

Reviews and Analysis

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MWEG: Grassroots "Addressing Misinformation" and "Voter Education"

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Summary

MWEG's efforts to "address misinformation on social media" were evaluated from a widely-shared public social media post of the group's founder regarding the upcoming November 2020 election. This post was reviewed for standards of factual accuracy and nonpartisanship.

"Addressing Misinformation on Social Media:" Of eleven thematic replies, one made no factual or political claims and could not be evaluated. Ten (10) remaining replies could be evaluated. Two replies were rated as mostly false, three were rated as false, and one was rated as "blatant falsehood." In total, six of ten (60%) contained narratives rated as mostly or entirely false. Two additional statements represented partisan claims as fact. Five replies (50%) were rated as distracting or misleading, all biased in favor of the political left. Valid or partially valid concerns were wrongly dismissed on five items. In aggregate, the piece attempting to "address misinformation on social media" was both less accurate and more partisan than the post it attempted to "correct."

Background

Mormon Women for Ethical Government notes that it conducts "voter education" activities. It also claims to train its members regarding how to "address misinformation on social media." The group's "Principles of Nonpartisanship" pledges that "MWEG will not endorse candidates or party platforms, nor will it privilege one party over another" in its public activities.

While these sound like praiseworthy goals, ethical behavior is not established by virtuous-sounding claims but by their implementation. It is, therefore, appropriate to evaluate MWEG's take on "voter education" and "addressing misinformation."

Grassroots activism refers to community-based activities bringing individuals together for a common cause, whether on the basis of geographic locale, bonds such as religious faith, belief, or other factors, to engage in collective action towards desired goals. Informal interactions and statements are at least as important, and arguably more important, to grassroots activism than formal ones. Much of the action occurs at the level of interpersonal contact and social messaging that is not delineated by group boundaries. Grassroots activists use social messaging to seamlessly influence outsiders, while affiliates act as amplifiers and

promoters.

While specific "grassroots" messages are not explicitly endorsed by the parent organization, they can provide essential insights into the atmosphere, attitudes, and worldviews of a group, at times illuminating key insights more clearly than crafted official statements. MWEG was organized through the efforts of like-minded individuals on social media. Such efforts have only grown. Evaluation of the nature of content promulgated through expansive social networks is relevant and necessary to understand the organization.

The essay examined below is NOT AN OFFICIAL STATEMENT OF MWEG. This is the case for all such social media activism, which nonetheless constitutes an integral aspect of MWEG's mission.

As with the full review of MWEG, statements here are not intended as an endorsement of one political candidate. I do not endorse either candidate and have serious concerns about both Donald Trump and Joe Biden.

Work of Public Discourse

The composition, dated September 5, 2020, is a prominent part of the public pre-election discourse in the online LDS community, having been shared some 338 times at the time of this writing. Although the number who viewed it is not precisely known, it is likely in the tens of thousands. Its author is a public figure. The authorship is well-known, having been seen by thousands. Many in the LDS community saw this posting on multiple feeds, and it generated considerable discussion both online and offline. The post is a persuasive advocacy piece ostensibly intended for wide distribution to influence third-party audiences. The post itself does not mention any private individuals. It is not part of or in response to private dialogue but was ostensibly intended as public discourse. It was written in response to another public advocacy piece by an unknown author. It is publicly accessible, although I will not post the link here to protect the privacy of third-party promoters and commentators. As an influential item of public discourse on key national matters, its evaluation is within the scope of public interest and does not breach "netiquette" or infringe privacy.

Relevance to MWEG

While the composition is not officially endorsed by MWEG, numerous links tie it to the group. Many of the sharers and promoters are members and affiliates of MWEG. The poster is MWEG's founder, Sharlee Mullins Glenn. The post appears to be promoted as a model of some of MWEG's ostensible values, including civil discourse, addressing "misinformation," and grassroots "voter education." The theme of the November 2020 presidential election could not be more relevant to MWEG's activism, as it brings the group full circle. MWEG was organized the week of Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2017 as an anti-Trump activist group.

The narratives and worldviews promoted in the piece correspond closely to those we have seen in MWEG's official statements. The social media piece at times takes a more direct approach, which is expected due to the sanitization and softening that can occur with committee review. This should not obscure that the underlying narratives, worldview, and agenda are essentially the same. Any departure from what we have already seen in MWEG's official statements is a matter of form and not substance.

The piece below is, in my observation, substantially representative of the broader social media activism of this genre promoted among MWEG's members. Over the past three years, I have noted dozens of similar posts from a variety of MWEG authors and promoters which have appeared in my news feeds. While posts of other MWEG affiliates varied based on specific current

events and issues, the themes closely mirrored those of in the piece below, including certain narratives, tactics, and conclusions that are repeated in piece after piece. Although numerous such postings of various authors are publicly accessible by anyone, I know only of the only ones which have appeared in my news feed without active search. Nonetheless, I have refrained from comparison and analysis of other narratives promulgated by MWEG affiliates out of consideration for privacy. As a result, I will make an assertion which I will not rigorously document here but am far from alone in being able to attest. Analysis of a cross-section of social media advocacy by MWEG affiliates offers clear evidence that the piece below is substantially representative of the group's social media activism.

