Chapter 4: Far-left Groupthink and Political Bias

> *"Socialism in general has a record of failure so blatant that only an intellectual could ignore or evade it."*
>
> Thomas Sowell

Given the decades long 'march through the institutions' discussed in Chapter 2 it is hardly surprising that surveys repeatedly show that academics lean overwhelmingly to the political left. That would not necessarily be a problem, as intellectual communities have always had political biases. The difficulty arises when one outlook becomes so dominant that alternative perspectives are treated less as arguments to be debated than as views that fall outside the boundaries of acceptable opinion. In many areas, this environment has come to be shaped not simply by broadly left-leaning views but by Marxist-inspired intellectual frameworks that increasingly structure how social and political questions are discussed.

This dynamic rarely takes the form of formal censorship. Instead, it emerges through culture and incentives: hiring patterns, professional networks, reputational pressures, and the gradual consolidation of intellectual orthodoxies.

The effects are increasingly visible across university life. They shape what is taught in classrooms, which ideas gain institutional legitimacy, and how dissenting voices are treated when they challenge prevailing assumptions.

This chapter explores how these pressures have reshaped academic culture, teaching, and intellectual debate.

Marxist-Inspired and critical frameworks courses

Before describing how widespread these developments are, I think it is important to state that I do not object to universities teaching subjects like Marxism and even critical race theory. Academic freedom means that such ideas should be examined. But they should be open to criticism.

The problem begins when these ideas stop being topics of study and become the assumptions that shape all study. When theories about power, race, gender, and oppression are treated as unquestioned truths, other perspectives are pushed aside. At that stage, a university shifts from open inquiry to intellectual conformity.

Gender-focused studies were once rare. The first dedicated Women's Studies courses in the UK appeared in the late 1970s and 1980s. Since then, they have expanded widely. Efforts to "decolonise" the curriculum are even more recent. They gained momentum in the mid-2010s, including campaigns such as "Why is My Curriculum White?" at University College London

(UCL)[1] in 2015. After global events in 2020, these efforts accelerated. Many universities now have formal policies and working groups devoted to this agenda.

Theories of race, power, and education, have followed a similar path. What began as occasional modules has gradually become embedded in teaching and teacher training across much of the university sector.

Substantial gender studies programmes now exist at many major universities, including Cambridge, Oxford, UCL, King's College London, Edinburgh, and Manchester. Modules focused on race, racism, or critical race theory appear in institutions such as Kent, Leeds, Durham, Birmingham, and Goldsmiths. Other related themes are increasingly common: courses centred on intersectionality, initiatives aimed at "decolonising" the curriculum, and programmes grounded in critical theory, postcolonial theory, or continental philosophy. Several of these themes often coexist within the same departments or degree programmes.

The same pattern is visible in teacher training. Most programmes now refer explicitly to EDI, anti-racism, or related concepts in their training materials. They also invariably cite the work of Paulo Freire, a Marxist-inspired Brazilian educator whose "Pedagogy of the Oppressed" has been interpreted by critics as encouraging political activism and social transformation through education[2].

Over time, this has produced a noticeable shift in university curricula and teacher training. A generation ago, such a development would have seemed unlikely. Today many academics and students no longer see these ideas as one perspective among others; they simply assume them to be true.

At the institutional level, this can sound abstract. In everyday academic life, however, it appears in small but telling ways. I first encountered it as a student.

My early student experiences

It was in my first year as a student at the LSE in 1975 that I first encountered the indoctrinating power of organised Marxist activism within academia. With my then left-leaning views, I attended the student union's frequent and often theatrical "emergency" debates. Two such meetings, held in the same week in November 1975, were especially instructive.

The first concerned the outbreak of civil war in Angola following the collapse of Portuguese colonial rule. I knew nothing about Angola, its history, or the factions involved. The meeting was dominated by a stream of confident, emotionally charged speeches, all in support of the Marxist group, backed by the Soviet Union, Cuba, and China, and against rival groups receiving covert American support. With no knowledge of the facts but primed by my existing political sympathies and the atmosphere in the room, I left the meeting genuinely enthusiastic in support of the Marxist group.

