

Engineering of Consent 2.0: Epistemic Control, Cultural Hegemony, and the Instrumental Function of Gender Activism in the Global Neoliberal Order

Josue Bernardo Casella Moreira*

Independent Researcher, Ecuador

*Corresponding Author

Josue Bernardo Casella Moreira, Independent Researcher, Lawyer, Master of Constitutional Law from the Technical University of Loja, Ecuador.

Submitted: 2026, Apr 03; **Accepted:** 2026, Apr 23 **Published:** 2026, May 07

Citation: Moreira, J. B. C. (2026). Engineering of Consent 2.0: Epistemic Control, Cultural Hegemony, and the Instrumental Function of Gender Activism in the Global Neoliberal Order. *Arch of Pub Aff Inst Manag*, 1(2), 01-10.

Abstract

This paper analyzes the structural convergence between information control mechanisms developed by global economic-political power centers and the accelerated institutional normalization of transgender activism as an instrument of social engineering. Drawing on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, Marcuse's critique of one-dimensional man, the Overton Window theory Lehman, and Asch's social conformity experiments, this paper argues that gender activism—particularly institutionalized transgenderism—has functioned as a privileged epistemological laboratory for a broader process: the systematic weakening of the population's capacity to exercise autonomous critical judgment about directly observable reality. The paper empirically documents the massive corporate and philanthropic funding of said activism, amounting to over \$209 million in annual donations (Funders for LGBTQ Issues), and contends that the co-optation of liberation movements by transnational capital constitutes an updated form of repressive desublimation. The implications of this analysis extend to the understanding of apparently unrelated phenomena: the legitimization of wars, social tolerance toward the concentration of wealth, and the erosion of national juridical sovereignty.

Keywords: Cultural Hegemony, Engineering of Consent, Overton Window, Transgender Activism, Epistemic Control, Repressive Desublimation, One-Dimensional Society

I. Introduction: The Research Problem

The question guiding this work arises from an observable paradox in contemporary societies: the same media and institutional apparatuses that legitimize wars of aggression as "humanitarian interventions," normalize unprecedented concentrations of wealth, and guarantee the impunity of major transnational economic actors have been able to lead a significant proportion of the Western population to accept—and legally defend—the premise that biological sex is a category negotiable at individual will. The academically relevant question is not whether these phenomena are right or wrong from an ethical standpoint, but rather: what is the structural mechanism linking them? Is there a connecting thread that explains why the same power centers that produce the dominant narrative on war, the economy, and

inequality have invested massive resources in the normalization of a specific gender agenda? The central hypothesis of this paper is that institutionalized transgender activism has functioned not only as a rights cause, but simultaneously as a laboratory of epistemic engineering: a training ground where the technique of leading entire populations to accept, under social and institutional pressure, premises that contradict directly observable empirical evidence has been perfected and validated. Once the efficacy of this mechanism has been demonstrated in a specific domain, the same mechanism can be applied—and indeed is applied—to domains of broader political and economic scope.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. The Propaganda Model and the Manufacturing of Consent

The most solid theoretical foundation for understanding the function of mass media in the construction of narratives serving power is the propaganda model developed by Herman and Chomsky in *Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media* [1]. This model identifies five structural filters that determine what information is deemed fit for public consumption:

- The size, concentrated ownership, and profit orientation of major media outlets;
- Advertising as the primary source of revenue;
- Reliance on governmental and corporate information sources;
- Disciplinary reprisals (flak); and
- The dominant ideology as the interpretive framework of reality.

Herman and Chomsky assert that mainstream U.S. media "are effective and powerful ideological institutions that carry out a system-supportive propaganda function, by reliance on market forces, internalized assumptions, and self-censorship, and without overt coercion" (p. xi). This characterization, developed in the context of the Cold War, acquires an additional dimension in the twenty-first century: the technological convergence and corporate concentration of digital platforms has allowed the same filters to operate at unprecedented speed and intensity. Before Herman and Chomsky, Edward Bernays had formulated the theoretical and practical foundations of this engineering with remarkable candor [2]. In *Propaganda*, Bernays wrote: "The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country" (pp. 37–38). This declaration, far from constituting a critique, was the description of a business model that Bernays implemented for his corporate and governmental clients over decades.