Therefore, the piece is appropriate both as an object of evaluation and as a prominent example of MWEG's grassroots social media activism. One of MWEG's official statements notes:

"It is incumbent upon us to rise above the polarizing pull of partisanship…Each U.S. citizen also needs access to the unbiased information required to make reasoned civic choices. We must each commit to be a responsible consumer of news, privileging well-researched and reputable reporting over commentary or tweets from partisan sources."

It is appropriate to examine Glenn's post here to see how it measures up to these standards of nonpartisanship, factual accuracy, and factual integrity. I had not previously seen the original post that Glenn is commenting on and do not know its origins.

"Addressing Misinformation" on Social Media

GLENN: I've seen this post (below) copied and pasted on many people's profiles here on Facebook. I'd like to provide a reasoned point-by-point response. The copied and pasted post that many people are sharing:

"To answer all of those of you who would say "I can't believe you would vote for Trump." Well folks listen up! I'm not just voting for him. I'm voting for the second Amendment. I'm voting for the next supreme court justice. I'm voting for the electoral college, and the Republic we live in. I'm voting for the Police and law and order. I'm voting for the military, and the veterans who fought for and died for this Country. I'm voting for the Flag that is always missing from the Democratic background. I'm voting for the right to speak my opinion and not be censored. I'm voting for secure borders. I'm voting for the right to praise my God without fear. I'm voting for every unborn soul the Democrats want to murder. I'm voting for freedom and the American Dream. I'm voting for good and against evil. I'm not just voting for one person, I'm voting for the future of my Country! What are you voting for?"

GLENN: My response (and let me preface this by saying that I am not a Democrat. I am a moderate with classical conservative leanings who is currently unaffiliated.):

>1. "I'm voting for the second Amendment."

GLENN: The second amendment is an important part of the Constitution, but it's but one small part. And the truth is that none of the candidates for president want to take away everyone's guns. None of them. And certainly not Biden. Putting in place some common sense regulations that will save innocent lives and which the vast majority of Americans agree are needed in no way violates the second amendment. The second amendment is safe no matter who wins in November.

GLENN: What's much more concerning to me is the utter disregard for other critical parts of the Constitution exhibited by our current president. Important things like the separation of powers, the emoluments clause, the right to peaceful assembly, and freedom of the press have all been flouted by President Trump.

STEWART: Common-sense firearms regulations represent an important public health and safety issue and are widely supported by Americans across the political spectrum. These are generally considered to include measures such as prohibitions on felons, psychiatrically ill, and threats identified by "red flag laws" from owning firearms; bans on automatic and semiautomatic assault weapons, converter devices, and large-capacity magazines; prohibitions from procuring or loaning firearms to non-eligible persons; and safety measures, including requiring parents to secure firearms from access by children.

Joe Biden's gun control proposal offers only limited common-sense reforms while including questionable items that have been cited as disadvantaging the poor and minorities. WaPo contributor Kim Kelly wrote that "Biden's gun control plan is terrible for working-class firearm owners. It will put them at risk while doing little to curb gun violence." Without space for detailed analysis here, these concerns appear to be overblown, although the core issues driving gun violence remain unaddressed.

The subsequent laundry list represents partisan allegations and not objective facts. Allegations of emolument clause violations have been dismissed by the court. Absent is any comparative context or critique of the conduct of leftists, such as the recent Senate report, which found that Biden family members "were involved in a vast financial network that connected them to foreign nationals and foreign governments across the globe" and received millions in wire transfers from Russia. In murky business dealings, Biden's direct family members received assets worth millions from China (according to some sources, up to $1.5 billion or more - perhaps an all-time record for any U.S. political figure) for activities that "may have imperiled American national security." Mormon historian John Hajicek explained in a post of September 25, 2020:

"Gullible voters are missing the point about Hunter Biden, and about the Clinton Foundation. It isn't only that the Biden and Clinton families got rich while Joe and Hillary were in office during the last administration. Foreign enemies didn't squander that money, charitably or foolishly. It is that the families traded something for that money. The Clinton and Biden families sold influence, such that Joe and Hillary gave away priceless American security and/or inestimable American prosperity in exchange for that money. The money influenced U.S. foreign policy and strategy. It constitutes bribery, for a foreign enemy to pay off the son of U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, or to pay the husband and foundation of U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. In comparison, it is like a magician's misdirection to point at a foreign ally merely sleeping in a Trump hotel to flatter Trump's ego, and call Trump corrupt. The Bidens and Clintons are caught in undeniable bribery scandals. Yet our publishers and broadcasters are pretending Bill and Hunter were handed the money for their good looks and charm, while they accompanied Joe and Hillary who were overseas negotiating U.S. policy."

Some other items will be addressed subsequently.

Rating: 1. Partly true. Paragraph 2 - Partisan allegations presented as fact.

>2. "I'm voting for the next supreme court justice."

GLENN: I hope we're all concerned about who our next supreme court justice will be. Hopefully it will be a justice who is not a political pawn. We need justices who are impartial and nonpartisan and we need a good balance of those who are by nature a little more progressive and those who are a little more conservative in their approaches.

STEWART: MWEG is indeed concerned over who the next Supreme Court justice will be and wants the seat to be filled by a Democrat. This notwithstanding the lack of precedent and credible ethical predication for objection. Supreme Court vacancies in an election year have almost always been filled when the same party controls both the White House and the Senate, whereas when different parties controlled the White House and Senate, an election-year vacancy was last filled in the 1880s. No one imagines that Democrats would leave the seat unfilled if they controlled both the Presidency and the Senate.