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[1] https://imogentyler.uk/2016/04/12/why-is-my-curriculum-white

[2] https://theeducationist.info/pedagogy-oppressed-critique

Only days later, another packed debate addressed the recent UN General Assembly Resolution 3379, which equated Zionism with racism. Unlike Angola, this was a subject I knew well through my Jewish upbringing and family ties to Israel. It was obvious that many of the Marxist speakers had little understanding of the issue. Their arguments largely echoed Soviet and Arab propaganda and sometimes crossed into antisemitic territory. More revealing was the audience response. Students with little prior knowledge were swept along by the rhetoric and left convinced that Zionism was racist and Israel an enemy.

It was then that my earlier enthusiasm for the Angolan Marxists snapped into focus. If the same speakers could be so confidently wrong, so casually dishonest, about Israel as I knew they were, why should they be uniquely insightful about Angola? I could see that neither debate had been an exercise in learning or argument; they were exercises in emotional alignment and virtue signalling.

At the University of Sheffield, much of the Marxist activism I saw took the form of strong anti-Western sentiment and criticism of Israel that, as at LSE, often crossed into antisemitic rhetoric, a subject I discuss in Chapter 13. I also saw how radical student groups could shape campus culture. At the time, any society with twelve members could receive funding. Along with Ed Tranham, who would later become a co-director of our company Agena, we made use of that rule after we founded a Spurs supporters' group.

Figure 1 Me receiving an award from World Cup winner Martin Peters at a Sheffield Spurs event, 1981

Looking back, similar funding structures enabled multiple variations of anti-Western, Marxist-aligned groups to flourish on campus.

Anti-Americanism, Trump and Brexit

During the 1980s and 1990s I, like most of my colleagues, was still politically left leaning and very comfortable within that environment. I benefited from the very system I later came to criticise: its elitism, its conformity, and its instinct to protect its own. We all ridiculed anyone who expressed sympathy for Margaret Thatcher or conservative ideas. Such views were treated as evidence of poor judgement. In fact, overt hostility toward Thatcher had become a compulsory marker of intellectual belonging within academic culture.

By the late 1990s, I became increasingly uneasy with the attitudes common among many academics. There was often a reflexive disdain for the views, values, and emotional instincts of ordinary people, coupled with an assumption of intellectual and moral superiority. One colleague in particular, Martin Neil, shared my discomfort, and together we began to feel that something had gone badly wrong within the surrounding culture.

Martin had joined me at City University in 1995, and he soon became my closest colleague. Like me, he came from a tough working-class background, which set us apart socially from many of our peers. We were never entirely at ease within the champagne-socialist, Guardian-reading culture that dominated much of academia, though at the time we remained sufficiently left-leaning to belong within it.

We were alarmed at an intense and often unthinking anti-Americanism that lost any obvious ethical framework. At its worst, Martin Neil and I both recall hearing staff and students expressing reactions that ranged from indifference to excitement after the collapse of the Twin Towers on 11 September 2001. Even more disturbing, a small number of former students were later reported to have travelled to Syria during the ISIS conflict. These episodes reflected a campus climate in which hostility toward Western institutions was sometimes normalised or excused.

By the time Donald Trump entered American politics, ideological conformity had become virtually automatic. During my time at the Isaac Newton Institute in Cambridge, the 2016 US presidential election unfolded in an atmosphere of near-total emotional unity. There was confident expectation of a Hillary Clinton victory and fear, treated as unthinkable, of a Trump win.

Even before election night, the atmosphere had turned punitive. A fellow researcher approached me with a mathematical problem and asked whether I could help her. I spent two full days working through it. When I finally presented a solution, she said she was not interested; she had only posed the problem because she had overheard me criticising Hillary Clinton and felt compelled to intervene and distract me. The exercise was a quiet form of reprimand.

When Donald Trump did win, the institute fell into what felt like collective mourning. The opening seminar that day was delayed so participants could express their shock and distress.

I had seen the same kind of behaviour during the 2016 Brexit referendum. Before the vote, opposition to Brexit was treated in academia as obvious and unquestionable. University leaders warned publicly of damage to research funding, international links, and global reputation. Many institutions issued statements supporting Remain. Surveys suggested that around 90% of academics intended to vote Remain[3].

