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# CONTINUING CULTURE WAR?

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How the sex education policies of the Trump administration can be seen as the result of a continuing culture war



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JULIA HELSLOOT  
S4810201  
Dr. Albertine Bloemendal

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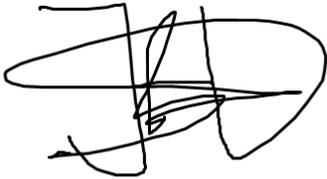
Teacher who will receive this document: Dr. Albertine Bloemendal

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Name of student: Julia Helsloot

Student number: 4810201

## **Abstract**

The United States has one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the western world. Sex education in the US is a heavily debated subject and highly influenced by federal policies. However, the Trump administration promotes sex education policies that were proven to be less effective in addressing teen pregnancy rates. This thesis outlines the history of sex education in the US and different policies throughout presidential administrations. It shows how sex education is one of the key topics in the American culture war. It focuses on the involvement of social conservative groups in politics and explains their possible influences on administrations. By looking at teen pregnancy rates throughout the years, different presidential policies on sex education, and the voter blocs of different administrations, this thesis reveals a pattern of religious influences on presidential administrations and how this might have an influence on the choices of the Trump administration.

Key words: sex education, abstinence only, Obama administration, Trump administration, culture war, Religious Right

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## **Abbreviations**

AFLA = Adolescent Family Life Act

AOSE = Abstinence Only Sex Education

AOUM = Abstinence Only Until Marriage

CBAE = Community-Based Abstinence Education

CDC = Center for Disease Control and Prevention

CSE = Comprehensive Sex Education

EU = European Union

FYSB = Family and Youth Service Bureau

HHS = Department of Health and Human Services

NAEA = National Abstinence Education Association

NEA = National Education Association

OAH = Office of Adolescent Health

PHS = Public Health Service

PREP = Personal Responsibility Education Program

SIECUS = Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States

SRAE = Sexual Risk Avoidance Education

STD/I = sexual transmitted disease/infection

TPPP = Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program

US = United States

## **Introduction**

During a semester abroad in Louisiana, I had a discussion with a 21 year old student named Mary Faith about safe sex and whether or not they could get pregnant from unprotected sex when they were intoxicated. She thought they could not, because a body does not function properly when it is intoxicated and this must also affect the reproductive system. The fact that a highly educated student in the United States was unsure about whether someone could get pregnant when intoxicated made me wonder how sex education was taught in the United States. I also noticed that there were several peers who already had children. Louisiana is the state with the third most teen pregnancies in the US; 27.5 per 1000 females from the ages 15-19 (United Health Foundation). Teen pregnancy rates in the United States are higher than in most rich countries in the world, with pregnancy rates twice as high as those from the European Union (Merelli). The large difference between teen pregnancies in the US and the EU caught my interest and led to this thesis.

Sex education is a topic in the US that is highly debated. Large institutions such as the Guttmacher Institute and the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS) have argued that comprehensive sex education (CSE) is the most effective form of sex education in preventing teen pregnancy (Santelli et al. 402; SIECUS; Guttmacher Institute). CSE programs offer theory on contraceptive methods and offers medically correct information on sexual health (Ramey and Young 315). However, this form of sex education is barely used in the United States.

President Donald Trump has been pushing abstinence-only sex education (AOSE) policies (Staff; Meyer). AOSE programs only include information on abstinence until marriage and how this is supposedly the only manner of contraception that will prevent premarital pregnancies (Ramey and Young 315). Trump reversed some of the CSE policies President Barack Obama had implemented before him and proposed a new program that

promoted sexual risk reduction and replaced Obama's policies (Belluck). Sexual risk reduction is meant to reduce the likelihood of premarital sex among youths, but it does not offer theory on contraceptive methods and therefore can be seen as a form of AOSE.

Teen pregnancy rates are a complex topic and influenced by more factors than sex education in schools. Examples of these other factors are poverty, less access to contraceptives, ethnicity, and education (Stanger-Hall and Hall 2). However, the focus of this thesis is not to study the factors influencing teen pregnancies, but the political choices made around sex education and teen pregnancies and especially the political choices made by President Trump. It will mostly focus on why he does not follow the forms of sex education scientists say is most effective in preventing teen pregnancies. The research question of this thesis is: Why did President Trump select the sex education policies which advocate methods that have proven to be less effective in preventing teen pregnancy and how does this fit in the history of sex education policies and the historical pattern of presidential policies in the American culture war?

To answer this research question, it is important to get a clear understanding of the history on sex education in the United States and why different administrations promoted different forms of sex education and how this fits in the American culture war. The American culture war is a cultural conflict about the true national identity of the United States between orthodox and progressive social groups on morals, principles, and ideals. Examples of topics in this conflict are education, religion, and human rights.

In the past, sex education in schools has switched from abstinence sex education to more comprehensive sex education including information about contraceptives and back (SIECUS). Institutions such as Pew Research Centre, Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, or the Guttmacher Institute have focused on the knowledge of safe sexual health among youth. For the most part, these existing studies draw conclusions on the

effectiveness of different forms of sex education. In order to answer the research question, it is important to look at this information and combine this with the political dimension of sex education.

Academic Alexandra M. Lord wrote in her book *Condom Nation: the US Government's Sex Education Campaign from World War I to the Internet* how the United States has failed to settle on a specific form of sex education in schools because of the battle between the supporters of CSE and abstinence sex education (Lord). Other scholars such as James Davison Hunter and Andrew Hartman explain that sex education is one of the key topics in an ongoing cultural conflict between the people of the United States. Hunter wrote his book in 1991 and he identified the concept of 'family' as "the most conspicuous field of conflict in the culture war" (Hunter 176). The concept of family included abortion rights, gay rights, women's rights, and also sex education. Andrew Hartman wrote one of the more recent key works on the culture wars in the United States and he also argues that sex education and family values are one of the key topics in the American culture war.

Interestingly, in his book that was published in 2015 during Barack Obama's second term, Hartman argued that the culture war was over and that the American people have accepted the changes and adjusted to a new nation (Hartman 285). This thesis demonstrates that this declaration might have come too soon and that the Trump administration shows that this is not yet the case. The books mentioned before are key works on sex education in the United States and culture wars. However, none of these books have yet taken the Trump administration into consideration. This thesis will place the Trump administration in the existing history and so demonstrate that the culture wars may not be over yet. This demonstration will simultaneously answer why Trump has chosen to go back to forms of sex education that were not scientifically endorsed, but seem to be based more on moral and religious principles and considerations..

This thesis will show how sex education has been influenced by politics and has become an instrument in the American culture war. It will describe how the broader context of the culture wars has affected the choices presidents have made. It will focus specifically on the evidence-based CSE programs of the Obama administration and the reason why the Trump administration stopped these programs when he came into office. Understanding this – and the power of social conservative religious voters, particularly in the Republican party in this context helps understand the choices of the Trump administration.

This thesis answers the research question based on an analysis of a combination of the primary and secondary sources. The secondary sources cover the historical dimension of sex education in the United States as well as the academic debates on the effectiveness of different forms of sex education such as books by scholars like Lord, Hunter and Hartman. Because of the fact that there was less academic literature available on the more recent developments on sex education policies and culture war in United States politics, where necessary this thesis used primary sources such as newspaper articles, government websites, and statistics, for example from the Guttmacher institute and Pew Research Center.