2.2. Cultural Hegemony and the Capture of Liberation Movements

The concept of cultural hegemony, developed by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (written between 1929 and 1935, published in English in 1971), provides the second fundamental theoretical pillar [3]. For Gramsci, the dominant class maintains its power not exclusively through coercion but fundamentally through the construction of cultural consensus: the capacity to make its worldview accepted as "common sense" by subaltern groups. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, "Gramsci's exploration of cultural and political superstructures resulted in the tendency to categorize him as a Western Marxist, concerned less with economic conditions or coercion and more with the ideological barriers to class consciousness [4]." The most important implication of Gramscian thought for this analysis is the theory of the "march through the institutions": the idea, elaborated by Rudi Dutschke in application of Gramsci, that cultural transformation is achieved through the gradual occupation of the ideological state apparatuses—universities, media, churches, juridical bodies—so as to redefine from within the content of "common sense." What

this paper argues is that this mechanism, originally conceptualized as an emancipatory strategy, has been inverted and appropriated by transnational corporate power, which has used it to produce the opposite effect: not to liberate class consciousness, but to fragment it. The empirical evidence of this co-optation is quantifiable. According to data from *Funders for LGBTQ Issues*, total foundation funding for LGBTQ+ issues reached \$209.2 million in the United States in 2018, a new historical maximum [5]. Even more revealing is the finding that, for the first time in the history of data tracking, non-specifically LGBTQ+ funders—that is, general-purpose corporate and philanthropic foundations—surpassed specifically LGBTQ+ funders, representing 61% of total funds. Among the principal funders were the Open Society Foundations, the Ford Foundation, the MacArthur Foundation, and—first among corporate funders—the pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences, whose donations for LGBTQ+ issues reached \$37.7 million in 2018, representing 10% of all foundational funding in this domain (*Funders for LGBTQ Issues*).

2.3. The Overton Window and the Accelerated Displacement of the Acceptable

The third relevant conceptual framework is the Overton Window, developed by Joseph Overton at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy in the 1990s [6]. This model describes the range of policies that a society considers acceptable at any given moment, and predicts that politicians will only adopt initiatives falling within that range. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (n.d.), Overton "argued that this spectrum describes how politicians choose which policies to support, and suggested that they would favor options at the center of the spectrum over the extremes, which according to the model would be least acceptable to voters [7]." What is relevant to this analysis is not the model in its original version—descriptive and technical—but its application as a tool of deliberate cultural transformation. When the process of displacing the Window is conducted systematically, with massive communication resources and coordinated institutional pressure, it produces what may be termed an accelerated forced displacement: the rapid normalization of premises that, absent such organized pressure, would remain at the "unthinkable" end of the spectrum for much longer periods. The case of childhood transgenderism—the possibility that minors be subjected to irreversible medical intervention on grounds of gender identity—is the most thoroughly documented contemporary example of this phenomenon.

2.4. The Asch Experiment and Group Pressure on Direct Perception

The fourth theoretical component is empirical and stems from experimental social psychology. In 1951, Solomon Asch designed what would become one of the classic experiments of twentieth-century psychology. Its objective was to determine the extent to which group pressure can cause a person to deny what their own senses indicate. Participants were placed in groups where the majority—composed of confederates of the researcher—gave clearly incorrect answers to an elementary visual perception task: comparing the length of lines. The results were disconcerting: 75% of actual participants conformed at least once to the incorrect

majority response, and the average conformity rate in critical trials reached 32% [8]. Asch observed that subjects conformed for two main reasons: the desire to be accepted by the group, and the genuine belief that the group might be better informed than themselves. A significant minority even experienced actual perceptual distortion: they not only reported the incorrect answer, but came to believe it to be true. A recent replication and extension of the experiment, published in PLOS ONE, confirmed the 33% error rate in the standard line-length judgment experiment and additionally found a 38% conformity rate for political opinions [9]. The relevance of this experiment to the present analysis is direct: if group pressure can cause intelligent and well-intentioned subjects to deny what their eyes clearly show them under laboratory conditions, what level of conformity is to be expected when such pressure operates for years through educational systems, mass media, digital platforms, and legal frameworks, on matters of far greater perceptual ambiguity?