Among colleagues I considered friends, even a tentative suggestion that I might vote Leave was met with astonishment and laughter; they assumed I must be joking. Support for Brexit was not just considered wrong. It was treated as unserious and socially unacceptable. Those who supported Leave kept quiet as silence became safer than disagreement.

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[3] https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/european-union-referendum-nine-out-of-ten-university-staff-back-remain

The reaction within academia to both Trump's victory and the Brexit referendum was one of shock and disbelief. In many departments, colleagues spoke openly of anxiety about the future, and discussion often took on the atmosphere of a wake.

Political activist first, academic second

At the many universities where I worked or with whom I collaborated, there were always academics who acted primarily as political activists. They use university time, resources, and authority to promote ideological causes. On several occasions, I complained about senior academics using official university webpages to promote material, that in my view appeared sympathetic to terrorist organisations, alongside information about their courses.

I have also been alarmed by the increasing academic involvement with online curation and censorship, euphemistically described as efforts to combat "online harms" and "misinformation". Enormous government funding since 2016 has been ploughed into AI research in university computer science departments and the Alan Turing Institute dedicated to this work. However, much of it has focused on developing clever AI algorithms intended to classify "harm" or "misinformation", using definitions that reflected heavily biased political assumptions.

For example, after attending many seminars on this topic, I noticed that examples of "misinformation" invariably included claims made by Donald Trump, even though many of those claims were later shown to be true. One frequent example was Trump's claim about the laptop of Hunter Biden, the son of then-presidential candidate Joe Biden. The claim was that the laptop contained incriminating evidence about the Biden family. The 'misinformation experts' dismissed this as Russian disinformation, but it was later shown to be true.

During one major online event the bias was so intense that I asked in the chat whether Trump supporters were welcome. The replies were openly hostile. I was told that anybody had any sympathy for Trump was not welcome there.

In 2019, I participated in a public panel of academics challenged to persuade an audience to reconsider issues allegedly settled by mainstream consensus. I chose two: that Trump's 2016 victory involved Russian collusion, and that climate science was "settled". I received vicious abuse from attendees and from a fellow academic on the panel for simply stating the fact (albeit largely un-reported by mainstream media in the UK) that the Mueller report had concluded definitively that there was no Russian collusion. I was called a "Trump supporter", considered the worst possible insult.

The detailed case studies that follow expand on these and similar episodes.

The price of dissent: intolerance on campus

My friend Montgomery Toms is a young British activist and founder of Freedom Watch GB. In 2023 he entered the University of the Arts London, London College of Communication, full of hope for genuine intellectual exploration. Instead, he encountered what he describes as a regime of ideological conformity masquerading as education.

Toms says that within weeks students were compelled to declare pronouns in every class, engage in race-based self-criticism sessions, and adopt progressive activist language as a condition of participation. Refusing to comply with what he saw as indoctrination rather than learning, Toms chose to walk away after just three weeks.

His voluntary departure was not a retreat but a principled rejection of an environment that punished independent thought and rewarded enforced consensus. In an era when many students quietly conform to survive, Toms' exit stands as an early warning of how EDI mandates can drive out those unwilling to submit.

According to Toms, when he returned to the campus three years later as a campaigner, protests escalated into violence, highlighting how intensely polarised the campus environment had become. A video of the events[4] seems to confirm Toms' allegation that he was attacked outside the campus on public ground for politely inviting debate on mass deportations. It also seems to confirm the allegation that his friend Will Coleshill restrained the attacker but, in doing so, was beaten by a group of students and lecturers. The video also seems to confirm their claim that police subsequently arrested Coleshill rather than the individual alleged to have initiated the confrontation. In the video a police officer clearly says to Toms that discussing mass deportations "creates a situation" where "you shouldn't be shocked" if you get attacked.

The pressures that drove a student like Toms from campus do not emerge in isolation. They reflect a wider academic culture in which political activism is normalised and institutional boundaries are blurred. The same logic that enforces conformity among students also permits faculty to use university platforms for ideological campaigning.