Chapter one of this thesis will describe the historical development of sex education in the United States. It provides a historical perspective on the rise of key social conservative religious political advocacy groups and the beginning of the culture war. This thesis will also refer to these groups as the Religious Right, as scholars such as Lord, Williams, and others do. It will focus on the history of sex education in the United States and its relationship to teen pregnancy rates. The chapter will start with a general history of sex education in the United States. After this, the chapter will describe the different policies that several presidential administrations implemented in their battle against teen pregnancy. This chapter will answer the following sub-questions: ‘How did sex education become a key element in the American

culture war?’ and ‘What kind of programs and funding regarding sex education in high school developed under President Ronald Reagan up until President Barack Obama and why?’.

Since the Obama Administration’s approach demonstrates a clear break with previous administrations, chapter two will focus on the policies that the Obama administration implemented and the academic research regarding the effectiveness of different forms of sex education, thus answering the following sub-questions: ‘What were the policies that the Obama administration implemented regarding sex education?’ and ‘What forms of sex-education have scientifically proven to be most effective in reducing teen-pregnancies?’ Particular attention will be given to the development of sex education during the Obama administration to provide a good understanding of how the situation was before Donald Trump was voted into office. Subsequently, the chapter will focus on academic research and relevant statistics found by research institutes on the effectiveness of different categories of sex education related to teen pregnancy rates.

The third chapter will focus on the Donald Trump administration and describe his policies and the changes he has made regarding federal funding for programs and grants for sex education, which go against what science endorses. The chapter will then delve into possible explanations for these changes. It will describe the tactical political interests of the Trump administration by looking at Trump’s political dependency on social conservative voters and the policies concerning sex education that the Trump administration has implemented in the last four years. The sub questions that will be addressed in this chapter are: ‘What are the changes that the Trump administration has implemented in the past four years?’ and ‘How can these decisions to support these policies despite the fact that science does not support them be understood as a continuation of the culture war?’

## **1. Historical context**

To answer the research question, it is important to get a good understanding of the history of sex education in the United States. Paragraph 1.1 will explain the development of sex education in the United States and how this has influenced teen pregnancy rates. It will also explain how former US presidents have dealt with legislation and funding regarding programs and institutions that provide sex education. Paragraph 1.2 will discuss the political dimension of sex education and how and why this became a controversial political issue. It will also explain where the support for AOSE came from. After that paragraph 1.3 will focus on the culture war and how sex education became a key element of these culture war.

### **1.1 History of sex education in the United States**

There is little literature about sex education in the United States before 1900 (Pearsall 378). Sex education was traditionally provided by the parents, but this often turned out to be a very minimal conversation with a strong focus on religious standards. According to Pearsall, abstinence until marriage was the social norm and people were expected to follow this norm because “sex should take place within marriage for reproductive purposes” (378). She also explains that in this male dominated time, women were not seen as sexual beings and female sexual pleasure was not considered to be important. Sexual intercourse was only for procreation and that was only appropriate after one was married (378).

Before 1900, sex education was not expected to be taught in schools. This changed in 1912. Huber and Firmin write how Granville Stanley Hall, a psychologist and an educator, wrote the book *Adolescence: its Psychology and its Relation to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* that described the early period in one’s life where sexual reproduction is possible; adolescence. Hall emphasized how essential sexual self-discipline is for adolescents and that they should be taught how to control themselves

(31). In 1912, the National Education Association (NEA) asked for the implementation of sex education in high schools to ensure that children in these adolescent age groups were taught the essential sexual restraint that Hall wrote about (Huber and Firmin 31).

The first high school to experiment with sex education was a high school in Chicago in the school year of 1913-1914. The sex education that was taught included physical facts, information about sexually transmitted diseases, and the importance of saving yourself until marriage. The lessons were taught by physicians, male physicians would teach the boys and female physicians would teach the girls. This was not fully accepted by all parents of these children, as some believed that this kind of information would awaken a sexual curiosity in children and encourage sexual activity among adolescents. As a result, the program was terminated after one semester (Huber and Firmin 32).

As Huber and Firmin explain in their article, sex education still was a controversial topic in the 1910-20s and many parents did not approve of any form of sex education being taught in schools, for they believed it would make children curious about sex rather than prevent them from participating in it (35). In the 1920s, many young people admitted that they participated in sexual activity without having had any form of sex education in high school (36). Alexandra Lord explains in her book *Condom nation: the US Government's Sex Education Campaign from World War I to the Internet* that during World War I, children were rebelling against the rules of society and this led to a rise in venereal diseases and premarital pregnancies (27). All of these circumstances encouraged a quiet integration of sex education in public schools. After this, sex education was taught at more and more schools and to prevent a similar situation as in Chicago in 1913, the sex education was integrated in other classes. It was blended into English, economics, biology, and more classes to discretely teach children about this subject. It also changed focus towards "family life" as a part of home economics classes and taught students that marriage was necessary to provide a safe

environment for young children, and to make sure that this was guaranteed, one should save sex until marriage (Huber and Firmin 36). Students were also taught that proper and healthy young adults would stay abstinent until marriage and sexual intercourse would come naturally after that. This mindset set the tone for sex education for the following years (Lord 28).

From 1927 onwards, almost half of the schools in the United States were teaching some form of sex education blended into other classes. “From the 1920s through the 1950s, the goal of American public school sex education was to encourage premarital abstinence and faithfulness within marriage to better ensure a satisfying and happy marriage” (Huber and Firmin 35). This form of sex education was still primarily abstinence based. During this time, sex education advocates used the argument that when you stayed abstinent until marriage, the sexual intercourse during your marriage would be more fulfilling. This argument acknowledged that sex was for more than solely procreation but that those pleasures were meant for marriage and not for unmarried adolescents.

Until the 1960s, sex education was taught discreetly in schools, still with a focus on the importance of family life and staying abstinent until marriage. The Sexual Revolution in the 1960s and 1970s influenced the public display of sexuality and that, in turn, influenced the sex education in schools. This revolution led to noticeable changes around sexual attitudes and behaviors concerning contraceptive methods, sex education, and government funding for these matters (Huber and Firmin 36). In 1963 Dr Calderone founded Sex Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS). She recognized that the Sexual Revolution called for a form of objective sex education instead of punishment. Many educators agreed with this, including a school nurse from Anaheim, California, Sally Williams, who created a sexual education curriculum that described sexual intercourse graphically for younger students and provided information on contraceptives to older students (Hartman 75).

In 1965, The Supreme Court ruled that the use of contraceptives was a constitutional right for married couples in Supreme Court case *Griswold v. Connecticut*. Later, in 1972, the court gave the same right to use birth control for unmarried couples in *Eisenstadt v. Baird* (Findlaw). However, schools were still reserved in including the use of contraceptives in the sex education programs. The sexual revolution broke down barriers to premarital sex, which resulted in an increase of nonmarital parenthood (Huber and Firmin 39). This led to calls for a change in sex education and under President Lyndon Johnson, the United States Office of Education funded agencies to develop sex education programs that included information on how to prevent STDs and pregnancies when participating in premarital sex, while still emphasizing family values above everything else (Resources 87).

