) list of public opinion on civil rights issues

Aid to blacks, equal treatment, ensure equal opportunity, equal rights too far, unequal chances, worry about equality, affirmative action, blacks deserve more, equal chances, no favor blacks, blacks try harder, different blacks succeed, blacks positive change, civil fights too fast, fair jobs for blacks, school busing, school integration.

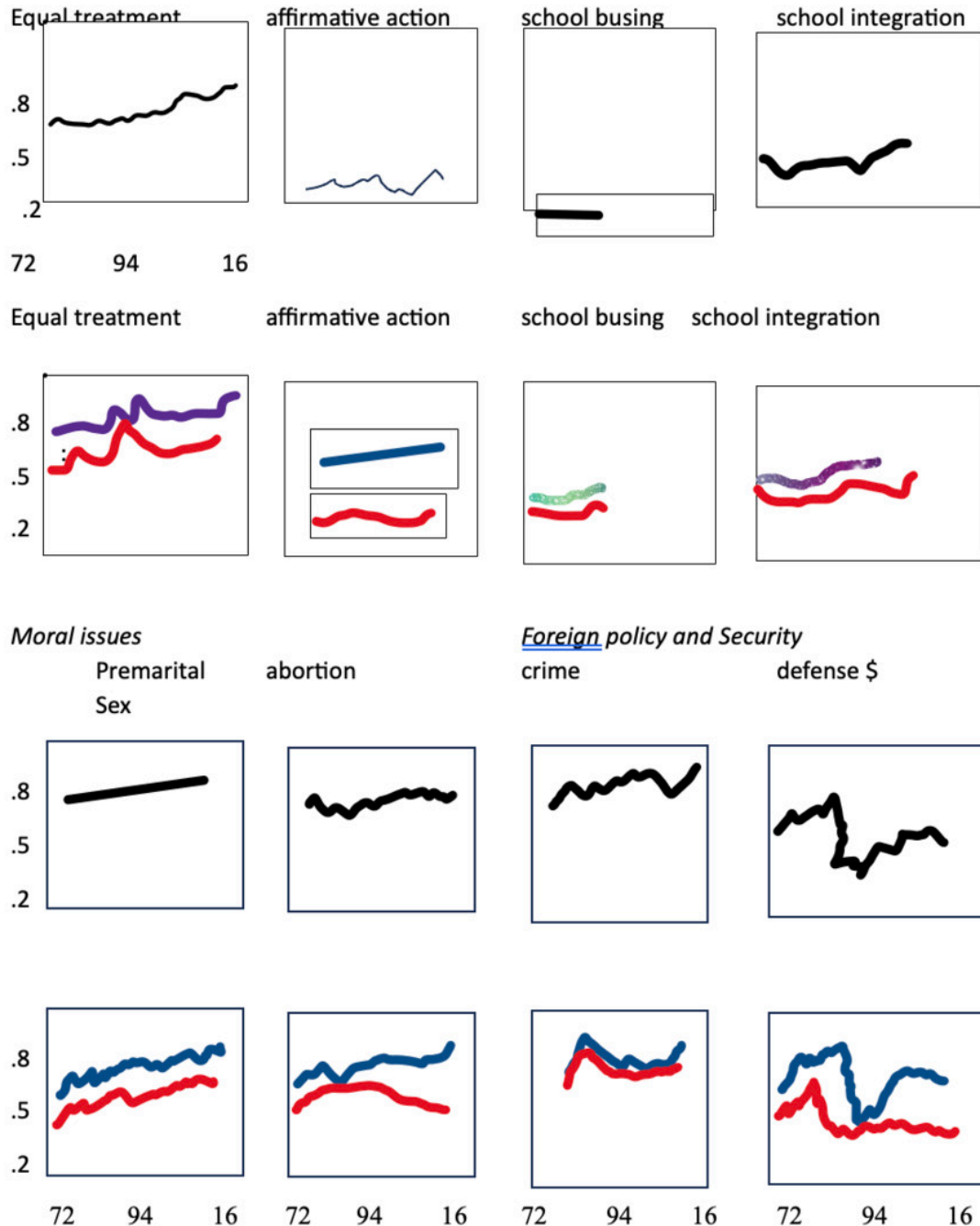
Baldassari and Park's Typical S Curve of Acceptance



Appendix 2. Baldassari and Park (2020) graphs

Trends in public opinion on civil rights, morals, then foreign policy, and crime.