Political propaganda on a university faculty webpage

In the mid-2000s, a senior professor at a leading UK university ran a personal webpage hosted on the university's servers. The site was the main portal for students to access lecture notes, research materials, and exam information. Alongside this academic content, however, he posted overtly far-left political material unrelated to his teaching.

The page linked to campaigns urging people to withhold taxes as an anti-war protest. In an article published on the site he also argued that there was no meaningful moral distinction between groups such as Al Qaeda and the Taliban and the British and American forces fighting them.

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[4] https://youtu.be/yHJG35xRe10

The webpage included crude and offensive cartoons mocking Jesus and Christianity. Political banners and links to inflammatory content appeared alongside lecture notes and course information. Students visiting the page for essential academic resources could not avoid exposure to these views.

The issue came to light in 2007 when a concerned friend, whom I will call Jane, discovered the site while researching the university for her child. She filed a formal complaint with the vice-chancellor. Jane argued that while the professor had a right to his personal opinions, hosting such material on an official university page forced it on students and blurred the line between education and activism.

The university's computing services director reviewed the case but declined to intervene, saying the page did not violate network policies. He cited the importance of free expression. Jane suggested a simple solution: move the non-academic content to a separate personal page, linked from the main one. The university refused to act, and correspondence ended without resolution.

In 2009, the professor received a senior civil service appointment advising the government on national energy and climate strategy, overseeing substantial public funding.

This episode demonstrates how weak institutional oversight can allow political activism to operate under the banner of academic freedom. The case also suggests that holding extreme political views may not be an obstacle to high-level government advisory roles; in fact, it can even be beneficial.

While extreme, this example is by no means uncommon. I flagged two colleagues who also posted radical anti-American and anti-Israel material prominently on their course web pages. Fortunately, in these cases when I complained directly, they agreed (albeit reluctantly) to move them elsewhere.

Academic bias at The Royal Statistical Society

One of the clearest examples of political bias disguised as professional judgement occurred in 2011 and involved the Royal Statistical Society (RSS). At that time, I had not been cancelled or censored for political views, largely because I had never expressed them publicly. I was leading an established research programme on Bayesian reasoning in law, working with senior collaborators and publishing widely. I was seen as a mainstream academic, not a provocateur.

The episode began with a short blog post[5] I wrote about claims that Barack Obama's memoir, Dreams from My Father, might not have been written solely by him. This was the first time I had written something that could even be described as political. My interest was methodological, not partisan.

In fact, my analysis weakened the strongest version of the shared-authorship claim. Using Bayesian reasoning, I showed that the available evidence did not support claim under reasonable assumptions.

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[5] https://probabilityandlaw.blogspot.com/2011/07/using-bayes-to-prove-obama-did-not.html

However, it turns out that anybody raising even the faintest possible criticism of then President Obama opened themselves up to being called a far-right conspiracy theorist, especially by academics who almost universally regarded him as one of the greatest ever gifts to mankind.

Around the same time, and separately encouraged by the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser to the Home Office, I contacted the RSS asking them to join a proposed research network called Bayes and the Law. The aim was to improve statistical reasoning in the criminal justice system. The proposal had nothing to do with the blog post and did not mention it.

The initial response, coming from a senior RSS official, was enthusiastic. Then, within twenty-four hours, it abruptly reversed. The same person, who must have subsequently seen my article, wrote:

> *"Dear Professor Fenton, your project is very interesting. But I can't help wondering why, of all the subjects to which Bayesian analysis might be turned for profitable result, you chose … the case of the authorship of President Obama's book, as denied by people who, to put it mildly, are politically motivated in a distinctly rightwing direction."*

I was shocked that he even raised such an issue, as it had nothing to do with the proposal he had earlier expressed enthusiasm about. The problem was not my analysis but the *topic itself*, and more specifically its perceived political associations.

The email went on to stress that the article I had critiqued "appeared in a publication associated with the Tea Party", adding:

> *"There's not a lot of rationality in such quarters, and a lot of arrant prejudice. If a good case is going to be made to judges, lawyers, juries and the criminal justice system, the company one keeps is important."*

In other words, even analysing an argument that came from the political right was treated as a reputational risk. This was presented as professional caution rather than ideological policing, but the message was unambiguous.