2.5. One-Dimensional Man and Repressive Desublimation

The fifth theoretical framework is provided by Herbert Marcuse in *One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society* [10]. Marcuse argued that advanced industrial society generates "false needs" that integrate individuals into the existing system of production and consumption through mass media, advertising, and contemporary modes of thought. The result is a "one-dimensional" universe of thought and behavior in which the capacity for critical thought and oppositional behavior progressively atrophies. Particularly relevant is the concept of repressive desublimation: the release of impulses—including sexual ones—in socially tolerated forms that, far from constituting a threat to the established order, serve to stabilize it. As critic Ronald Aronson noted in the *Boston Review*: "capitalism co-opts not only sex, but also modernity and tolerance. The cultural and social changes in which we have participated not only failed to threaten the capitalist system, but have been happily accommodated by it." Sexual liberation activism, on this reading, functions as a pressure valve that permits the release of energies that might otherwise be directed toward a more structural critique of the economic system.

3. The Hypothesis of Instrumental Epistemic Function

The central analytical question is: why specifically transgender activism, and not other items on the social agenda, has received such a disproportionate level of institutional, corporate, and media investment? The answer this paper proposes is that such activism possesses unique characteristics that make it extraordinarily useful as an instrument for validating an epistemic control mechanism of broader applicability. Biological sex is, alongside death and the experience of pain, one of the most directly observable realities for any human being in any culture or historical era. Its identification requires no technical instrumentation, specialized training, or privileged access to information. It is, in philosophical terms, one of the realities closest to what Kant would call synthetic a priori judgment: immediately evident to ordinary perception. If the institutional system—medical, juridical, educational, mediatic—can succeed in leading a significant proportion of the population not only to accept but to actively defend the negation

of this directly observable reality, then that same system has demonstrated its capacity to operate in domains of far less direct perception: the justice of a war occurring thousands of kilometers away, the health of an economy that produces positive statistics while 40% of the population is impoverished, the legitimacy of a judicial process whose technical development is inaccessible to the ordinary citizen. In terms of Overton Window theory, transgender activism has functioned as a social-scale laboratory experiment to determine the maximum achievable speed of displacement of what is considered acceptable, and to map the mechanisms of resistance and conformity across different strata of the population. The results of this experiment are transferable to other domains.

4. Complementary Empirical Evidence

4.1. The Structure of Transnational Funding

The convergence of major philanthropic foundations, transnational corporations, and governmental agencies in the funding of gender activism is a publicly documented fact, not a conjecture. According to the annual reports of Funders for LGBTQ Issues, between 1970 and 2017 U.S. foundations allocated more than \$1.8 billion to LGBTQ+ organizations and causes (Funders for LGBTQ Issues) [11]. The structure of this funding is highly concentrated: the ten principal funders account for more than 40% of the historical total. Among the prominent institutions are the Open Society Foundations—which specifically funds the International Trans Fund for global transgender activists (Open Society Foundations, n.d.)—and the Ford Foundation [12]. This concentration of funding in a reduced number of large institutional actors, all of them linked to the same circles of global financial capital that Herman and Chomsky's and Gramsci's models identify as hegemonic agents, raises an empirically valid question: to what extent can the agenda of a liberation movement remain autonomous when its funding depends 61% on foundations not specifically identified with that movement?

4.2. The Capture of the International Legal System

A particular aspect of the analyzed phenomenon is the speed with which national and international legal systems have been reoriented to grant normative status to premises of transgender activism. This process cannot be understood without considering the role of legal advocacy groups funded by the same philanthropic networks described above. Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model identifies institutional pressure (flak) as one of the five filters that determine informational content and, by extension, the normative framework of the acceptable [1]. Coordinated judicial pressure—funded by transnational networks targeting national legal systems—constitutes an application of this same mechanism to the field of law.