The top chart is the aggregate on that variable, the bottom chart shows the Democrats on the top graph/line and the Republicans on the second graph/line below.

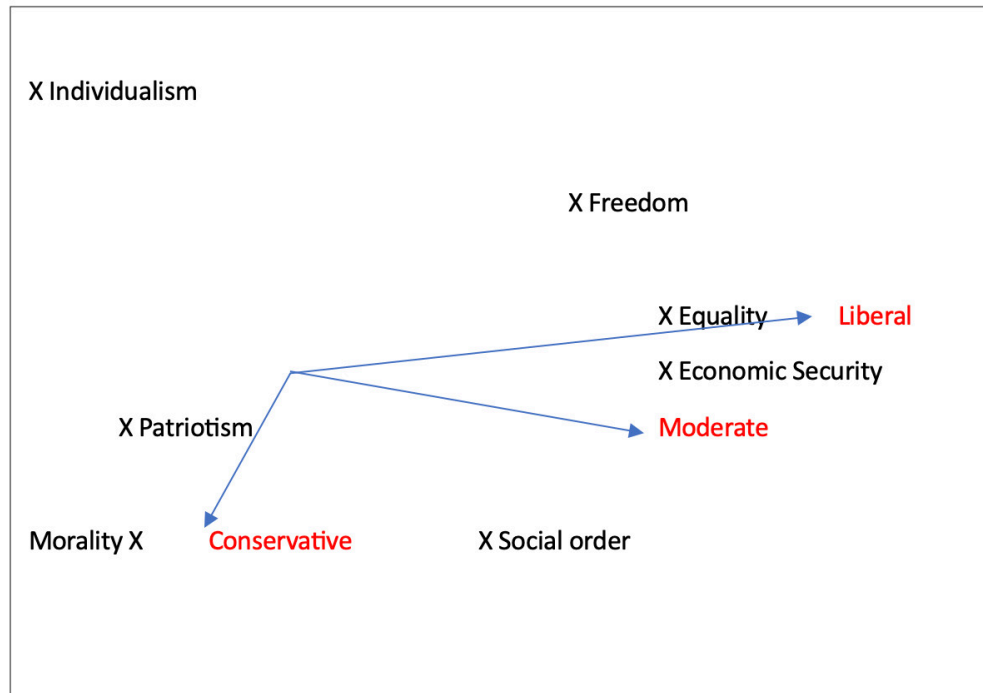


Civil Rights issues

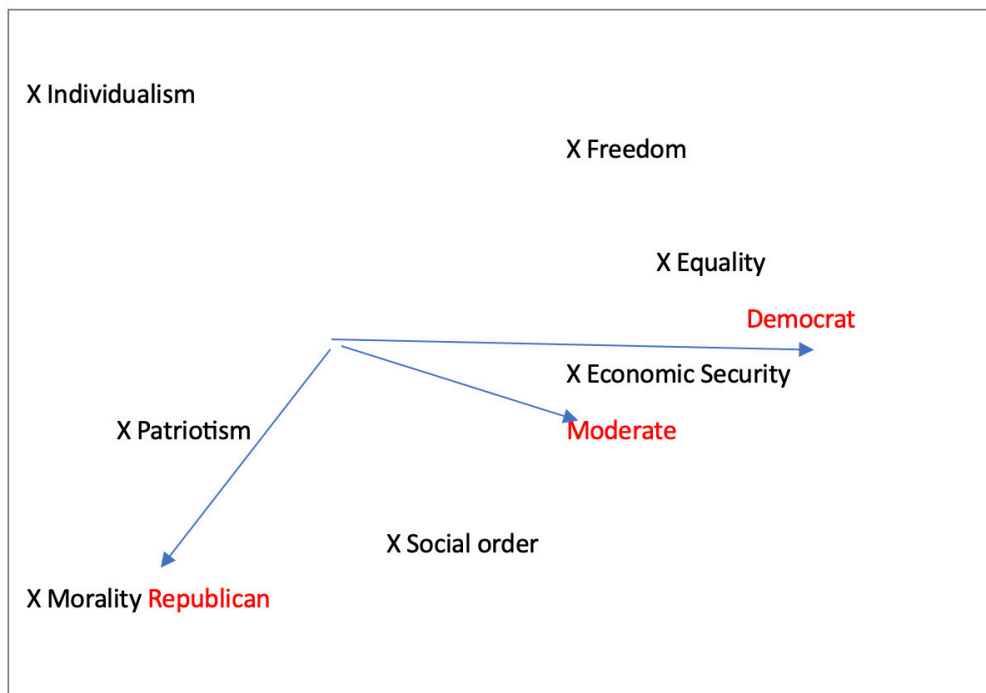
Source: Baldassari, D. and Park, B. (2020). Was there a culture war? Partisan polarization and secular trends in US Public opinion. *The Journal of Politics* 82 (3).