## **1.2 Government influence on the form of sex education**

This government funding was very important for sexual health programs, because it allowed them to grow. It also increased the government's influence on sex education programs, for this funding enabled the government to choose the kinds of programs that would receive funding. Most institutions that offered sex education, whether it is abstinence only, comprehensive, or both, need financial support to afford it. Public schools that want to teach sex education need to have the funds to pay the salary of a professional who can teach students. Even though public schools can technically decide which type of sex education they want to provide, they are influenced by the government and government funding. If schools do not have the funds to support their education, they will not be able to carry it out regardless of their good intentions (Meyer).

The governmental support for sex education in schools that included contraceptive methods sparked malcontent among the Religious Right in the United States. In response to the developments around sex education of the 1960s, social conservative Americans felt that

their religious nation and way of life was threatened by the secular power in the United States. This led to religious conservatives actively engaging in politics in the 1970s. A political alliance emerged between fundamentalists, conservative evangelicals, Catholics, Jews, and Mormons, also referred to as the Religious Right, which can be considered as the start of the American culture war (Hartman 71). The issue for the Religious Right was the threat of a secular state and traditional family values. Visible, for example, in the elimination of the school prayer, the legalization of abortion, and the upcoming of feminism, and gay and lesbian rights and the increase of CSE in schools, that all incurred in the 1970s. CSE in schools was especially a problem, as the conservatives believed it promoted sexual activity among teens. Because of this, a social movement in the Christian Right wing arose; the abstinence movement. It was formed by single-issue organizations such as Abstinence Clearinghouse, National Abstinence Education Association (NAEA), Silver Ring Thing, and True Love Waits. As CSE emerged in the United States, this movement grew and they gained the support of more and more emerging groups (Williams 424).

At the end of the 1970s, new Christian Right pro-family groups from the abstinence movement, such as Concerned Women for America, Citizens for Excellence in Education, and Focus on the Family, fought for AOSE and tried to abolish funding for programs that discussed contraceptive methods in sex education. This was because the Christian Right considered CSE an effort from the liberals to ““undermine all parental authority ... subvert all Christian morality ... [by] promoting sexual perversion, homosexuality, pornography, abortion, family destruction, population control””(qtd in Williams 424). To undermine these upcoming and increasing CSE programs in United States, the abstinence movement tried to abolish these CSE programs from public schools. When removing these programs was not possible, the Christian groups wanted to control what was taught; they wanted the schools to teach AOSE (Williams 425).

James Davison Hunter wrote in his book *Culture Wars* how there was a struggle to define America. The culture war shifted from being a conflict between the Protestants and the Catholics to a cultural conflict for the national identity of the US between orthodox and progressive groups. A cultural conflict is defined as “political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding” (Hunter 42). Hunter called this dispute – starting with the organization of the Religious Right in the 1970s – the ‘contemporary culture war’. However, since this book was written in 1990, this thesis will refer to this culture war as the ‘American culture war’. The worry about public education and how and what American children are taught in schools is one of the key topics in this contemporary culture war (50–51). After all, the schools are the place where the next generation of the United States are taught the American norms and values (Hartman 200) as “schools are the primary institutional means of reproducing community and national identity” (Hunter 198). He explains that this cultural conflict is between two groups, orthodox and progressive and it emerged in the 1950s when “the essential lines of division between orthodox and progressive forces in America’s main faiths had been drawn” (Hunter 85). This included the orthodox groups from several religions, namely Protestantism, Judaism, and Catholicism that came together to form a political alliance of groups that shared this orthodox vision (85-90). How this political alliance had a big influence on politics in the United States will be explained in the next part of the chapter.

### **1.3 Presidential administrations and the American culture war**

The first election where it became obvious what kind of influence the culture war had on a presidential administration was the 1980 presidential election where Ronald Reagan was elected president. In this year, the Religious Right helped Reagan get elected for president, which exhibited the political influence of this group (Hartman 72). During Reagan’s presidency, a conservative agenda set the tone for United States politics. As the Religious

Right was under the assumption that the secular power in the United States was threatening the traditional family unit, the Reagan administration introduced the first federal AOSE program the Adolescent Family Life Act (AFLA) which promoted self-discipline and purity and promoted the concept of the traditional family unit (SIECUS; Hartman 72). In the 1980s, the Religious Right had also gathered support from Congressional advocates which contributed to the large funding for AOSE programs, instead of the CSE programs (Williams 425).

Reagan's successor, George H. W. Bush, continued this AOSE program and teen pregnancy rates of females of the ages 15 to 19 years old continued to increase (Merelli). The campaign of George H. W. Bush exhibited the acknowledgement of the political power of the Religious Right and how presidential candidates know that that is the group to convince to have a chance to win an election. While Bush originally was a supporter of the spread of information on birth control in his early career, he publicly renounced this support in the 1980s. The public's opinion on sex education had shifted and a movement that was against birth control and CSE emerged and formed a substantial part of the Republican voters. Bush had to completely switch his view on sex education to satisfy this group and gain their votes to win the presidency (Lord 164). Lord also explains that, once he was elected president in 1988, Bush tried to push the federal government to support the views of the Religious Right on sex education. He did this so excessively that, even though he did not win the support of the Religious Right eventually, the government would still favor AOSE programs over CSE programs for the foreseeable future (169-170). This complete switch in policies to gain the votes of a religious group influenced the entire country.

When President Bill Clinton campaigned, most Americans knew that Clinton's views on sexual health, STD's, teen pregnancy, and sex education were unlike those of his predecessor. When Clinton was elected in 1992, teenage pregnancy rates started to decrease

again (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). He had appointed CSE promoter Joycelyn Elders as surgeon general of the Public Health Service (PHS) who was very outspoken on adolescent sexual health and had tried to create programs to provide students with free condoms. This was met with extreme opposition from the far right and after she publicly promoted masturbation as essential for the development in 1994, she was let go by President Clinton, who was pressured by the far Right (Lord 1, 170–71).

In 1996, President Clinton signed the 1996 Welfare Reform Bill that included the Section 510 Title V Abstinence Education Program, a program that funded grants for AOSE (Huber and Firmin 41). In 1992, there were 60.3 pregnancies per 1000 females age 15-19. In 2000, this was only 47.7, which is a drop of 12.6 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). The Clinton administration enacted Section 510 after heavy debate in Congress, where the votes were divided between abstinence-only sex education and abstinence-plus sex education, which has a strong focus on abstinence but also includes information on other contraceptive methods (Haskins and Bevan; Ramey and Young 314). Section 510 of Title V only allowed grants for educational or motivational programs which exclusively taught abstinence education, not on the basis of fear and with the acknowledgement that sexual intercourse is not only for procreation, but that those pleasures are meant for marriage. Because of a guideline in this bill that said “it is not necessary to place equal emphasis on each element of the definition”, states could be a little flexible with designing their programs and message. What this meant exactly is not clear, but states had a little more freedom to determine what they wanted to teach, except for contraceptive methods, which were not allowed to be discussed (SIECUS; Haskins and Bevan).

States had the freedom to decide how they wanted to divide the funds among programs, however, “the funds can only be spent on activities that meet the detailed definition of abstinence education” (Haskins and Bevan). It seemed like there was a correlation between

sex education that included contraceptive methods and a decrease in teen pregnancies.

However, as mentioned before there were also other factors that could have influenced the drop in teen pregnancies.