The email then attempted to repackage this objection as a methodological concern:

> *"We can't apply Bayesian reasoning till there's reliable evidence to hand. You assume Loftus and Cashill provide reliable evidence. Yet their political affiliations could lead an impartial observer to wonder about their sincerity and disinterestedness."*

This was strange because my analysis undermined, rather than supported, the claims against Obama.

When I pointed this out, it made no difference. The RSS withdrew its support and the funding bid failed, possibly because several legal academics who had previously expressed enthusiasm quietly distanced themselves. I cannot know whether this was connected, but the timing appeared striking.

The problem was not that my reasoning was flawed, but that I had engaged with the "wrong" people. Their political views alone were treated as enough to discredit the work.

It is interesting that no one called it censorship. Instead, it was framed in terms of "reputation," "company," and professional standards. But the message was simple: some questions should not be asked, no matter how carefully they are examined. As my colleague Martin Neil later observed, even mentioning a right-wing argument had come to be seen as a right-wing act.

The enforcement of ideological conformity is not confined to marginal activists or student politics; it extends upward to the creation and protection of academic celebrities.

Academic celebrity and conformity: Daniel Kahneman

The career of Daniel Kahneman provides an example of how reputational authority can shape academic discourse. Kahneman, a psychologist by training, received the Nobel Prize in Economics in 2002 for work on behavioural economics. At the time of his death, he was widely described as one of the greatest thinkers of his generation.

Kahneman's work on loss aversion and his "fast versus slow thinking" framework, popularised in his best-selling book *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, had enormous cultural influence. However, subsequent research has suggested that the empirical support for some of its central claims is less robust than many assume. Critics have argued that several influential findings are smaller, less consistent, or more dependent on specific experimental designs than originally believed[6].

These criticisms rarely reached the public, so his conclusions were often presented as settled truth rather than open to debate.

Kahneman openly admired Barack Obama and, in 2013, received the Presidential Medal of Freedom from him. In an academic culture strongly shaped by progressive politics, this reinforced his standing.

I met Kahneman in 2014 at a behavioural legal studies workshop at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He formally opened the event with a public lecture and an interview. He was treated as its central intellectual figure. The atmosphere was deferential. In my view, some of the claims he made were supported by less evidence than their presentation suggested, yet no one challenged them.

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[6] Osman, M. (2015). The problem with 'Thinking Fast and Slow': The limits of dual-process theories. The Psychologist, 28(2).

Figure 2 Kahneman (right) on stage with Prof. Eyal Zamir at the Hebrew University

At one point, I asked why he had stated that President Obama was a "System 2" thinker, someone supposedly more careful and rational in decision-making. His answer amounted to little more than contrasting Obama favourably with President Bush. The audience laughed approvingly and no one pressed the point further.

What happened next was also concerning. A formal reception had been organised in his honour, but Kahneman did not attend and left before many participants had the opportunity to speak with him. Some attendees, including myself, found this surprising given the event's emphasis on his contribution.

To me, Kahneman's standing appeared to reflect not only his research but also features of an academic culture that I believe rewards political alignment, discourages scepticism, and overlooks behaviour that would not be tolerated in others. Universities do not elevate figures solely on the strength of their ideas; they also elevate those whose work reinforces prevailing narratives, and groupthink ensures that this often goes unchallenged.

Chomsky: ideology, atrocity, and intellectual immunity

Noam Chomsky is one of the most influential academics of the modern era. His pioneering work in linguistics made him one of the most cited scholars in the world and gave him a public platform far beyond his academic field. Politically, he has long described himself as a libertarian socialist and anarcho-syndicalist, and his career illustrates how strong ideological commitments can shape the interpretation of political events.

During the late 1970s, as evidence mounted that the Communist Khmer Rouge had caused the deaths of roughly two million people in Cambodia, Chomsky questioned the reliability of early reports, and critics have argued that this scepticism had the practical effect of minimising one of the twentieth century's worst genocides. When the scale of the atrocities became undeniable Chomsky shifted to emphasising the role of prior U.S. bombing and regional conflict.

Remarkably, the controversy had little impact on Chomsky's professional standing. He remained an Institute Professor at MIT; his books continued to sell widely, and his reputation within large parts of the academic world remained largely intact.