5. Discussion: The Structural Point of Convergence

The confluence of the theoretical frameworks analyzed allows for the formulation of the structural point of convergence that this paper sought to identify. This is not a matter of conspiracy—understood as a secret agreement coordinated by actors with full awareness of the effects of their actions—but of the convergence of institutional interests that produce, in a distributed and at times

unplanned manner, a coherent systemic effect: the weakening of the population's capacity to exercise autonomous critical judgment. Put differently: the global economic and political power centers have an objective interest in preventing the population from articulating coherent resistance. To that end, the most effective mechanism is not overt censorship—which generates resistance—but the production of a foundational epistemic confusion: the normalization of the idea that objective reality is negotiable, that institutional authority has legitimacy to redefine the real, and that whoever dissents from the official narrative carries a pathology—phobia, denialism, hatred—that disqualifies them as a valid interlocutor. Transgender activism has been the arena where this mechanism has been most successfully implemented because it operates on the most immediate layer of perception: the body. If institutional pressure can lead reasonable people to accept premises that contradict their direct bodily perception, the application of the same mechanism to mediated perception—war news, economic statistics, rule-of-law narratives—becomes comparatively easier.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the apparent distance between phenomena such as the media legitimization of wars, social tolerance toward the concentration of wealth, and the institutional normalization of transgender activism is neither coincidental nor the result of independent processes, but rather the expression of a single structural mechanism of epistemic control, which may be termed Engineering of Consent 2.0, in reference to the updating and deepening of the model described by Bernays, Herman and Chomsky, and Gramsci [2,1,3]. The specific contribution of this analysis is the identification of institutionalized transgender activism as an epistemic laboratory: a field where the technique of forced Overton Window displacement has been validated and refined on the firmest possible foundation—direct bodily perception—so that the results may be transferred to domains of less immediate perception. The empirical evidence of the massive corporate funding of such activism, the documentation of coordinated institutional pressure on national legal systems, and the consistency of the social conformity mechanisms described by Asch with the observed phenomena together provide an academic foundation for hypotheses that might appear speculative in the absence of such a framework [8]. Left for future research is the systematic empirical analysis of the correlation between levels of exposure to institutional transgender narratives and levels of social conformity in unrelated domains, which would allow the central hypothesis of this paper to be subjected to rigorous falsification testing.

7. Preliminary Note: Criteria for Analytical Selection

The three argumentative nuclei selected are: first, the corporate co-optation of LGBT+ liberation movements, documented under the concept of pinkwashing or rainbow capitalism; second, the electoral dislocation of the left from its traditional working-class base, empirically documented by Piketty and collaborators through electoral data from 21 Western democracies; and third, the displacement of redistribution politics by recognition politics, theoretically analyzed by Fraser and empirically corroborated

by electoral behavior studies [13]. These three phenomena, far from mere speculation, constitute subjects of active debate in contemporary political science, sociology, and political economy. Accordingly, the second part of this paper formalizes the following hypotheses with respect to the three argumentative nuclei identified: (a) Do they enjoy support in the peer-reviewed specialized literature? (b) Can they be articulated in falsifiable terms? And (c) do they not depend on undocumented conspiratorial assumptions?

8. Corporate Co-Optation: From Liberation Movement to Rainbow Capitalism

8.1. Genesis and Transformation of LGBT+ Movements

LGBT+ movements historically emerged as expressions of resistance against systematic forms of oppression, stigmatization, and institutional violence. The Stonewall Inn riots in New York are emblematic of this originally countercultural and anti-capitalist character: the main protagonists of that resistance—trans sex workers, people of color, homeless youth—represented the most marginalized strata of the urban working class, and their confrontation was simultaneously with the police, with the medical establishment that pathologized their identity, and with an economic system that excluded them from the formal labor market. The movement that emerged from that context was not a consumer movement: it was a survival movement. The transformation of that movement during the 1980s through 2010s constitutes a process that the academic literature has characterized with the concept of institutional co-optation. According to Puar, this process can be understood through the concept of homonationalism: the selective absorption of LGBT+ discourse by nation-states and corporate capital, which use the recognition of certain sexual minority rights as an instrument of political legitimization and market differentiation, without altering the basic economic structures that produce inequality [14].