Unprecedented threats by leftist senators to "pack the Supreme Court" would seem to be a fundamental ethical issue that challenges the separation of powers, the U.S. system of checks and balances, and longstanding precedent. Kamala Harris has long stated that she is "open" to adding additional seats to pack the Supreme Court to undermine conservatives. But MWEG has made no mention of these matters, as the group's critiques have been directed almost exclusively against conservatives.

Rating: No rating. No factual claims were made.

>3. I'm voting for the electoral college."

GLENN: I'm not sure the electoral college is really on the line in this election. Changing the way a president is elected would take an amendment to the Constitution which would require a 2/3 affirmative vote in the House, 2/3 in the Senate, and 3/4 of the states. It is interesting to note, though, that 65% of Americans across the board think the president should be determined by popular vote (see 2019 Atlantic/PRRI poll).

STEWART: The principle contemporary movement to change the electoral college mechanism has been through the National Popular Vote Interstate Compact (NPVIC) and not through a constitutional amendment. The National Popular Vote Interstate Compact to "guarantee the Presidency to the candidate who receives the most popular votes across all 50 states and the District of Columbia" has already been "enacted by 16 jurisdictions possessing 196 electoral votes" and, it is anticipated, "will go into effect when enacted by states possessing a majority of the electoral votes—that is, enough to elect a President (270 of 538)." This would require states representing just 74 more electoral votes sign on. This compact, which is an attempt to change the constitutionally-mandated process for selecting a president without a constitutional amendment, would need only a few more state signatories to become active. Some legal scholars have argued that to take effect, the NPVIC would require congressional consent, and therefore may be at stake in national elections. This process would also advance if promoted by a president.

Rating: Mostly false, misleading/distraction and dismissal of valid concern. Current concerns about altering the constitutional electoral college process hinge principally on the NPVIC, yet an argument claiming that a change would require an unlikely constitutional amendment is substituted as a "straw man."

>4. "I'm voting for the police and law and order."

GLENN: This statement concerns me a lot because as Greg Sargent so succinctly points out:

"'Law and order' without the rule of law is neither 'law' nor 'order.' Law and order without the rule of law is the wielding of power and violence (both state violence and private vigilante violence) unshackled from law-and rules-bound processes."

The truth is that as much as Trump likes to call himself the candidate of law and order, he has shown over and over again that he has no respect at all for the rule of law. Law and order without rule of law = authoritarianism.

It's also highly ironic that Trump keeps pointing to the riots and looting that are accompanying some of the protests across the country and saying: "This is Biden's America. I will be the president of law and order."--apparently forgetting that, well, he *is* the president. What he is pointing to is actually Trump's America.

STEWART: This response conveys sentiments that I recently heard in a Biden radio ad, closely echoing the same language about Trump's America. These are partisan slogans.

The author levies partisan allegations while ignoring growing leftist authoritarianism and construes basic misconceptions about the American system of government. The unprecedented number of unanimous rebukes by the Supreme Court over extreme positions taken by the Obama administration reflects nothing if not a breakdown of the rule of law, yet never seem to have troubled MWEG's members. Others have raised the alarm at V.P. nominee Kamala Harris' authoritarianism and disregard for the U.S. Constitution and the rule of law: likely "the first presidential candidate in history to laugh derisively at the idea that the Constitution limits what a president can do."

Governors and mayors, not the president, are responsible for maintaining law and order in their states and cities, and those in the worst-affected ones almost all declined federal assistance. Almost all of the cities with widespread violence and looting were run by Democrats. This bizarre self-own in the Washington Post was widely critiqued as unintended satire. Experienced law enforcement officials across the country have placed the blame squarely with leftist mayors and governors who refuse to enforce the law: 1,2,3,4,5,6. These trends began long before Donald Trump was even a candidate.

Destructive riots and mass unrest have repeatedly been acknowledged as leftist political strategies. Even the far-left New York Times has acknowledged that the so-called "mayhem" that was not "the spontaneous eruption of anger at racial injustice," but was "strategically planned, facilitated and advertised on social media." A Rutgers research report documents "systematic, online mobilization of violence that was planned, coordinated (in real-time) and celebrated by explicitly violent anarcho-socialist networks that rode on the coattails of peaceful protest." Even liberal commentator Bill Maher acknowledged that Joe Biden will have to wear looting "on his back into the election" because it is being done by the left.

Leftist groups have promised more protests and unrest before the November 2020 election as calculated political theater. Recently, Democratic V.P. nominee Kamala Harris called for continuous political unrest, albeit ostensibly peaceful, as part of the leftist strategy. It would be naïve to think that such incitement calling vast throngs into the streets, including not only peaceful protesters but anarchists and criminals, will not result in destruction and loss of life.

An official statement of MWEG notes: "Words spoken at rallies and over podiums and airwaves should be both chosen and judged based on how they affect those most susceptible to violent tendencies." It is not difficult to see how hate speech and false, incendiary claims by leftists (#23, above) are likely to incite violence. This potential for violence and wanton destruction is vastly amplified when mobs are enabled and emboldened by Democratic mayors refusing to enforce the law, protect their own citizens, and hold criminals accountable.

On the day President Donald Trump was inaugurated, the political secretary of the Marxist group Freedom Road Socialist Organization "Steff Yorek declared to a crowd of Washington protesters: 'We need to stay in the streets the entire four years opposing Trump and making the country ungovernable.'" is disingenuous to blame Trump for the conduct of his opponents. But it is not surprising that MWEG would do so, seeing that it was organized during this same week of Trump's inauguration – and by all indications of the group's subsequent conduct, not as a nonpartisan ethics group, but as part of the Obama resistance.