The economist Thomas Sowell has argued that intellectuals like Chomsky operate in a system insulated from the normal consequences of error. In *Intellectuals and Society*, Sowell observed that most professions are judged by tangible outcomes: a doctor who repeatedly harms patients loses a licence; an engineer whose bridge collapses faces legal consequences. Intellectuals, by contrast, are rarely judged by the real-world effects of their ideas. In Sowell's analysis, this insulation from consequences explains why certain ideological frameworks persist in academia even after their practical applications have produced catastrophic results.

Regimes inspired by Marxist ideology in the twentieth century, including the Soviet Union, Maoist China, Cambodia under the Khmer Rouge, and North Korea, were responsible for tens of millions of deaths. Yet Marxism remains a respected intellectual framework across many disciplines in Western universities, and scholars who identify with it frequently hold prominent academic positions.

It is instructive to compare this with conservative thinkers. For example, Ayn Rand, a defender of individualism and capitalism, is often dismissed in academia. Yet her ideas were never associated with regimes responsible for mass repression or violence. Why, then, are Marxist ideas often treated more favourably?

Over the decades Chomsky has expressed sympathy for a range of radical anti-Western movements, frequently interpreting their actions primarily through the lens of opposition to U.S. foreign policy. During the Covid era, however, Chomsky advocated the social exclusion of people who refused vaccination. Asked how those excluded from society would obtain food, he responded: "Well, that's actually their problem". Such views are difficult to reconcile with the image of Chomsky as a champion of personal freedom and civil liberties.

These episodes show that in academia, status and ideological conformity often matter more than accuracy. As Paul Johnson observed after studying the influence of major twentieth-century thinkers:

> "One of the principal lessons of our tragic century is: beware intellectuals. Not merely should they be kept well away from the levers of power; they should also be objects of particular suspicion when they seek to offer collective advice."

Ideas backed by celebrated far-left academics can retain influence long after the evidence against them has become clear.

The Anti-Autocracy Handbook

Few documents show the distorted ethical lens now widespread in academia as clearly as *The Anti-Autocracy Handbook: A Scholars' Guide to Navigating Democratic Backsliding*.[7] Produced in 2025 by a network of academics and policy advocates whose political outlook is generally progressive, it presents itself as a defence of democracy, academic freedom, and truth. To me, it appears less concerned with defending open debate than with protecting a progressive academic establishment from external accountability.

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[7] https://commonslibrary.org/the-anti-autocracy-handbook-a-scholars-guide-to-navigating-democratic-backsliding/

The handbook's main claim is that academia, especially in the United States in the Trump era, faces an "existential" threat from authoritarianism. Yet the dangers it points to are just elected officials questioning research priorities, funding choices, and ideological bias. Instead of treating this as normal democratic oversight, the authors describe it as an attack on academic independence. What they oppose is not repression, but scrutiny by conservatives.

Figure 3 Nina Jankowicz

This becomes clearer when looking at the people promoted within this network. One example is Nina Jankowicz. She is a leading figure in the modern "disinformation" industry and former head of the Biden administration's short-lived Disinformation Governance Board. She has spoken at major academic events, including a disinformation summit at the University of Cambridge. Her public statements and performances are widely available, and she faced criticism for what many see as a censorious approach and far-left political leanings.

Critics on social media dubbed Jankowicz "Scary Poppins" following a widely viewed video[8] she made about "countering misinformation" set to the tune of *Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious*. The episode raised questions about the seriousness with which disinformation governance was being approached.

While the handbook warns about "epistemic collapse" and "post-truth politics," it promotes individuals whose public behaviour undermines the credibility it claims to defend. The gap between its words and its actions is hard to ignore.

The proposed remedies are just as revealing. Scholars are urged to assess their personal "risk," document political threats, secure their data against possible hostile governments, and coordinate responses, sometimes anonymously. To me, this reads less like a defence of open inquiry than a collective self-protection strategy by a politically uniform professional class wary of democratic oversight.

