

“You’ll Only Be Allowed In if You Aren’t Voting for Hillary Clinton”:

An Exploration of Country Music as a Vehicle through Which to Study Celebrity and Politics as  
an Emerging Sub-Field of Political Science

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**Abstract:** While several case studies have been explored involving celebrities serving as politicians, little research has been conducted to seriously understand the relationship between celebrity and politics and the depth of influence celebrities have and could have on public policy, electoral politics, and the political process in general. This inquiry seeks to demonstrate the importance of celebrity and politics as an emerging sub-field of political science, as well as to explore the ways in which celebrity and politics can be studied qualitatively and quantitatively. Country music – including its artists, industry executives, and fans – is heavily relied on to achieve these goals.

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### **Introduction**

By merely looking around and exploring one’s surroundings, one will notice the strong presence and importance of celebrity in day-to-day life. Because of this, celebrities are a powerful tool when advocating for an issue, attempting to gain support for an individual, or simply uniting a population. Thus, celebrities often assume the role of public spokesperson, a job that usually surpasses the reason they are a celebrity in the first place: a musical talent, athletic talent, etc. When these celebrities become spokespeople for issues in the public sphere (i.e. a cause or political figure), these celebrities become celebrity politicians (Wareham 2015).

Although this dynamic is evident throughout popular culture, country music is a particularly good vehicle through which to explore the characteristics and efficacy of celebrity politicians. Since its conception in the early 1900s, country music has been linked to the day-to-day thoughts and experiences of average Americans. These thoughts and experiences often include politics and other public issues as demonstrated by various artists as discussed in this paper. Today, discussion of current events linked to politics is commonplace on the stages of country concerts and in the words of country songs. Country music is thought to be most closely linked to conservative political ideology, thus making the genre a relatively straight forward case study for celebrity politicians in action.

### **Goals of this Inquiry**

While several case studies have been explored involving celebrities serving as politicians, little research has been conducted to seriously understand the relationship between celebrity and

politics and the depth of influence celebrities have and could have on public policy, electoral politics, and the political process in general. Thus, this inquiry seeks to demonstrate the importance of celebrity and politics as an emerging sub-field of political science, as well as to explore the ways in which celebrity and politics can be studied qualitatively and quantitatively. Country music's artists, industry executives, and fans are my primary subjects in measuring these dynamics.

This study seeks to uncover whether the study of celebrity and politics has a place in the broader study of political science, as well as the best practices for studying celebrity and politics. In addition, this inquiry works to identify further research questions that could be explored in the future using the methodologies for studying celebrity and politics that are outlined in this paper. Further, this inquiry begins to explore the differences in perception of celebrity politicians among industry executives and fans.

This study approaches celebrity and politics from a variety of angles which, considered together, compose a strong argument for not only the further study of celebrity and politics in the world of political science academia, but also demonstrate clear pathways through which this further study may occur. First, this study discusses how theories about human nature can explain the natural occurrence of country celebrities taking on political roles. Second, this inquiry explores the concept of masculinity and the presence of alpha males in country music as it relates to celebrity politicians. This study then discusses several key components of country music history that clearly link the genre to politics. Next, this study discusses two specific country celebrity politician case studies: Dusty Lynch and Granger Smith. This is followed by an exploration of country music industry executives' intent of using celebrity politicians in relation to fans' perception of the use of celebrity politicians. This inquiry concludes with a small study

of fan perception of country celebrities utilizing their celebrity as a means to take a political stance.

### **Methodology**

Various methodologies were utilized for the purpose of this inquiry. In addition to relying on my previous research, I attended 2016 the International Country Music Conference in Nashville, Tennessee. There, I further legitimized the study of celebrity and politics through the lens of country music. Understanding the historical link between country music and politics is essential to understanding how this genre can be used to study celebrity and politics. Thus, I conducted research into country music history at the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum archives. I also attended the 2016 Country Music Association (CMA) Festival, where I observed Granger Smith's actions on stage during his concert. An experience from this concert inspired the title of this inquiry. As I was walking into the Granger Smith concert, a security guard looked at me and said, "You'll only be allowed in if you aren't voting for Hillary Clinton." I was not wearing anything nor did I say anything that would have marked me as either left or right leaning politically or in support or opposition of Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton, but this experience reaffirmed the expected link between country music and conservatism.

As this study also seeks to understand the intent of the country music industry and the perception of country music fans regarding country music artists acting as celebrity politicians, data from members of the industry as well as fans were collected for the purpose of this inquiry. As there are many country music artists that act as celebrity politicians, two particular artists are discussed in depth in this study. These artists are Dustin Lynch and Granger Smith, both artists on the Broken Bow Record label, which is based out of Nashville, Tennessee. Focusing on one

record label allows for greater depth in understanding the reasons why a record label signs particular artists and encourages/discourages their artists from taking particular stances.

Dustin Lynch and Granger Smith are two very different examples of celebrity politicians, despite the fact that they share a record label. Lynch takes on a spokesman role, whereas Smith takes on a much more outspoken advocate role. Understanding how the same label works with very different celebrity politicians allows for a better understand of the country music industry's intent in allowing artists to act as celebrity politicians.

In order to gather data from the country music industry, I conducted several interviews. One interview was with JoJaime Hahr, Vice President of Marketing for Broken Bow Records, who was interviewed about her experiences with fan interaction. Another interview was with Jon Freeman, journalist for *Rolling Stone Country*, who was interviewed about his interaction with political issues and current events when writing about country artists. Prior to this specific inquiry, I interviewed Sarah Gaffney, Country Music Television (CMT)'s Manager of Public Affairs, about CMT's utilization of Dustin Lynch as spokesman of their CMT Empowering Education program. I also interviewed Amber McCullough, Operations Coordinator for the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), about SCORE's decision to include Dustin Lynch in the programming of their annual SCORE Prize event in 2014. Details of these interviews are found in the data section below.