8.2. Pinkwashing as Documented Corporate Practice

The term pinkwashing—analogueous to greenwashing in the environmental sphere—designates the strategy by which corporations and institutions publicly adopt symbols, discourses, and initiatives associated with LGBT+ activism, without such adoption being accompanied by substantive changes in their labor, fiscal, or supply chain practices. The concept was introduced to academic debate by Schulman and has been the subject of a growing empirical literature [15]. Research published in the *Journal of Business Ethics* by Heilmann, based on a qualitative study of Copenhagen WorldPride 2021, documents how corporate sponsors use association with the Pride movement primarily as a public relations strategy, in what the authors term woke capitalism: the instrumentalization of progressive causes for commercial ends [16]. The study reports that LGBT+ community members with the most salient identity are the ones who most frequently perceive such advertising as rainbow-washing, attributing to large corporations situational motivations—that is, purely profit-driven ones—rather than intrinsic motivations. Quantitative data support this perception. A content analysis of 2,930 English-language journalistic articles on pinkwashing published between 2020 and 2022 Commetric, cited in Admind found that the primary trigger

for pinkwashing accusations was the finding that companies with rainbow advertising had simultaneously made donations to politicians or causes opposed to LGBT+ rights [17]. According to data by Chalabi, several U.S. corporations that displayed rainbow logos during Pride month 2019–2020 funded politicians who voted against the Equality Act in Congress, a bill providing protections against discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. These findings are consistent with the first hypothesis advanced in this research—that there exists an instrumental use of LGBT+ symbols by large corporations to improve their public image without addressing the structural conditions of labor exploitation. This observation has a supporting basis: it is not a speculative inference, but an empirically documented phenomenon in peer-reviewed academic journals and in quantifiable data.

8.3. Corporate Foundation Funding: Structure and Concentration

The structure of philanthropic funding for LGBT+ organizations has been systematically documented by Funders for LGBTQ Issues since 1970. Their data allow precise identification of the profile of the main institutional actors involved. According to their 2018 tracking report, total foundation funding for LGBT+ issues in the United States reached a historical high of \$209.2 million that year. More significant than the total figure is its composition: for the first time in tracking history, non-specifically LGBT+ funders—that is, general-purpose corporate and philanthropic foundations—surpassed specific ones, representing 61% of the total (Funders for LGBTQ Issues, 2018). Among the principal individual funders are the Open Society Foundations, the Ford Foundation, and the MacArthur Foundation. In the specific corporate segment, the pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences—manufacturer of the antiretroviral Truvada, whose market is directly tied to the LGBT+ population—contributed \$37.7 million, equivalent to 10% of all foundation funding in the sector that year (Funders for LGBTQ Issues.) [5]. This datum illustrates with particular transparency the underlying logic: corporate philanthropy toward identity-based causes is not altruistic but structurally functional to the market interests of the donor corporations. The hypothesis advanced in this research regarding the role of major corporate foundations in the funding and direction of identity activism is thus empirically substantiated in its factual aspects. Research by Incite! Women of Color Against Violence elaborates the critical distinction between two types of effects of such funding: the direct effect, whereby funded organizations adopt agendas compatible with the funder's interests; and the structural effect, whereby financial dependence produces self-censorship and the reformulation of demands in terms tolerable to the funder [18]. This distinction, developed under the concept of the nonprofit industrial complex, is fundamental to a non-conspiratorial understanding of the phenomenon.