What is conspicuously absent is any acknowledgement that some of the most visible attempts at de-platforming and reputational pressure in recent years have emerged from academic institutions. These attacks are usually directed at dissenters from progressive orthodoxy. While Jankowicz and others who openly promote content suppression and narrative control are portrayed as freedom's champions, those who criticise these methods are characterised as authoritarian dangers.

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[8] https://hannity.com/media-room/big-sister-sings-bidens-new-disinfo-czar-sings-calls-herself-the-mary-poppins-of-disinformation

Despite the Trump administration being presented as proof of "autocratization", there is no genuine attempt to differentiate between political disagreements, shifts in financial priorities, and actual suppression. Any challenge to the progressive academic consensus is deemed authoritarian.

This case study reinforces a central theme of this chapter. The public is depicted as an unstable mob, and academics as a self-authorising elite whose authority must not be questioned. That this worldview can be advanced under the banner of "anti-autocracy", speaks volumes about how completely the language of democracy has been appropriated.

Nowhere is this convergence of ideology, fear, and institutional self-interest more visible than in the academic response to the Covid event and its aftermath.

Academic fearmongering and the pandemic industry

A recurring feature of modern academia is the promotion of speculative future crises to justify expanding funding, influence, and political relevance. "Climate change" is the most obvious example of this, which I will examine in detail in Chapter 8. Another recent example comes from the University of Cambridge and its warnings about the threat of "engineered pandemics."[9]

Cambridge announced a major new initiative presenting engineered pandemics as an urgent and under-examined danger requiring immediate investment. The framing echoed the Covid period. Worst-case scenarios were treated as likely outcomes. Uncertainty was presented as inevitability. The proposed solution was not caution or accountability, but new centres, new funding streams, and expanded authority.

Notably, the initiative was housed in the Centre for Research in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (CRASSH), not in a medical or epidemiological department. A speculative global biosecurity threat was therefore placed in a policy-focused, narrative-driven environment. This is the same kind of institutional setting that, during the Covid period, amplified fear, shaped messaging, and sidelined dissent.

Cambridge stated that the programme was launched after a £5.25 million donation intended to "pump-prime" a future Pandemic Risk Management Centre. The donor's identity was withheld. When I submitted a freedom of information request asking who funded the initiative, the university refused to disclose it, claiming that transparency would harm its "commercial interests." In effect, Cambridge acknowledged that fear-based research was being used to attract further funding, mostly public money, while denying the public the right to know who was backing it.

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[9] https://www.crassh.cam.ac.uk/research/projects-centres/engineered-pandemics-risk-management-programme/

The ideological connections soon became clearer. The programme's leadership was closely tied to the same scientific and policy networks that had played a major role in shaping the UK Covid response. These networks were strongly aligned with organisations such as the Wellcome Trust and with senior government scientific advisers who consistently promoted pessimistic modelling, prolonged restrictions, and worst-case scenarios while downplaying uncertainty, trade-offs, and wider societal harms. The initiative was also embedded within the growing world of public-policy "citizen engagement" and behavioural influence campaigns that became highly prominent during the pandemic.

To me, this appeared to be a continuation of many of the same networks that had advocated some of the most contentious Covid-era policies that we have argued caused serious social, educational, economic and psychological damage[10].

Around the same time, the UK government allocated £1 million to speculative pandemic-risk research and £10 million to the Behavioural Research UK Leadership Hub. One of its directors is Professor Susan Michie, a long-standing Communist Party member and a vocal supporter of fear-based behavioural interventions during Covid. Michie argued that compliance should be engineered through psychological pressure and later suggested that restrictions should continue indefinitely.

These developments illustrate how speculative risks justify new research centres, expanded funding streams, and greater institutional authority. Oversight is resisted, donors may remain undisclosed, and scepticism is framed as irresponsibility. In this environment, fear becomes an enduring institutional resource.

This is not science correcting its mistakes. It is a system that failed, learned little, and now seeks to entrench itself by warning once again that only it can prevent disaster.

The next chapter examines the doctrine of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, which has become one of the main institutional vehicles through which the ideological capture of universities is enforced.

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[10] Fenton N, Neil M, "Fighting Goliath: Exposing the flawed science + statistics behind the Covid-19 event", Sovereign Rights Publishing, 2024