Rating: False/misleading. Partisan allegations are represented as fact. Misstatement of the American system of government regarding who is responsible for maintaining safety and order in cities. Ignores real differences in stances towards the police and maintaining safety in American cities between political candidates.

>5. "I'm voting for the military, and the veterans who fought for and died for this country."

GLENN: Me too. Which is why I cannot vote for Trump. President Trump knew about and ignored the fact that Russia was offering bounties to Taliban militants to kill U.S. soldiers in Afghanistan. Trump has treated Gold Star families with deep disdain and repeatedly attacked the record and integrity of war hero, Senator John McCain. And the most recent allegations regarding his calloused comments about our brave soldiers killed in battle should be deeply concerning to every American.

STEWART: Here, we have one allegation which allegedly was not deemed credible by intelligence officials and on which the president was allegedly not briefed (it has also been claimed that Democrats would also have had access to the intelligence). Veterans have found the politicization of this dubious allegation offensive. Another claim is based on an anonymous/unidentified source first reported by the same publication that soon thereafter called for the suspension of the Nobel Peace Prize. This claim is now widely considered debunked and has been discredited even by Trump critic John Bolton, with no evidence it ever happened.

Joe Biden, as Obama's Vice President in 2016, insulted U.S. troops at Al-Dharfra Air Base in the United Arab Emirates, telling them "clap for that, you stupid bastards." Biden subsequently appears to call the troops "a dull bunch" and states that "they must be slow." Unlike the unsubstantiated and largely discredited allegation against Trump, Biden's words are recorded on video. The authenticity has been confirmed by the Biden campaign.

Trump's claim that the mother of a Gold Star family that lost a son in Iraq was not allowed to speak while her husband criticized him at the 2016 Democratic National Convention and a bizarre controversy with Gold Star families in 2017 were inappropriate and unpresidential. Yet his Democratic opponents are never held accountable for numerous bizarre and inappropriate incidents, such as Joe Biden's racist and controlling statements towards Blacks, history of racist policies, abusive statements towards a female supporter, and profane and abusive attack on a factory worker. Joe Biden's handlers have tried to minimize unscripted interactions with voters because of Biden's propensity for bizarre controversies. Joe Biden's performance has been noted by the founder of MSNBC to be "very unsatisfying" even in “softball interviews.” Many Democratic strategists have seen coronavirus restrictions keeping Joe Biden in his basement as a blessing. This strategy has worked well because of Trump’s propensity to self-destruct.

Rating: False. Partisan narratives are uncritically presented as fact while contrary data is ignored. Double standard. Only the Republican president is attacked, primarily on the basis of dubious partisan allegations, while Democrats are given a free pass for confirmed abusive and inappropriate conduct.

>6. "I'm voting for the Flag that is always missing from the Democratic background."

GLENN: A simple fact check and/or google search of images will show that this statement is blatantly false. The Democrats display the flag at their events with the same regularity that Republicans do.

STEWART: The flag is not "always missing from the Democratic background," but neither do "Democrats display the flag at their events with the same regularity that Republicans do." For example, there were no physical flags on the stage on the first night of

the Democratic National Convention in 2016.

Some have shared the perception that there appear to be far fewer flags waving in the audience at many Democratic events than Republican ones. Although a "flag count" hardly seems to be a substantive issue, the Pew Research Center found in 2014 that self-reported pride in being an American was much more widespread among conservatives (72-81%) than among solid liberals (40%). The perception of a "patriotism gap" is not unfounded.

Rating: Mostly false. There is no evidence that “Democrats display the flag at their events with the same regularity that Republicans do,” and evidence of a “patriotism gap” is ignored.

>7. "I'm voting for the right to speak my opinion and not be censored."

GLENN: Yes, freedom of speech is a vital part of our democracy. Which, again, is why I could never vote for Trump. He has repeatedly tried to suppress the voices of those who disagree with him, including at his own rallies. Also, hate speech is not protected by the Constitution.

STEWART: Real concerns about freedom of speech are dismissed with a hand-waving pivot to a partisan attack on Trump. This is particularly disappointing as freedom of speech has been declining worldwide for years, and not in consequence of the 2016 U.S. election. Most Americans think that social media sites censor political viewpoints.

Increasingly, free speech has come under attack from the political left. There are numerous documented cases of leftist mayors and governors discriminating against unfavored speech, including rights to assembly, worship, and protest by conservatives and Christians, while giving a free hand to leftists. Contemporary college students are “both more left-wing and more openly hostile to free speech than earlier generations of collegians.” This creates an “atmosphere of harassment and intimidation," which "undermines the tradition of free inquiry that used to be the hallmark of higher education.”

Even centrists have been censored and "canceled." Millions of Americans have experienced firsthand the discrepancy summarized by Senator Tom Cotton: "It cannot be the case that thousands of Americans can exercise their First Amendment right on the street, while dozens of Americans can't exercise their First Amendment rights in churches...it cannot be the case that you can be arrested for opening a business but not for looting one." Ironically, Senator Cotton was censored by the New York Times for his unfavored views, even though polls showed that more than half of Americans supported his thesis, whereas MWEG’s anti-Trump editorial was printed.