With the internet becoming a more day to day thing in the lives of teenagers, some teens had the freedom to look up information about sexual health online. A case study by Thanomwong Poorisat and Arul Chib explains how internet can work as a sex education tool. They explained how interactively obtaining information on forums for example can be more productive than passively receiving information (3). Also, the internet is not dependent on governmental funding and restrictions like state institutions are, so there is more freedom to discuss sexual health, how to have safe sexual intercourse, and different contraceptive methods. This access to comprehensive information about sexual health can be another explanation of the drop in teen pregnancies.

In 2000, George W. Bush was elected president. The Bush administration was stricter about the distribution of funding for AOSE. In 2002, the Bush administration introduced the Community Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) program (Huber and Firmin 42). The budget for abstinence-only education rose from \$97 million in funds in 2002 to over \$214 million in funds in 2008. The Bush administration also limited the access to federal funding for states that preferred sex education that was not abstinence based. This change in funding appears to have contributed to a drop of only 7.5 in the birth rates per 1000 females ages 15-19, which is a smaller drop in birth rates per 1000 females ages 15-19 than during the Clinton administration (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

Furthermore, the Bush administration took a precaution with which they hoped to limit the public discussion on sex education. The Public Health Service and the Department of Health and Human Services offered almost no information on factors that could promote or influence teen pregnancy of sexually transmittable diseases. It was even rumored that the

Bush administration may have played an active role in “activities ranging from rewriting federally funded websites on sexual health to repeatedly auditing organizations that advocate comprehensive sex education” (Lord 184). With these strict and aggressive measures to limit the debate on sex education, the American population did the opposite of what the Bush administration intended to achieve. Instead of shrinking, the number of Americans that believed in CSE and supported open discussion of sex and sex education grew (Lord 185).

To summarize, sex education was discreetly taught from the 1920s until the 1950s due to disapproval of sex education among the American people (Huber and Firmin 35). This was until the sexual revolution in the 1960s and 1970s, which was a complete turning point for sex education policies. When the government noticed that the sexual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s led to a change in sexual attitudes and a subsequent uprising in premarital sex, they started to invest in sex education programs that helped parents and teachers educate students about their sexual health and safe intercourse. This included information on how to prevent STDs and pregnancies when participating in premarital sex, while still emphasizing family values above everything else. Christian Right groups did not agree with this development and, with the help of influential Congressional advocates that supported abstinence until marriage, they changed the federal funding policies to fund AOSE programs.

Presidents like Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush supported AOSE in schools. George H. W. Bush publicly changed his opinion on sex education to gain the votes of the Religious Right, who were a large part of Republican voters and necessary to win the presidency. Bill Clinton supported AOSE, but he also allowed some programs to include information on other contraceptive methods than staying abstinent. George W. Bush increased funding for AOSE from \$97 million to \$214 million and later tried to limit the public debate on sex education, which led to many states only being able to teach AOSE and later stopped all conversation on sex education.

With the support for CSE rising among Americans, George W. Bush's successor, Barack Obama, had gained enough support to change the policies on sex education once he was in office. This will be discussed in the next chapter.

## **2. The Obama administration and scientific proof**

This chapter will focus on the Obama administration and its policies on sex education. It will explain how his policies were a break from previous administrations in the way he funded institutions and programs regarding sex education. Paragraph 2.1 will discuss the policies implemented by President Obama and the programs and institution started during this administration. In paragraph 2.2, it will describe research on the different forms of abstinence sex education (AOSE) versus comprehensive sex education (CSE) and the effectiveness in preventing teen pregnancies. After that, paragraph 2.3 will then compare the Obama administration with previous administration and point out the differences between these administrations.

### **2.1 The Obama administration**

The 2008 presidential elections were the most diverse elections in the history of the United States. A record number of 131 million people voted in 2008, with an enormous increase in the turnout rate of minority eligible voters. Because of this, “blacks made up 12.1%, Hispanics 7.4% and Asians 2.5%” (NW et al. 1). From those three groups, the majority voted for Barack Obama. However, he was not fully supported by white voters, only 43% of all white voters voted for Barack Obama in 2008, while 55% voted for his Republican opponent John McCain (NW et al. 1). Looking at the political philosophy of the voters, 78% of voters with a conservative philosophy voted for McCain and only 20% of conservative voters voted for Obama (*How Groups Voted in 2008 | Roper Center for Public Opinion Research*). This shows that the Obama administration did not have a large conservative supporter base during his presidency.

During the elections, President Barack Obama campaigned with a fierce support for CSE and when he was inaugurated as president, he wanted to defund the programs that were

devoted to abstinence education (Williams 419; O’Neill). CSE would include the explanation of contraceptive methods to prevent pregnancies and STDs while being sexually active. When he came into office in 2009, the policy on sex education changed drastically.

In a break with previous administrations, the Obama administration decided to make the funding of sex education programs conditional on the ‘evidence-based’ effectiveness of these programs. In this case, evidence-based meant that these programs were based on results from academic research surrounding this topic to ensure that they would be successful. In particular, there was academic evidence that these programs would contribute to the reduction of teen pregnancy in the United States (Kappeler and Farb s1). With this knowledge, President Obama drastically changed the sex education system by almost completely eliminating AOSE and increasing the funding for evidence-based CSE. Furthermore, he proposed a “pregnancy prevention program” that would create funding for programs that offered CSE (Huber and Firmin 43). In the federal budget proposal for fiscal year 2010, the Obama administration budgeted \$190 million for new sex education initiatives and transferred funding from Bush Jr’s Community Based Abstinence Education Program to these new initiatives (Planned Parenthood 5).

As mentioned before, President Obama did not depend on conservative Christians to win the elections. Furthermore, in the first two years of his presidency, there was a Democratic majority both in the House of Representatives and in the Senate (*House of Representatives Big Board - Election Results 2008 - The New York Times*; *Senate Big Board - Election Results 2008 - The New York Times*). This gave Obama the support in Congress that he needed to set up these programs and initiatives and abruptly end the abstinence-only programs from the Bush administration and earlier administrations (Lozano).

The initiatives were called the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP) and the Personal Responsibility Education Program (PREP). The TPPP started in 2010 when federal

funds were devoted to help evidence-based sex education to focus on teen pregnancy prevention. It also resulted in the establishment of the Office of Adolescent Health (OAH) (Koh 1). The OAH created grants that were focused on reducing teen pregnancies. It also supported pregnant teens or teens who were parenting with the Pregnancy Assistance Fund, which was also set up during the Obama administration (Kappeler and Farb s4). PREP, a program that awards grants to State agencies that educate young people on contraception and abstinence to prevent STDs as well as unwanted pregnancies, also started in 2010 (“State Personal Responsibility Education Program Fact Sheet”).

To start this program in 2010, the Obama administration had budgeted \$110 million in federal funds for the TPPP in 2009. In addition, \$75 million was made available for other teen pregnancy prevention programs that had proven to be effective (Kappeler and Farb s5). These funds were divided between evidence-based programs by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), which identified programs that would be considered for funding and had shown to have a positive effect on teen pregnancy rates. The HHS set up an evaluation standard that these programs had to meet, and “conducted a systematic, comprehensive review of the literature on teen pregnancy, STIs, and sexual risk behaviors” (Kappeler and Farb s6). These standards are very strict and not many programs were approved for funding (s6).