Appendix 3

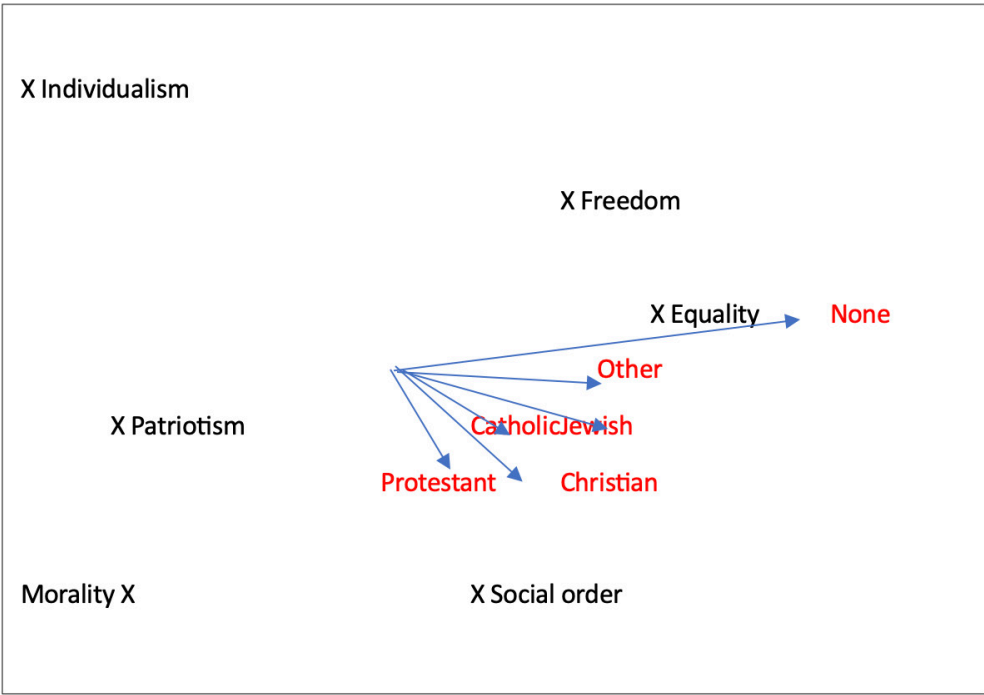
Jacoby's (2014) Geometric Model of forced value ranking provides a quantitative measure of the distance between two groups shown by the length of the arc between the arrows. The length of each arrow provides a measurement of the strength with which that value is held.



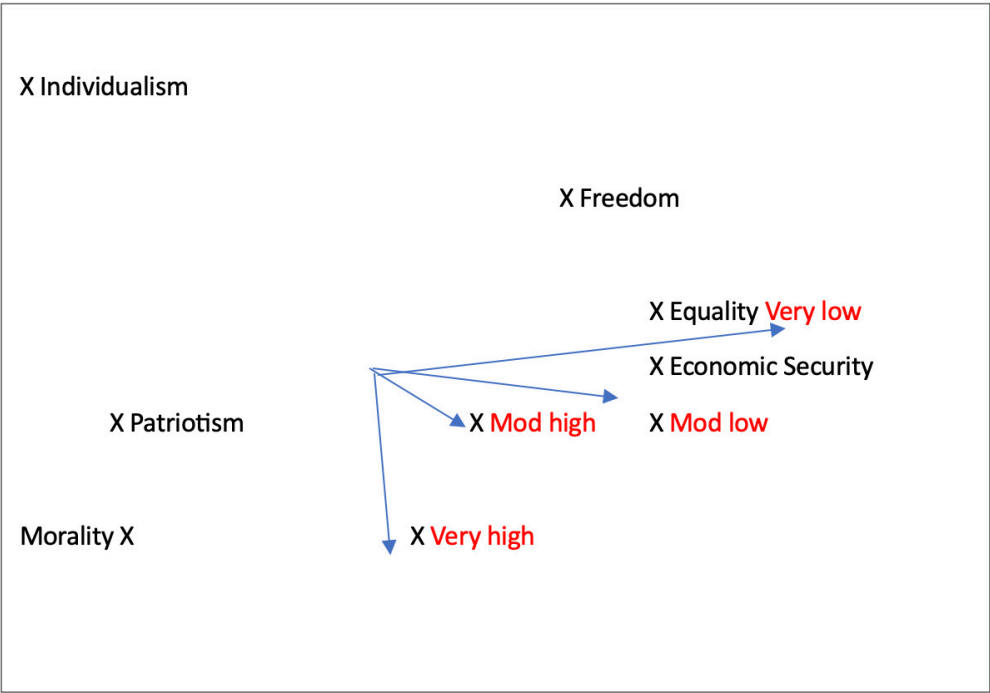
Mean vectors for subgroups defined by ideology