Democratic candidate Kamala Harris has promised to pursue online censorship of unfavored speech. Those who follow human rights are well aware that such legislation has been abused elsewhere as a pretext to silence political opponents while failing to curb hate crimes.

Trump should be held accountable for his mixed record, which has mostly been supportive of peaceful protestors but has also included some troubling incidents. The author ignores increasing violence and incitement against Trump supporters and fails to call out high-profile Democrats, including Hillary Clinton, who have encouraged mobs by stating that “you cannot be civil” towards Republicans.

Rating: Distraction/Misleading. Partisan narrative and allegations represented as fact; failure to hold leftists accountable.

>8. "I’m voting for secure borders."

GLENN: Again, every single viable candidate from both major parties during this election cycle wanted secure borders. Does anyone want insecure borders? Of course not. This statement is a prime example of a straw man argument--one of the most common logical fallacies employed in political discussions.

STEWART: The official 2020 Democratic Party platform makes no mention of border security in its discussion of immigration (pp. 61-64), except in the negative to state opposition to the border wall (p. 61). Media sources have noted that Joe Biden “doesn’t even distinguish” between legal and illegal immigration (nor does MWEG – see #9 above) and has proposed widely opening American borders to bring in an additional two million immigrants a year. Kamala Harris has advocated decriminalization of illegal entry into the U.S. and non-enforcement of border security. Harris compared Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers to the KKK. She supports sanctuary cities and states which ignore federal immigration law and prohibit cooperation of local law enforcement with federal immigration officials. Many leftist politicians do not want secure borders. The reasons are not hard to find.

MWEG is obviously aware of major differences in border security platforms among presidential candidates. The group objected vociferously in an official MWEG letter to former presidential candidate and then-senatorial candidate Mitt Romney over his stated “hawkish” immigration stance, including border security.

Rating: Blatant falsehoods with no merit. Additional citation is made for “gaslighting” as MWEG and its leaders are obviously aware that the claim is false, based on the group’s own official statements.

>9. "I’m voting for the right to praise my God without fear."

GLENN: Again, straw man. Is anyone planning to take away anyone's right to praise their God without fear? No. Although Trump came as close as any U.S. president ever has by threatening to shut down mosques. Freedom of religion must extend to all religions.

STEWART: It is unfortunate that these important concerns are dismissed with hand-waving. Religious freedom has been declining worldwide, and not because of Donald Trump.

After terrorist attacks in Paris perpetrated by Islamic terrorists killed 130 and wounded 494, France's interior minister stated they would pursue the "dissolution of mosques where hate is preached." More recently, leftist French president Emmanuel Macron has noted ongoing difficulties with Islamic radicals and vowed a crackdown on Islamic separatism. Candidate (not President) Trump's comments were similarly directed only as a last resort towards mosques which were inciting hate and violence (where "bad things are happening"), noting that he would "hate to do it..." and would close specific sites down only if there is "no choice." He also noted the history of surveillance and profiling of radical Islamists by prior administrations. The author has previously acknowledged that hate speech is not protected. This is the case even if hateful rhetoric occurs within a church or mosque.

The author also fails to mention Trump's designation of "churches, synagogues and mosques" as "essential services," calling for

them to re-open largely over restrictions implemented by Democratic governors. The claim that Trump tried to deny Muslims' rights of worship is a leftist canard.

The Pew Research Center has reported that a majority of U.S. adults who identify themselves as Democrats or who lean Democrat feel that religion's impact on public life does more harm than good. Attacks on churches have increased markedly: " houses of worship and religious statues are coming under attack in the protest mayhem" following calls from the far left. The BLM movement has noted that it is not attempting to dismantle Christianity and that many Christians are part of the coalition. Nonetheless, increasing attacks on Christianity from an "ascendant cultural secularism" are real.

Rating: Mostly false and highly partisan. The respondent dismisses valid concerns about trends of declining religious freedom and increasing violence against Christianity with hand-waving. The charges against Donald Trump are also partisan and involve gross misrepresentation.

>10. "I'm voting for every unborn soul the Democrats want to murder."

GLENN: It's difficult to even know how to respond rationally to such an irrational statement. I am not a Democrat, but I know many, and I don't know a single Democrat who wants to murder unborn souls. What a terribly unhelpful way to approach the very complex and nuanced topic of abortion.

I get how problematic the issue of abortion is. It's hugely problematic for me too. I am staunchly pro-life. But it's a complicated issue (as my own church's position on abortion acknowledges (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints)) and sensationalist, inflammatory, and reductive statements like the one above should offend the intelligence of every single one of us.

STEWART: The response critiques the initial poster's poor and exaggerated phrasing without addressing the underlying concern. Democratic candidate Kamala Harris has co-sponsored many Planned Parenthood bills and has a 100% pro-abortion rating from the abortion advocacy group NARAL (0% pro-life). Kamala Harris has also voted against providing medical care for abortion survivors. When Harris was Attorney General of California, David Daleiden produced a video documenting that Planned Parenthood executives appeared to be selling fetal parts. Instead of investigating these abuses, Harris's response was to sue Daleiden for exposing them.