The programs and institutions that received these grants primarily targeted vulnerable groups and poor communities. PREP targeted homeless “youth ages 10-19 or youth in foster care, in rural areas or in geographic areas with high teen birth rates, or those who come from racial or ethnic minority groups” (“State Personal Responsibility Education Program Fact Sheet”). The new initiatives TPPP and PREP appeared to be very successful. In 2008, the teen pregnancy rates per 1,000 black females aged 15-19 was 60.4, for Hispanic females this was 70.3. In 2016, these numbers had changed to 29.3 and 31.9 (U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services). The focus on these vulnerable groups and the improvement in numbers suggest that these groups needed the additional support from these specific programs and that these programs were effective.

Figure 1 shows the number of teen pregnancies over the years. After a small increase in 2005, the years 2008 – 2013 saw a steeper decline in teen pregnancy rates per 1000 females aged 15-19 compared to 1990 – 2005. In 1990, the pregnancy rate of this age group was 117.6 while in 2005, the pregnancy rate was 68.7. In 2008, the pregnancy rates were 68.2 and in 2013 they were 43.4. This is a decline of 48.9 in 15 years compared to a decline of 24.8 in five years (Kost et al. 20–22). These might

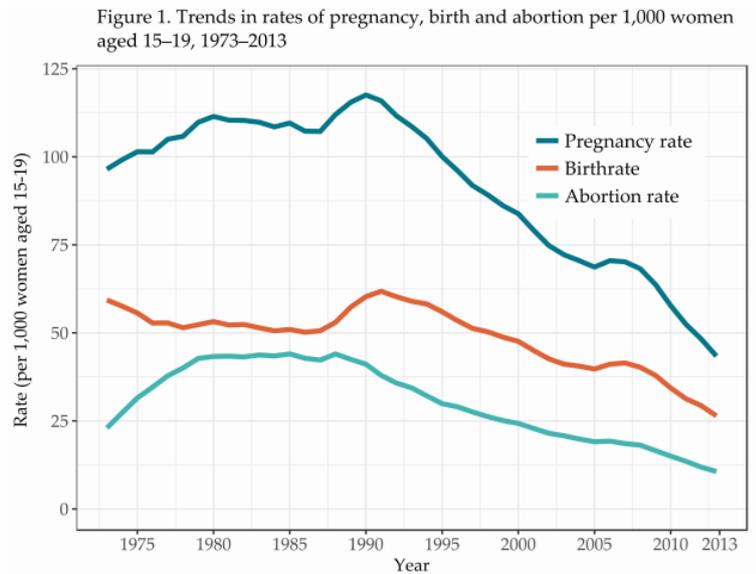


Figure 1(Kost et al. 10)

indicate a difference in effectiveness between Obama’s policies compared to those of Bush senior, Clinton, and Bush Jr. Furthermore, the birth rates per 1000 females age 15-19 dropped from 40.2 in 2008 to 20.3 in 2016. With a drop of 19.9, the Obama administration seems to be more successful in reducing teenage birth rates than the Bush administration, which had a drop of 7.5 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services). It is important to acknowledge that this steeper decline in teen pregnancy could also have been caused by other factors such as accessibility to information on sexual health on the internet or conversation between parents and children about safe sex, which will be discussed later in this chapter. However, knowing that this decline was exactly when Obama changed sex education policies, it seems to indicate that it was likely to play a role in the decline.

With programs and institutions such as the TPPP and OAH, the Obama administration was able to reach vulnerable groups and offer help to those in need. Around the end of the Obama administration, in 2015, another 81 grants were given to evidence-based programs that were approved by the HHS and believed to be successful according to HHS standards in helping to reduce teen pregnancy and develop new and innovative ways to continue this. While the complete elimination of abstinence-only sex education did not happen under the Obama administration, with a funding of \$50 million per year, the TPPP, PREP, and OAH remained stable during the entire Obama presidency. Paragraph 2.2 will elaborate on AOSE vs CSE with academic research and draw a conclusion about which form of sex education is more effective according to scientific sources.

## **2.2 Abstinence only vs. comprehensive sex education**

As mentioned, the Obama administration supported comprehensive sex education (CSE) and during his eight years in office there was a sizable reduction in teen pregnancies. The success in reducing teen pregnancy rates during this administration was much larger than during the Bush administration, who only funded abstinence only sex education (AOSE). One could say that this might be an indication that CSE is more successful in reducing teen pregnancy than AOSE. Other reasons for a decrease in teen pregnancy numbers is an increase in social media use and information that can be obtained through the internet on sites such as Teen Health Source, Young Women's Health, and One Love (Ybarra). Despite of all this, AOSE has been and is still widely supported throughout the United States.

At the time that the Clinton administration established Title V Section 510, there was little to no evidence that those programs would be successful in preventing sexual intercourse between adolescents and with that, teen pregnancy (Hampton 2013). In 1997, one year after Title V Section 510 was enacted, the survey firm Mathematica Policy Inc received permission from Congress to evaluate these AOSE programs. They did a nine-year study that observed

four different abstinence-only programs, examining abstinence-only programs from both the Clinton administration years and the Bush administration years (Guttmacher Institute). The final evaluation was published in 2007. Mathematica Policy Inc had interviewed more than 2000 elementary and middle school students and did a follow up in high school to measure the students' knowledge about sexual intercourse and sexual health. From this group, 60% followed AOSE and the remaining 40% belonged to the control group whose members were not offered any form of sex education. The programs were evaluated in their achievement of six specific goals. These goals were:

- “1. Strengthen knowledge and attitudes supportive of abstinence
2. Induce more youth to embrace abstinence as a personal goal
3. Reduce sexual activity among youth
4. Persuade sexually experienced youth to become or remain abstinent
5. Lower the risk of STDs
6. Lower the risk of nonmarital pregnancies” (Trenholm et al. 4).

The results showed that these specific funded abstinence-only programs “had absolutely no measurable impact on initiation rates, ages of first intercourse, or numbers of partners, no impact on pregnancies, births, or STDs, and the same rates of condom and birth control use,” said Bruce Trigg, MD, of the New Mexico Department of Health in Albuquerque. “And in some of these cases, kids sat through 3 years of mandatory abstinence-only classes” (Hampton 2014). The conclusion of this study indicated in 2007 that AOSE was not the most effective way of teaching and demonstrated the “need for rigorous research on how to combat the high rate of teen sexual activity and its negative consequences” (Trenholm et al. 61).

A report from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) documented a decline in the national teen birth rate and the number of teenagers who were having sexual intercourse based on interviews with teenagers from 1991-2009. There was also a rise in sexually active

students using contraception. In 2009, half of the teens interviewed for this research indicated that they had communicated about sexual health and intercourse with their parents. Among these teens, there was a much higher percentage of teens using contraceptive methods (55%-71%) compared to the teens that had not talked to their parents about this subject (26%-50%) (CDC 415). These numbers show that parent-child communication concerning sexual health can have a positive influence on teens, provided that this communication was more comprehensive than the sex education taught in schools. A study from 2017 showed that parents are increasingly communicative about sex and sexual health with their children, one of reasons is that many of them suffered from a lack of proper sex education in schools and from their own parents and wanted to do better for their own children (Flores and Barroso 11). This increase in positive parent-child communication might be an additional reason for the decline of teen pregnancy rates in the US. Nevertheless, the rates are still significantly higher than in other developed countries, so parent-child communication about sexual health in some households is not enough to reduce national teen pregnancy rates. Similar to the other studies, this report also recommends evidence-based sex education and information about reproductive health (414).