9. The Electoral Dislocation of the Left: From Workers' Party to the Graduates' Party

9.1. The Inversion of the Educational Cleavage: Comparative Evidence

One of the most robustly documented electoral phenomena in comparative political science over the past two decades is the

inversion of the educational cleavage in Western democracies: the fact that left-wing forces, which historically represented sectors with lower formal education and lower incomes, have progressively become the preferred party of voters with higher educational attainment, while lower-education sectors have migrated toward the right or toward new populist formations. The most comprehensive documentation of this phenomenon is provided by Gethin, Martínez-Toledano, and Piketty in their article published in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, based on the analysis of post-electoral surveys from 21 Western democracies between 1948 and 2020 [19]. The authors find that, whereas left-wing parties in the 1950s obtained results up to 17 percentage points lower among university graduates relative to non-graduates in France, by 2012 that same indicator had reversed: university graduates voted for the left in greater proportions than non-graduates. Similar patterns, with somewhat different chronologies, are documented in the United Kingdom and the United States. The most significant implication of this finding is what Piketty terms the multiple-elite party system: a configuration in which both the left and right blocs represent distinct fractions of the upper classes—the intellectual elite or Brahmin Left and the business elite or Merchant Right, respectively—while the low-education, low-income popular sectors are left without effective representation within the party system [20]. As Gethin note, this dissociation between the educational cleavage and the income cleavage "can be related to the growing relevance of a large and complex set of public policy issues, including environment, migration, gender, education, and merit, that divide voters along educational, but not income, lines."

9.2. The Disconnection Mechanism: The Prioritization of Cultural Over Economic Politics

The mechanism by which this dislocation occurs has been analyzed from complementary perspectives. Thomas Frank, in his study of the electoral behavior of the American working class in Kansas, argued that conservative parties had succeeded in capturing populist language through the exaltation of conservative "emotional wedges"—abortion, family, values—while displacing from public debate the economic policies that materially harmed that same working class [21]. The left, for its part, had contributed to this displacement by adopting a predominantly cultural agenda that was alien to the everyday concerns of its traditional electoral base. Piketty and his collaborators offer a complementary structural explanation to that of Frank: as left parties came to be dominated by voters and activists of higher educational attainment, they adopted socioculturally progressive positions that alienated their traditional working-class base. As Rovny summarizes, commenting on Piketty's work: "the implied conclusion is that the left has abandoned the working classes through its shift toward culturally, rather than economically, progressive politics [22]." This observation has robust quantitative empirical backing, based on electoral data from 21 countries over seven decades. The analytical contribution this paper makes is the articulation of the mechanism of this dislocation with the processes of corporate co-optation described above: this is not an involuntary error on the part of the left, but the structurally foreseeable consequence of the financial dependence of progressive parties and movements on

the same corporate actors that promote recognition politics as a substitute for redistribution politics.

10. The Redistribution-Recognition Dilemma: Structural Tension or Instrumental Incompatibility

10.1. Fraser's Analytical Framework

The tension between economic redistribution politics and cultural recognition politics—which constitutes the analytical axis of this paper and which surfaces intuitively—has been the subject of an extensive and rigorous academic debate initiated by philosopher Nancy Fraser. In her article "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a Post-Socialist Age," published in *New Left Review*, Fraser observes that in post-socialist political conflicts "group identity supplants class interest as the principal medium of political mobilization [23]. Cultural domination supplants exploitation as the fundamental injustice [13]. And cultural recognition displaces socioeconomic redistribution as the remedy for injustice and the goal of political struggle." This diagnosis by Fraser—formulated in 1995, before Piketty's electoral data quantified its consequences—anticipates with remarkable precision the phenomenon described here. Crucially, Fraser does not conclude that recognition politics is in itself an instrument of capitalist domination, but rather that it can become one when it operates in a manner disconnected from redistribution politics. In her article "Rethinking Recognition," Fraser identifies two specific problems with recognition politics when it becomes dominant: the displacement problem—whereby recognition struggles marginalize, eclipse, and displace redistributive struggles—and the reification problem—whereby they tend to simplify and solidify group identities rather than complexify them [24].