The reply obfuscates the LDS Church's stance on abortion as "complicated," when the Church's position is straightforward. Official LDS statements denounce elective abortion with limited exceptions for "exceptional circumstances," such as "the result of incest or rape," when "the life or health of the mother is judged by competent medical authority to be in serious jeopardy," or "when the fetus is known by competent medical authority to have severe defects that will not allow the baby to survive beyond birth." The statement further notes that "even these circumstances do not automatically justify an abortion" and recommends prayerful consideration in consultation with ecclesiastical leaders. Abortion is clearly not represented as an acceptable form of routine birth control.

That said, I believe that there is a difference between one's personal moral beliefs and imposing them on others through the law and acknowledge that women, speaking generally, are far better equipped than men to understand and make decisions regarding the difficult and deeply personal issues of abortion. I do not believe that male legislators and judges should make decisions regarding what women can and cannot do on the matter, beyond a preference to save the baby if viable to live independently outside of the womb and the mother's health is not excessively jeopardized thereby, and perhaps limited steps to ensure that the alternatives have been discussed and considered consistent with the requirements of procedural informed consent.

Centrists and some conservatives have made pragmatic acknowledgment that elective abortion is here to stay, but have opposed the extension of abortion laws to killing infants who can survive outside of the womb, or have supported provisions to render medical care to infants who survive abortion procedures. Countless loving families would be happy to care for them.

Rating: Distraction. Dodges the underlying ethical issues, and does not address valid concerns regarding potential expansion of abortion law.

>11. "I'm voting for freedom and the American Dream. I'm voting for good and against evil."

GLENN: Me too. Which is why I cannot under any circumstances vote for someone like Donald Trump, the very antithesis of our Savior and of everything that He taught.

STEWART: This statement directly contravenes the MWEG Pledge Not to Leverage or Weaponize Faith for Political Gain, which states: "We hereby pledge to never...morally condemn individuals for their personal political expressions or imply that any candidate or party has doctrinal, Church, or divine support." This pledge, which had been published only three weeks earlier, applies to the personal conduct of signatory individuals as well as to the organization.

Here, Trump is painted as an anti-Christ, "the very antithesis of our Savior." Religious faith is evoked to support political partisanship, which is zealously proclaimed as a new gospel. There is no possibility for balance or fairness, no nuance in this Manichaean world in which Trump is the incarnate Satan, and Biden is the implied savior figure.

The proximate cause of the MWEG Pledge Not to Leverage or Weaponize Faith (#38) appears to have been improper claims and use of temple imagery on the website of Latter-day Saints for Trump: inappropriate behavior which ought to be condemned. It is curious that many of the promoters of the above composition were MWEG affiliates who less than a month before had been indignant with such behavior from conservatives, but it appears that no one raised any concern about this weaponization of faith favoring Democrats. Are the problems with such statements really so difficult to see? What happened to ostensibly inviolable ethical boundaries? Behavior that evokes outrage when committed by political enemies is deemed responsible and even exemplary in the service of favored causes. Is this the behavior of credible, nonpartisan arbiters of ethics?

Rating: Extreme partisanship, claim of religious mandate for political partisanship

"Addressing Misinformation" and "Voter Education" Results

Of eleven thematic replies, one (#2) made no factual or political claims and could not be evaluated. Ten (10) remaining replies could be evaluated.

Factual Accuracy: Two replies (#6,9) were rated as mostly false, three (#3,4,5) were rated as false, and one was rated as “blatant falsehood with no merit” and was additionally cited for gaslighting (#8). In total, six of ten (60%) contained narratives that were mostly or entirely false.

Four replies (#1,4,5,7) represented partisan allegations as fact. Two of these (#4,5) were already cited for additional claims that are false or mostly false. When aggregated with prior ratings on factual accuracy, eight of ten replies (#1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9) contained statements that were either false, mostly false, or represented disputed partisan allegations as fact.

Partisanship and Bias: Five replies (#3,4,7,9,10) were rated as distracting (#3,7,10), misleading (#3,4,7), or involved gross misrepresentation (#9), all biased against Republicans or in favor of Democrats. Valid or partially valid conservative concerns were wrongly dismissed on five items (#4,7,8,9,10). One item (#11) was cited for extreme partisanship with the claim of a religious mandate for political partisanship.

“Addressing Misinformation” Discussion

The public election advocacy piece was apparently intended as a model of fair-minded civil discourse, voter education, and correction of “misinformation” on social media. How does it rate when assessed by MWEG’s stated principles? Does it “rise above the polarizing pull of partisanship?” Does it adhere to eloquently stated principles about the importance of seeking “clear, objective, verifiable facts,” “unbiased information,” and being a “responsible consumer of news?” Does it successfully “address misinformation” and provide a balanced, reasoned, and robust data? Is it a factual, nonpartisan, and ethics-based resource that one can appropriately share to educate about election issues?

To the fair-minded reader, it seems obvious that the intent of the piece is not to provide balanced, factual, and nonpartisan voter education. It is not to provide carefully-researched data and context to correct misinformation. It is not to advocate for principled, ethical government. Rather, it engages in unabashed political advocacy from its inception. The post that the social media piece critiqued lacked sophistication and included both factual and interpretive errors: low-lying fruit to be sure. Yet the response astonishingly failed to meaningfully improve on almost any item.

In the best case, one partisan position is merely swapped for another. In others, meritorious items are replaced with erroneous ones. Valid or partly valid concerns are dismissed with distraction and misleading assertions. Disputed partisan claims are repeatedly presented as fact. Political opponents are painted in the worst possible light with inflammatory narratives. Contrary data and perspectives are withheld. Members of the favored party are never scrutinized or held accountable.