Other studies like the study by Nicole Haberland and Deborah Rogow from 2015, focused on the effectiveness of CSE. They focused on studies that tested the effectiveness of CSE worldwide, not specifically the policies of the Obama administration. This study did not only address education on sexuality and sexual health, but also gender relations and equality, and sexual violence. When discussing the evidence of the effectiveness of CSE programs such as school-based sexual health interventions or HIV prevention in sub-Saharan Africa, Haberland and Rogow explain that there is still room for improvement in these programs as “some reviews find that about two-thirds of evaluations show reductions in targeted sexual risk behaviors” (s17). However, this is still a fair quantity and it shows that CSE programs can

certainly be considered more effective than abstinence-only programs. As research mentioned above concluded that those programs had no measurable impact. The reason why this progress in sub-Saharan countries is important to show that CSE programs can be considered more effective, is that teens in these countries do not have as much access to online sources on sex education as teens in the United States. This shows that healthy and accurate explanation on sexual health is likely to have an impact to decrease the spread of STD's and teen pregnancies.

What is peculiar is that studies also indicate that a large part of Americans seemed to support programs that include more than just abstinence as contraceptive. Researcher Amy Bleakley administered a cross-sectional survey in 2006 with United States adults from the ages 18 to 83 years old. From this survey, she concluded that 82% of the respondents were in support of sex education curricula that covered both abstinence and other forms of preventing pregnancies and STDs. This form of sex education can also be referred to as 'abstinence-plus sex education'. 68% of these adults were also in favor of teaching students how to use condoms (Bleakley et al. 1151). This is interesting because with these numbers one would think that CSE would be popular in high schools. This is also what the Mathematica Policy concluded from their research and this support of the population is in line with the CSE policies from the Obama administration (Guttmacher Institute; Kappeler and Farb s4).

Haskins and Margolis state that many Republicans still support AOSE and they do not need much proof. They describe how scholar Robert Rector wrote several reviews on abstinence-only programs, suggesting that AOSE was in fact successful. Later, the validity of these studies was questioned when it turned out that Rector used a random assignment design for only three of these studies, which assigns the participants of a study entirely at random (79). When a researcher does not use this random assignment design, they are able to select the groups of participants themselves, which can lead to their own desired outcome. This

hurts the credibility of a study. Also, some other claims made by Abstinence Only Until Marriage (AOUM) programs are mostly not supported by scientific evidence. For example, some AOUM programs suggest that “sexual activity outside of marriage is likely to have harmful psychological and physical effects”, while there is no evidence that consensual nonmarital sex between adolescents are psychologically harmful (Santelli et al. 401). While it is hard to argue with the argument put forwards in AOUM studies that the concept of staying abstinent is indeed 100% effective when put into practice, evidence shows that AOUM programs are no guarantee that students will in fact remain abstinent until marriage. In fact, intentions to stay abstinent often fail and these programs do not prepare students to avoid STD’s and unwanted pregnancies in those quite common situations (Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health).

In 2017, the Society for Adolescent Health and Medicine published a paper that explained the scientific evidence concerning AOUM. The paper explains that many AOUM programs promote old-fashioned gender power imbalance, which is associated with dangerous sexual behavior like reduced use of contraceptives. The AOUM programs also ignore the needs of students with a history of sexual abuse, for whom staying abstinent might be more challenging than students that do not have a history of sexual abuse. And last, AOUM programs completely ignore sexually active students, who actively need medically accurate information about intercourse and sexual health (Santelli et al. 402).

### **2.3 Obama vs previous administrations**

Looking at the policies of the Obama administration compared to its predecessors, the Obama administration was the administration with the largest amount of funding going towards programs that offer CSE. Another important part is that these programs were evaluated and tested by the HHS before they were able to receive any funding. Contrary to programs such as

Title V section 510 which was enacted without any research done on its effectiveness (Hampton 2013).

To summarize, President Barack Obama changed the policies on sex education drastically in his time in office, straying from the path that his predecessors had been following for many terms. He made sure to only fund the programs that were evidence-based and proven to be medically accurate and truthful. During the Bush administration, teen pregnancies per 1000 girls in the age category of 15-19 went from 47.7 in 2000 to 40.2 in 2008. While during the Obama administration, teen pregnancies per 1000 girls in the age category of 15-19 went from 40.2 in 2008 to 20.3 in 2016. In paragraph 2.1, more information is given indicating that these evidence-based programs seemed to be more effective than AOSE programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services).

President Obama was very different than his predecessors in his policies. That different that writer Andrew Hartman argued in his book in 2010 that with President Obama, the culture war had ended. He explained that the culture war were the strongest in the 1980s and 1990s, but that the American people have accepted the changes and adjusted to a new nation (Hartman 285). This book was published in 2015, during the Obama administration, and looking at the sex education policies in this chapter, one could argue that the culture war seemed to have ended at this time. However, President Donald Trump changed the policies that President Obama had implemented. Chapter three will demonstrate the contrary to Hartman's conclusion and show that the culture war had in fact not really ended. The Obama administration rather represented an aberration rather than the end of the culture war.

### **3. The Trump administration**

In 2016, Donald J. Trump was elected as the 45<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. As a Republican successor of President Obama, he soon began to change the policies of the former presidential administration to policies that were more according to his own political philosophy and that of his followers (Girard 1399; *The Trump Administration Accomplishments*). This chapter will explain how the Trump administration pushes a form of sex education which has been proven to be less effective than other forms of sex education. This chapter will explain what the Trump administration did exactly in the area of sex education in high schools and provide an explanation for this. After that, the chapter will discuss the makeup of the supporter base of the Trump administration and its morals and beliefs, to see whether its decision on sex education policies might have a political motive. It will then focus on the impact that this supporter base has on American society and finally, it will focus on the culture war in the United States between the progressives and orthodox and how they might play a role in sex education policies and presidential administrations in the United States.

#### **3.1 Donald Trump and Sex education policies**

As explained in the last chapter, academic research shows that comprehensive sex education (CSE) is more effective than abstinence only sex education (AOSE) in the prevention of teen pregnancies. However, even with this scientific proof Trump still supports AOSE. He was quick to reverse the policies of the Obama administration that supported evidence-based CSE in schools. An example of this is the sudden stop in grants for evidence-based programs in the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program (TPPP). The institutions that were promised the five-year grants by the Obama administration were shocked by the abrupt ending of the grant after only three years. The Trump administration cut back \$213.6 million on these programs and on teen pregnancy reduction research. They are also trying to limit the possibilities on expanding

curricula to comprehensive classes in Title X – a federal grant program created in 1970 to offer comprehensive and personal family planning services and preventive health services – and returning to the ideological view of “no sex until marriage” (Kay; PRH).

On August 28, 2017, The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published a fact sheet that argued that the Teen Pregnancy Prevention Program was not effective, based on numbers from the CDC and HHS. It was a waste of taxpayers’ money and that was one of the reasons that it had been cut short (ASH). The institutions in the TPPP that had received the funding, had not had enough time to analyze all the collected data at the time the funding was cut. Would they still want to research this data, they would have to do this without any funding. This caused quite some discontentment among these programs. Nine of the programs sued the Trump administration over the defunding and they claimed that the HHS had no right to terminate the grants so suddenly. They argued that the termination went against the HHS’s own regulations and “that it goes against Congress’ mandate that HHS fund “medically accurate and age appropriate programs that reduce teen pregnancy,” and that it “excessively entangles” the government with religion” (Eunjung Cha).