Mean vectors for subgroups defined by party affiliation



Mean vectors for subgroups defined by religious affiliation



Mean vectors for subgroups defined by religious commitment

Source: Jacoby, W. G. 9 2014). Is there a culture war/ Conflicting value structures in American public opinion. *The American Political Science Review* 108 1 (4). 754-771.

Appendix 4. Background data of the Issues

BACKGROUND DATA ON SOME RELEVANT DEMOGRAPHICS AND ISSUES

While the above explains how intense the conflict has become, the question becomes who are the protagonists and how big are some of the issues? The following provides some meaningful data about the biggest issues such as LGBTQ+, religious conservatives, abortions, and contraception.

Background on LGBTQ+ Demographics

In February 2023, the Gallup poll found that 86% of the respondents identified themselves as straight or heterosexual, 7.2% saw themselves as LGBT, and 7% would not answer. Of the LGBTQ+ respondents 13.4% were lesbian, 20.2% identified as gay, 58.2% bisexual, 8.8% as transgender, and 6% identified as other LGBT (J. M. Jones, 2023, 2024).

LGBTQ+ was higher in the subset of the younger population with 19.7% of Gen Z and 11.2% of millennials as opposed to the subset of older generations – 3.3% of Generation X and 2.7% of Baby Boomers and 1.6% of the Silent generation (Gallop, 2024).

Background on Evangelical Christians Demographics

A survey 2020 survey of religion found that overall, 14% of the population were white evangelical protestants. The percentage varies with age: 7% of the age 18-29, 12% of the ages 30-49, 17% of the age 50-64, and 22% of the population 65 and older (*US Religion Census*, 2020).

Background on same sex marriage attitudes and demographics

A Gallup survey found that nationwide support for same-sex marriages reached 50% in 2011, 60% in 2015, and 70% in 2021 (J. M. Jones, 2023). Same sex marriages were .5%

of all US Households while unmarried same-sex marriages were .4% of all US Households (J. M. Jones, 2023: US Census Bureau, 2021). McCarthy (2018) reports that two thirds of American support same-sex marriages.

Background on abortions

The Guttmacher Institute found that 19.6women per 1000 had abortions in 2008 (R. K. Jones & Kooistra, 2011) which declined in 2017 to 13.5 of 1000 women (Jones, et al 2017).

Background on contraception

The National Center for Health Statistics (2023) reports that 14.0% of women aged 15-49 currently use the pill, 10.4% use a long-acting reversible contraception (intrauterine device or contraceptive implant), 18.1% use female sterilization, and 5.6% use male sterilization (also see Elfin, 2023).

Background on legal issue- Employee Benefits

Abortion will cause the small business to reconsider its benefits if it offers any. Small businesses in red leaning states who offer benefits will have to carefully consider the impact. For example, some laws in some states allow any citizen to sue any organization or anyone who provides supports to females seeking abortions (Goodman, 2023; Pope, 2022). If they provide health benefits to males for erectile dysfunction, are they obligated to provide reproductive benefits? If they knowingly or unknowingly provide support to female employees, they could be sued. The result will be for them to carefully approve any travel or other benefits (Goodman, 2023; Pope, 2022).