The piece serves as political propaganda attempting to dissuade prospective voters from the author’s unfavored candidate and to boost a favored candidate. The initial poster is permitted no valid reason of conscience or logic to vote for his or her favored candidate but is instead compelled to support the respondent’s favorite as a moral imperative. It is total partisan war; a seek-and-destroy mission intended to undermine every stated argument for the opposing candidate, to put all of one’s weight on the scale to tip it in the direction of the desired outcome. This includes points that have nothing to do with the group’s unfavored candidate and no relevance to ethics, such as the discussion about flag count. A cotton-candy view of leftist policies is taken, repeatedly portraying them as benign and concerns and objections as unfounded.

On most topics where the unfavored candidate is not mentioned, a pivot is made to attack him, however unrelated or strained the transition. The tactic recalls Cato the Censor’s habit of ending every speech with a call for the destruction of Carthage: “Ceterum autem censeo Carthaginem esse delendam” (“Furthermore, I consider that Carthage must be destroyed”). The impression is conveyed that only the totally naïve or the moral reprobate could support the unfavored candidate, or fail to discern a matter as obvious as the spiritual equivalence of one candidate to Satan and the other, by implication, to Jesus.

For many, the Trump/Satan and implied Biden/Jesus comparison is hardly self-evident and falls flat – not because individuals have not heard enough partisan rhetoric, but because a more balanced evaluation demonstrates serious concerns regarding both candidates.

Conflicts of Interest

There is an affirmative duty to disclose real or perceived biases and conflicts of interest. The leaders of bona fide ethics organizations are not permitted to engage in overt public political advocacy at odds with the organization's stated principles. Care is taken to observe ethical boundaries and avoid any appearance of impropriety. It would be unethical for a researcher owning stock in a pharmaceutical company to present research on the company's medication as if it represented impartial, independent research. It is similarly unethical for an organization's leaders to engage in biased partisan conduct and then claim that the group's activist positions on these same topics are fair, nonpartisan, and unbiased.

Public figures and prominent organizational members are regarded as role-models for those within their organizations, while those without are likely to judge the organization by their conduct. Such individuals have a duty to conduct themselves circumspectly and to represent their organization well in their personal conduct and not only when explicitly acting in an official role. When a discrepancy arises between claims and conduct, others almost inevitably will assimilate the conduct that is demonstrated over abstract statements of principle.

MWEG's founder and other prominent members have demonstrated political prejudices that would disqualify from jury service regarding the very persons and topics MWEG critiques. In a judge, such conduct would mandate recusal. Other prominent leaders of the group have engaged in similar conduct. The partisanship of MWEG's leaders poses conflicts for the group's claim of nonpartisanship

These conflicts of interest are never acknowledged or disclosed by Mormon Women for Ethical Government, which repeatedly insists that it is a nonpartisan group. To the contrary, efforts are made to obfuscate and deny these biases. Whether the conduct is centrist, nonpartisan, or ethical is determined by evaluation of the conduct itself, and not by the group's self-interested characterization of its own activities.

Ethical Boundaries and Nonpartisanship

The public election advocacy of MWEG's founder cited above demonstrates a strategy that has been repeatedly implemented by MWEG members: the claim, whether stated or implied, that there is no reason to vote for the group's unfavored candidate, and that opposing him represents a moral imperative. Over the past three and a half years, I have seen numerous similar pieces by various authors promulgated by MWEG acquaintances. Each was construed as a veritable tour de force of ethics and reason, a powerful "checkmate," demonstrating that there was "no reason" of ethics or logic – more often explicitly stated than not – to vote for the group's designated political enemy. There has seemed to be almost a competition within the group to see who could most cleverly portray designated political enemies as the world's great threat to (insert virtuous principle here). Related narratives articulated how (insert leftist agenda item) that was never the case in the history of our nation has now become an imperative which virtuous and informed people cannot oppose.

Each piece brimmed with factual errors, partisan talking points represented as fact, naked assertions, withholding of contrary data, and logical fallacies. Yet such fare was conveyed as the work of genius and mastery within the echo chamber of like-minded partisans who were either unable to identify glaring errors or unconcerned thereby. When misrepresentations and

inaccuracies were called out by unrelated parties, MWEG affiliates would often perseverate in their partisan narratives without attempting to engage the data.

While the content varied, the messages have conveyed much the same logic as the piece above: that those who fail to oppose the group's unfavored candidate or to support the favored candidate have no valid moral or logical reason. Reasonable people from across the ideological spectrum, it has been argued, are compelled to band together to oppose MWEG's political enemies. It is the doctrine of the Only True Church, or religious exclusivism, transmigrated to partisan politics.

Yet MWEG goes beyond that, attempting to impose a new orthodoxy. As we have already seen from the group's official statements, MWEG's "nonpartisanship" permits others to support any party they wish, so long as it is the Democratic party. Those who do not tow the "party line," much like those in Congress who did not support impeachment in spite of concerns about a "sham" process are prone to portrayal by MWEG as "rank partisans" (#41). They are defined a priori to behave out of misplaced loyalties or lack of virtue, and not because they have any valid moral or logical reason for their convictions. Facts and evidence no longer matter, nor is any role of individual conscience allowed – at least, not if conscience points to conclusions different from those declared acceptable by MWEG's Ministry of Truth. Dissenters, by implication, must be evil or stupid. A fanatical level of partisanship that does not acknowledge that others have valid and important reasons for personal and political beliefs differing from one's own is troubling behavior from a group ostensibly opposed to authoritarianism.