The HHS had the following response to these claims: “The Teen Pregnancy Prevention (TPP) Program was created by the US Congress in FY 2010 by prematurely ending and then eliminating more than 150 Community-Based Abstinence Education (CBAE) Program grants and repurposing the monies. This action resulted in grantees losing their funding midstream in the grant cycle, thus permitting these funds to be diverted to the newly created TPP Program. Far from unprecedented, the TPP Program was literally created by hastily ending the CBAE” (ASH). It did not mention that, as mentioned in chapter two, the Obama administration researched which programs would be effective in decreasing teenage pregnancy and eliminated all programs that were not proven effective according to their standards. The court agreed with the grantees and “four federal judges ruled five consecutive times that the Trump

administration unlawfully cut the funding for TPPP grantees. Nevertheless, the government is continually trying to eliminate funding for the TPPP (Uzzell).

In May 2018, the Family and Youth Services Bureau (FYSB), a bureau that was part of the HHS, published and set up the Sexual Risk Avoidance Education (SRAE) Program. A program that was set up “to fund projects that exclusively implement sexual risk avoidance education that teaches youth how to voluntarily refrain from non-marital sexual activity” (“Sexual Risk Avoidance Education Program - General Departmental Program Fact Sheet”). Grantees from this program must be evidence-based, medically accurate, may exclusively include education in sexual risk avoidance, and it “must not promote, encourage, or normalize sexual activity outside of marriage”. Even though the program must be medically accurate and evidence-based, programs are still encouraged to withhold information about reproductive health and sexual intercourse to prevent promoting, encouraging, or normalizing premarital intercourse. The fact that these programs can withhold information and that some studies falsely claimed to be evidence based, makes it difficult to examine if these programs are effective in preventing teen pregnancies (Haskins and Margolis 79). This makes the term “evidence-based” under the Trump administration less credible than the same term under the Obama administration.

In March 2019, President Trump proposed a budget for the Fiscal Year 2020, called “A Budget for a Better America”. In this budget, he decreased the budget for the CDC by \$750.5 million, he eliminated the Office of Adolescent Health’s TPPP that was set up under Obama, made a 12% cut to funding for Health and Human Services in general, and continued to fund the Title V abstinence-only SRAE program. All of these changes influenced sex education programs throughout the United States (Eisenstein; United States et al.). In response to these developments, medical specialist Tracy Hampton argues that the “fact that the massive federal spending on AOSE programs, despite overwhelming evidence that the program has no

measurable impact on teen sexual behaviors, shows that the program is really much more about spreading conservative ideology and religion than about public health” ( Hampton 2014). How the Trump administration fits into this description will be explained in the next part of the chapter.

### **3.2 The Republican Party and the Religious Right**

Looking at the voter records in 2016 divided by race and religion, Trump was successful in attracting a significant number of socially conservative white Christian Americans to support him. From all Protestant Americans that voted in the election, 56% voted for Trump. Focusing specifically on the white evangelical group within the Protestant Americans, 77% voted for Donald Trump and 16% for Hillary Clinton, indicating that Trump has a large following in that group. White mainline protestants also voted primarily for Trump, 57% voted for Trump as opposed to the 37% that voted for Clinton. However, when you look at the votes of black protestants, 96% of voters voted for Clinton and only 3% voted for Trump. The same can be said about protestants of other non-white races, where 51% voted for Clinton. Also, 64% of white non-Hispanic Catholics voted for Trump, while only 19% of Hispanic Catholics did. Furthermore, a large majority of non-religious Americans voted for Clinton. To clarify, the Protestant voters were divided by evangelicalism and race, which made white evangelical protestants a separate voter group.. Evangelicals of other races are not specifically identified as separate evangelicals, but are grouped with “black protestants” or “protestants of other races” (Pew Research Center 13).

Looking at all of these statistics, it is clear to say that Donald Trump has convinced the Christian white population of the United States and has a primarily white religious supporter base. Out of all of the people that voted for Donald Trump in 2016, 85% of the voters was religious (Pew Research Center 11). A large part of this supporter base were white

evangelicals, which have been a key constituency of the Republican Party for decades. In 2016, about a quarter of all American citizens identified as evangelicals and the majority of evangelicals in the United States is white (Casanova). This makes it one of the most powerful voting blocks in the elections. Attracting white evangelicals has been one of the most important parts of campaigning to win the elections for Republican candidates (Prothero). Donald Trump achieved this by promises he made during the elections to accommodate the wishes of these socially-conservative Christians. Such as promising to appoint conservative Supreme Court judges, how he picked Mike Pence as his running mate and how he promised conservative stances on reproduction rights.

Evangelicals are defined as right wing Christian protestants that believe in the Bible as the highest authority (Casanova). As mentioned before, the majority of evangelicals is white. Pew Research Center even categorizes white evangelicals as a separate group within protestants and does not mention evangelicals of other races, as mentioned above. Other literature demonstrates how ‘theologically conservative Protestants’, another definition of evangelicals, are more diverse than most literature and research acknowledges. “In 2018, approximately 65-75% of evangelicals are white, with rapidly increasing numbers of people of color, including black, Asian, and, most significantly, a growing Latino population” (McAlister 3). Evangelicals often recognize a strong connection between politics and religion and this makes them passionate voters. They have a conservative view on political issues such as foreign policy, education, and women’s rights and gender issues and they believe it is important that the president of the United States has the same beliefs. This opinion is shared across evangelicals of all races (Wilcox 32–38; Alonso-Zaldivar and Crary; McAlister 3). Even though Donald Trump has been married and divorced multiple times, he gained their support by disapproving the Obama administration’s policies and loudly supporting policies

and laws that measure up to conservative Christian norms and values and promising during his campaign that he would do something to end Obama's policies (Girard 1409,1414).

In the primary elections, many of these white evangelicals did not have Donald Trump as their first choice as Republican candidate. In November 2016 however, he went on to win the votes of 81 percent of white evangelicals that voted (Peters; Girard 1409). This victory is remarkable because this percentage is higher than the percentages earned by other popular Republican candidates such as Mitt Romney in 2012 with 78%, John McCain in 2008 with 74%, and before that George W. Bush with 78% in 2004 (Miller 43). Even though many white evangelicals do not think that Trump's personal tendencies and ideas are very honest, morally righteous, or religious, they do feel that the Trump administration is making a case for their beliefs and interests (Alonso-Zaldivar and Crary).

In order to win a second term, it is of key importance to keep this voter block satisfied in order to maintain their political support in the 2020 elections as well, and President Trump seems to be quite successful in doing so. A study from March 2020 shows that 59% of white evangelicals feel that the Trump administration has helped their interest opposed to 7% of white evangelicals who feel that their interests have been hurt and that the policies and laws that were created under the Trump administration are not in line with their beliefs. (Gecewicz et al. 6–8). It is important to note that apart from these socially conservative religious right groups, most of the US public is not enthusiastic about President Trump. Two-thirds of these groups is in favor of his beliefs, while the rest of the “Americans are much more likely to say they dislike (53%) rather than like (15%) the way Trump conducts himself” (Gecewicz et al. 10-11). Even within the evangelical population of the US, opinions are starting to differ. Because of the strong engagement in right-wing politics, the younger generations of the evangelical community are starting to resent evangelical activism and the way how church leaders are supporting President Trump unconditionally. If the evangelical church fails to gain

more younger supporters, that might lead to a decrease in their political power in the country (Lewis and Timmons).