10.2. Fraser's Position as Simultaneous Refutation and Confirmation

Fraser's framework allows us to observe two things simultaneously. On the one hand, it constitutes a refutation insofar as Fraser argues—with theoretical solidity—that not all recognition politics is regressive, and that "some represent genuinely emancipatory responses to serious injustices that cannot be remedied by redistribution alone." That is, the broad intuition that identity politics are entirely a tool of capitalist control is empirically untenable, since liberation movements, in their original form, responded to real forms of oppression. But Fraser's framework is also a substantive confirmation insofar as her concept of displacement describes with academic precision the documented fact that the recognition agenda has tended to displace, rather than complement, the redistributive agenda, with tangible electoral and organizational consequences for the forces that articulated the interests of the working class.

10.3. The Brahmin Left Paradox: Quantitative Evidence

Piketty's and Gethin data allow for quantification of the electoral consequences of the displacement described by Fraser [20,19]. In the United States, in the 2016 presidential election, 70% of voters with a master's degree (representing 11% of the electorate) voted for the Democratic candidate, along with 76% of voters with doctoral degrees (2% of the electorate). Among voters without a

university degree, who constitute 59% of the electorate, only 44% voted for the same candidate. This pattern is consistent across the three political traditions studied—French, British, and American—over seven decades, lending it exceptional comparative validity. The question these data pose is whether this shift is the result of a spontaneous convergence between the interests of university-educated voters and the progressive values of left-wing parties, or whether there exists a causal relationship in the opposite direction: that the adoption of cultural progressive agendas by left parties, fostered by their new university-educated base and their financial dependence on corporate foundations, has produced the estrangement of the non-university working class [25]. The data from Gethin suggest that the second hypothesis is more consistent with the evidence: the inversion of the educational cleavage can indeed be linked "to the growing emphasis on sociocultural factors among old and new parties," which points to changes in political supply—not only demand—as the primary explanatory factor.

11. Synthesis: Toward a Theory of Differential Co-Optation

The three phenomena analyzed in this second part—rainbow capitalism, the electoral dislocation of the left, and the displacement of redistribution by recognition—are neither independent phenomena nor merely parallel ones. Their structural articulation may be described as follows: transnational corporate capital actors have an objective interest in shifting the left's political agenda from redistribution toward recognition, because the former threatens their accumulation structures while the latter is compatible with them. This interest materializes through:

- Direct funding of organizations, parties, and media that prioritize the identity agenda over the economic one;
- Corporate promotion of LGBT+ and feminist symbols and causes that generate progressive image at no redistributive cost; and
- The construction of a hegemonic cultural field—in the Gramscian sense—in which criticism of recognition politics is presented as a conservative reaction, thereby inhibiting its articulation within left movements themselves.

This articulation—which may be termed the theory of differential co-optation—does not imply conspiracy: none of the mechanisms described requires prior agreement among actors. What it requires is a structural convergence of interests, which is precisely what the empirical data presented document. This distinction is crucial to the academic validity of the argument: the hypothesis that the displacement of redistribution by recognition objectively benefits capital does not depend on there having been a deliberate decision to that effect, but rather on the structural incentives of the system producing that result systematically, regardless of the intentions of individual actors. In this sense, one can academically maintain the hypothesis that corporate capitalism generates structural incentives that favor the co-optation of liberation movements and the displacement of redistributive politics, independently of even the awareness or intention of the actors involved.

12. Conclusion of Part II

This second part has academically demonstrated the three

central hypotheses with robust empirical and theoretical support in the specialized peer-reviewed literature. The corporate co-optation of LGBTQ+ movements under the form of pinkwashing or rainbow capitalism is documented in business ethics journals, communication studies, and philanthropic funding analyses [26]. The dislocation of the left from its traditional working-class base is quantified in comparative electoral studies of 21 democracies over seven decades. And the structural tension between redistribution and recognition has been elaborated with theoretical rigor by Nancy Fraser since 1995, constituting today one of the most active debates in political philosophy and sociology [13]. What this research captures and allows us to analytically discern is the scaffolding enabling us to distinguish between what can be affirmed with empirical support and what remains at the level of speculation: not all identity politics is an instrument of domination; there exist genuinely emancipatory recognition movements not reducible to the logic of rainbow capitalism [27]. But the systematic tendency toward the displacement of redistribution by recognition, favored by the structural incentives of corporate capitalism and documented in its electoral and organizational effects, is a real, academically established phenomenon, the political consequences of which the specialized literature is beginning to recognize as one of the most acute problems facing the contemporary left [28].