MWEG transgresses boundaries traditionally observed even by overtly partisan organizations. Whereas the Democratic and Republican Parties and their candidates have made their case to the American people, the right of conscience has always been respected. If someone does not support the platform and arguments of a traditional partisan advocate, he moves on. He does not chase them down and attempt to deconstruct their worldview and show that ALL of their reasons for supporting their favored candidate are wrong. In presenting support of a political agenda as an ethical mandate with which there is no valid moral or rational grounds for dissent, MWEG becomes both more partisan and less ethical than the partisans themselves.

Mormon missionaries do not set out to make war with the religious establishments of the world, proclaiming to Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, or Protestants that there is no valid reason for their faith. They do not base their approaches on dismantling the beliefs of others, nor do they imply that adherents of other faiths must be ignorant or bereft of moral judgment. Rather, they work to show a better way.

Attempts to impose political orthodoxy among Latter-day Saints, whether for Democrats or Republicans, have been explicitly repudiated by the LDS Church. Like millions of others, I have friends and acquaintances across the political spectrum, from far-left to far-right. I would not dream of impugning the sincerity of their faith as Latter-day Saints, their faith as Christians, their ethics, or their intelligence by claiming that there is "no reason" for them to support the candidate of their choice or to foist beliefs upon them as a moral imperative. It is good that there are people on the political left and on the political right. I try to glean what is worthy on both sides, or frequently from neither when both parties depart from principle. I am glad to live in a nation that celebrates diversity, where individuals are free to think, speak, and vote according to their conscience. Matters of individual conscience are precisely that.

It has been particularly troubled to witness longtime MWEG acquaintances who I had previously held in high regard engage in one-sided public attacks, ostensibly as voices of ethics, and then turn around and engage in overt partisan scheming – calling, for instance, to ignore evidence of significant malfeasance by China in order to focus attacks exclusively on Trump as part of a political strategy. Partisan scheming is more akin to the conduct of Pharisees than Jesus. Rather than facilitating greater civility and thoughtful, open-minded discourse, the group has hardened partisanship. Pseudo-religious testimonies of political figures are shared. One-sided partisan diatribes lacking basic fairness and factual integrity are construed as virtuous acts of moral courage. One form of bigotry is denounced while another is embraced. A crusade against political infidels – couched in persuasive and subtle language, but a holy war nonetheless – has been waged, even as the group has continued to assert that it is nonpartisan and ethics-based.

Many op-eds by MWEG members have followed the script as little more than anti-Trump screeds, attempting to blame the

Republican president for a range of ills with one-sided partisan narratives while ignoring positive contributions and failing to hold leftist fellow-travelers accountable. "Anyone would be better," it has often been implied: slogans similar to those that, in the twentieth century, brought down corrupt imperial regimes and swept far worse revolutionary dictatorships to power. The group's ostensibly "inviolable principles" of civil discourse are suspended in regard to designated political enemies, who are dehumanized, even demonized. It is always necessary to scrutinize both sides to soberly understand alternatives. Deconstruction alone does not build a brighter future, and it is always possible for things to get worse.

These same MWEG op-eds have cited the authors' affiliation with Mormon Women for Ethical Government to legitimize one-sided, inflammatory, and discourteous partisan claims as ostensibly ethical and faith-based, even while disclaiming that the opinions do not represent those of MWEG. The group has long tried to have it both ways, promoting political narratives both through official statements and grassroots advocacy while claiming to be nonpartisan.

I have no love for either Donald Trump or Joe Biden and have debated with pro-Trump acquaintances to critique misstatements and inaccuracies on multiple occasions. I do not understand the mentality of voters that propelled either of these candidates to the national stage. Yet fairness and basic integrity should not be partisan issues hinging on personal political preferences, with one standard for favored candidates and another for unfavored candidates. Breaches of fairness and integrity are everyone's concern and should be called out and held accountable regardless of whether they boost or hamper a favored agenda.

Several MWEG respondents have written without addressing the core issues, asserting that either (1) the piece above is just personal opinion and has nothing to do with the organization, or (2) have pointed to the group’s stated principles without addressing variations. Yet the worldview expressed above offers a glimpse into the mindset that led to MWEG’s founding, as well as the philosophy that has governed the organization. MWEG’s official statements and advocacy all reflect these same biases and perspectives. Again, any differences are matters of form and not substance. Stated principles are of little relevance if not observed.

I would certainly be interested in hearing from other MWEG members regarding the following questions: Do you believe that MWEG is exempt from ethical requirements for disclosure of bias and conflicts of interest of leaders and officers in regard to the biases expressed in this and other pieces? Do you not object to false and misleading claims when used to boost your favored candidates and issues or to oppose unfavored candidates? Do you believe that claims made in the above piece do not represent the weaponization of religion for political gain? Do you believe that these tactics of partisan “total war” attempting to dismantle every claim and conveying to others that there is no moral or ethical reason to support candidates opposed (whether formally or informally) by MWEG, constitute constructive and responsible civic discourse? Do you deny that numerous such pieces have been modeled and propagated under the guise of ethical mandate, formally or informally, by MWEG’s leaders and affiliates? Do you believe that the group’s public representations have been truthful, fair, and consistent with the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the demands of normative ethics?

Others can review the data and decide for themselves.