Despite all of this, the Trump administration still has a rather large supporter base that altogether has a shared political view. Looking at the policies the Trump administration has implemented in the past four years, the administration has fulfilled many of the wishes of his social conservative supporter base. Examples of policies and laws that have been implemented since 2017 that support the Religious Right are: the reinstatement of Mexico City Policy, which blocks funding for the performance or promotion of abortion by international organization; the Executive Order Promoting Free Speech and Religious Liberty, which gives people religious freedom rights and the right to deny a person something on the basis of their own religion; altered the Obama administration's Department of Defense policy so that it no longer allowed transgender people to join the military; giving insurance organizations the right to deny coverage for contraceptives to protect their religious freedom; separating the Title X family planning program by the Clinton administration from abortion facilities, and they could not refer their patients to abortion clinics; and how he stopped the grants given by the Obama administration for evidence-based sex education programs two years early, stripping the programs and institutions of hundreds of millions of dollars before they finished (*The Trump Administration Accomplishments*). All these policies are either in favor of religious freedom or support the conservative beliefs of the Christian Right.

As mentioned before, Donald Trump is not a religious man. Looking at the conservative nature of the aforementioned policies, one could argue that Trump is doing this just to satisfy his supporter base and to make sure he keeps this supporter base to get re-elected for a second term. The Trump administration is rather dependent on these groups of white evangelicals and other white Christians. This gives the group a slightly disproportionate amount of power and influence in the United States. Their ideological views on society have contributed to an

ideological cultural shift in the United States, where the ideological views of the people are chosen above scientific proof on certain topics, such as sex education. Looking at former presidential administrations, there has been an obvious conservative influence on politics from the Religious Right. This impression of sex education seems to be deeply rooted in social conservative religious groups and that appears to be the reason that sex education in the United States has always been influenced by the culture war. In this case, during the Trump administration, it is no exception. As mentioned in chapter two, Andrew Hartman wrote in his book that it seemed like President Barack Obama had broken the pattern of his predecessors by not allowing them to have much political influence anymore. However, the Trump administration is continuing on the same path that Obama's predecessors have followed, by adapting his policies to satisfy his conservative and religious supporter base. This seems to demonstrate a continuation of the culture war and the remaining influence of socially conservative religious groups on the Republican party.

However, since the elections in 2016, the group of evangelicals in the United States has become divided. The largely older and white delegation of evangelicals felt stronger about everything staying as it always has been than the largely younger part of evangelical people of color. Pastor Tim Keller has named the two groups the "red evangelicalism" and "blue evangelicalism" (McAlister 10). The colors red and blue tend to have a political meaning, red stands for Republican and blue for Democrat. The older contingent of evangelicals has a stronger support for President Trump, while Trump does not have the complete support of the younger contingent (Lewis and Timmons). If this younger part of evangelicals in the US keeps growing, the older generation white evangelicals with older norms and values might become a minority in the future. This combined with the decrease of participation from younger white evangelicals as their policies are starting to repel younger generations, the

classic white evangelical population seems to be under threat of existence. Perhaps, this will have an effect on the political dynamics in the future.

## **Conclusion**

This thesis focused on the research question why President Donald Trump selected the sex education policies that had proven to be less effective in preventing teen pregnancy and how this fits in the history of sex education policies and the culture war in the United States. Sex education became an issue of the American schools in the 1910s, after psychologist Granville Stanley Hall wrote a book that shared how essential it is for adolescents to receive sex education. At this point, all sex education taught sexual restraint until marriage. The unrest between orthodox and unorthodox groups started around the 1950s when the social conservative religious groups started to resist the increasingly secular society.

After the sexual revolution in the 1960s, when the attitude towards sex changed and federal programs started to fund sex education programs that included contraceptive methods, the American culture war started and sex education was one of its key topics. Education was the primary system that could teach the future generations of America their national identity. Religious America felt threatened as the dramatic erasure of religion in education could also lead to an erasure of religion in the future national identity. Social conservative religious groups formed an abstinence movement and fought for AOSE in schools and institutions. Through organizing themselves into a political interest group, these social conservative religious groups were able to influence sex education policies during multiple presidential administrations. This contributed to a focus on AOSE in schools from president Ronald Reagan up until President Obama.

President Obama was a clear aberration from this pattern and introduced new policies that were comprehensive and evidence-based. Scientific evidence did not support AOSE and consequently the Obama administration's new evidence based policies funded programs that taught CSE. Many studies showed that CSE was more effective in preventing teen pregnancies than AOSE. One of the political factors that may have enabled Obama to do so

was that the Obama administration was not dependent on the social conservative religious voter bloc that his predecessors were. Some scholars like Andrew Hartman even suggested that with Obama's presidency and his predominantly progressive policies, the culture war had ended.

Then why did the Trump administration re-introduce AOSE despite evidence against its effectiveness in preventing teen pregnancies? Looking at other presidencies and their take on sex education policies, the Trump administration fits in the old pattern of the culture war. This demonstrates that socially conservative religious right wing groups are still organizing themselves in groups whose vote can be courted by catering to their wishes, still allowing them to exert political influence within the Republican party and therefore exerting this influence on President Trump. President Trump continues to form his policies to satisfy this voter group by putting their morals and principles before scientific evidence. He has not been the only president to have done this in the history of the United States. This thesis discussed the 1980 election and how that was the election where the political power of the social conservative Religious right groups came to light when they helped Ronald Reagan get elected for president. President George Bush Sr. publicly changed his opinion on sex education to more conservative ways to satisfy this group and President George Bush Jr. also campaigned with conservative topics from the culture war to use to his advantage. President Donald Trump is using a key topic from the American culture war for his own political future which fits in the broader Trump strategy to cater this group of voters. Looking at the history of sex education policies, it can be concluded that this is a continuation of the culture war.

Because of the demographic changes among the religious right, these social conservative groups may not have this strong political position for much longer. As mentioned in chapter three, the evangelical community in the US is getting divided in an older white contingent and a less conservative younger contingent with an increasing amount of

Latino and African American people. If this divide will grow, the support for the Republican party may decrease in the future, possibly changing the dynamics of the American culture war.

### **Discussion**

Due to the limitation of space, this thesis highlighted the influence of the Religious Right on the Trump administration and the decision on sex education policies and how this behavior fits into the American culture war. Further research could delve deeper into this issue and also focus on other decisions the Trump administration might have taken because of the influence of its conservative Christian supporter base. It would also be interesting to focus on the future of the evangelical community in the United States and if the demographic changes might have an effect on the strong political influence of this group. Another thing that might be interesting to study is the effect on American society and presidential policies if this group keeps its strong political influence but changes its political views.

The American culture war contained more topics than just sexual education. Looking at sex education, one could argue that the American culture war between orthodox and progressives is not over. However, to argue that the same culture war that started in the 1970s is still raging in the United States, one should also do research on other key topics in this culture war. Topics such as the influence of media and the importance of arts, law, family, electoral politics, and other aspects in education. Further research could determine whether more policy decisions by the Trump administration can be explained in the light of a continuing culture war.

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