References

- Herman, E. S., & Chomsky, N. (2002). *Manufacturing consent: The political economy of the mass media* (2nd ed.). Pantheon Books. (Original work published 1988)
- Bernays, E. L. (1928). *Propaganda*. Horace Liveright.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Q. Hoare & G. N. Smith, Eds. & Trans.). International Publishers. (Original work written 1929–1935)
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2023). Antonio Gramsci.
- Funders for LGBTQ Issues. (2018). 2018 tracking report: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer grantmaking by U.S. foundations.
- Lehman, J. (2010). *An introduction to the Overton window of political possibilities*. Mackinac Center for Public Policy.
- Britannica. (n.d.). Overton window. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.
- Asch, S. E. (1951). Effects of group pressure upon the modification and distortion of judgments. In H. Guetzkow (Ed.), *Groups, leadership and men* (pp. 177–190). Carnegie Press.
- Gachter, S., Gerhards, L., & Nosenzo, D. (2023). The power of social influence: A replication and extension of the Asch experiment. *PLOS ONE*.
- Marcuse, H. (1964). *One-dimensional man: Studies in the ideology of advanced industrial society*. Beacon Press.
- Funders for LGBTQ Issues. (2019). *LGBTQ philanthropy since Stonewall: The top ten funders of all time*.
- Open Society Foundations. (n.d.). *Giving trans activism the support it deserves*.
- Fraser, N. (1995). From redistribution to recognition? Dilemmas of justice in a "post-socialist" age. *New Left Review*, (212), 68–93.
- Puar, J. K. (2007). *Terrorist assemblages: Homonationalism in queer times*. Duke University Press.
- Schulman, S. (2011, November 22). Israel and "pinkwashing." *The New York Times*.
- Heilmann, K., Schöps, A., & Sievert, F. (2024). Productive tensions of corporate Pride partnerships: Towards a relational ethics of constitutive impurity. *Journal of Business Ethics*.
- Admind. (2022). *Exposing pinkwashing: Striving for real D&I*.
- Incite! Women of Color Against Violence. (2007). *The revolution will not be funded: Beyond the non-profit industrial complex*. South End Press.
- Gethin, A., Martinez-Toledano, C., & Piketty, T. (2022). Brahmin left versus merchant right: Changing political cleavages in 21 Western democracies, 1948–2020. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 137(1), 1–48.
- Piketty, T. (2018). *Brahmin left vs merchant right: Rising inequality and the changing structure of political conflict* (WID.world Working Paper 2018/7). World Inequality Lab.
- Frank, T. (2004). *What's the matter with Kansas? How conservatives won the heart of America*. Metropolitan Books.
- Rovny, J. (2019, September 16). The "Brahmin left" vs the "Merchant right": A comment on Thomas Piketty's new book. *LSE European Politics and Policy Blog*.
- Fraser, N., & Honneth, A. (2003). *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange*. Verso.
- Fraser, N. (2000). Rethinking recognition. *New Left Review*, (3), 107–120.
- Kiss, S., Polacko, M., & Graefe, P. (2024, June 10). Educated voters in Canada tend to vote for left-leaning parties while richer voters go right. *The Conversation*.
- Marcuse, H. (1969). Repressive tolerance. In R. P. Wolff, B. Moore, Jr., & H. Marcuse (Eds.), *A critique of pure tolerance* (pp. 95–137). Beacon Press. (Original work published 1965)
- Rammstedt, B., & John, O. P. (2007). Measuring personality in one minute or less: A 10-item short version of the Big Five Inventory in English and German. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 41(1), 203–212.
- Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. (2013). Herbert Marcuse.

Copyright: ©2026 Josue Bernardo Casella Moreira. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.