Fans are also an essential part of understanding the ways in which different individuals respond to celebrity politicians, especially when these celebrity politicians are country music artists. Thus, a brief survey was created and distributed to country music fans. This survey includes primarily quantitative questions about fans' experiences with country music, as well as their thoughts on country music artists taking stances on political issues. The survey questions

are included in the Appendix. This survey was distributed through personal asks outside the Grand Ole Opry House in Nashville, Tennessee, as well as through various forms of technology (i.e. Facebook and text message programs). A total of 151 individuals responded to and completed the survey. This survey begins to answer the question of how celebrity politician can influence fans, as well as how fan perception of celebrity politicians, can be measured quantitatively. The results of this survey are found in the Data section of this paper.

### **Celebrity and Politics as an Emerging Sub-Field of Political Science**

#### **Conceptualizing the Scope of Political Science**

As this inquiry is an exploration of an emerging sub-field of political science, it is important to establish a strong understanding of the study of political science. According to *The Scope of Political Science* from the 1905 Second Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, “Political science gathers its concepts from the mental deposits of our own race experience. Such terms as the state, government, sovereignty, citizenship, liberty etc. are analyzed to determine their nature and to deduce therefrom the institutional principles of political organization” (Ford 1905, 202). Celebrity and politics fits in nicely with this understanding of celebrity and politics. Celebrities have the ability to affect the “state, government, sovereignty, citizenship, liberty, etc.), and fully understanding the ways in which these items can be manipulated is essential to fully understanding political science.

A more straight-forward definition of political science comes from the Merriam-Webster dictionary and states that political science is “a social science concerned chiefly with the description and analysis of political and especially governmental institutions and processes” (Merriam-Webster dictionary). Again celebrity politicians have the ability to influence

governmental institutions and processes; thus, if one seeks to fully understand political science, one must seriously consider the role of celebrity in politics.

Yet another conceptualization of political science affirms the place of celebrity and politics in this field of academic study. Former United States President and political scientist Woodrow Wilson (Miller Center) explains that “the method of political science is the interpretation of life; its instrument is insight, a nice understanding of subtle, unformulated conditions” (Mahoney 2004, 124). This quote considers the very interdisciplinary nature of political science and the notion that political science is the tool by which “unformulated conditions” may be studied. Political science is a superb tool by which to study the influence of country music celebrities on the political process. Clearly, celebrity and politics is rightly characterized as an emerging sub-field in the broader study of political science.

### **Definition of Celebrity Politicians**

Now that the study of celebrity and politics is justified in the field of political science, one may wonder what exactly the term *celebrity and politics* means. This study revolves around the actions and influences of *celebrity politicians*. Thus, an operational definition of *celebrity politician* must be established. There has been some scholarship on celebrity politicians, and the work of British scholar John Street has been particularly useful in framing this inquiry. In his article *Celebrity Politicians: Popular Culture and Political Representation*, Street defines celebrities as “those people who, via mass media, enjoy ‘a greater presence and wider scope of activity and agency than those who make up the rest of the population. They are allowed to move on the public stage while the rest of us watch’” (Street 2004). This definition rightfully paints celebrities as anyone who, for any reason, is watched on a large scale by the general public. Thus, an individual may have become a celebrity due to a particular talent or incident, but an

individual maintains the status of celebrity by staying on the “public stage while the rest of us watch.”

### **Two Major Types of Celebrity Politicians**

Street also identifies two major types of celebrity politicians. One type refers to elected officials who assume the role of celebrity in an attempt to seem relatable by connecting to pop culture, and the other type refers to celebrities who assume the role of politician through spokesperson roles that affect the political process, whether it is advocating for a certain cause or helping elect a certain candidate (Street 2004). This inquiry focuses on the latter of type of celebrity politician.

In particular, this inquiry focuses on country music artists Dustin Lynch and Granger Smith, both on the Broken Bow Records label, as celebrity politicians who advocate for causes. In this sense, Lynch and Smith are similar to Bono when he served as the spokesman for RED, an organization that sought to provide assistance to individuals in Africa suffering from AIDS (Farrell 2012). Bono, Lynch, and Smith are similar, as they both increase support for a particular issue through their role as celebrity politicians. Yet, none of these artists hold any sort of elected office as they advocate for their issues. Rather, they recognize their ability as a celebrity to highlight a specific cause. As individuals are quite interested in celebrities, the inclusion of celebrity politicians in an agency’s network is not only clever; it is arguably essential when attempting to foster the attention of a constituency on a large scale. As seen in the case of Bono’s advocacy for RED, a celebrity politician does not necessarily need to be holding meetings with legislators and speaking on radio and television news shows regarding specific policy measures. Rather, a celebrity is still considered a celebrity politician even if he or she serves mainly as a link between the constituents and decision makers (Wareham 2015).



## **Importance of Studying Celebrity**

Celebrity politicians are now defined, and the place of celebrity and politics in the study of political sciences is justified, but the importance of studying the concept of celebrity has yet to be discussed. Celebrities are present in countless advertisements encouraging viewers to buy a certain skin care product, line of clothing, sports drink, etc. Viewers thus become interested in a product because of the celebrity attached to that product. Similarly, celebrities are often linked to the public sector, as they are often seen advocating for a specific issue or pledging their support for a particular candidate. In his book *Celebrity, Inc.: How Famous People Make Money*, Joe Piazza explains that “in the past decade, philanthropy has acquired a patina of sexiness, and part of this acquired appeal comes from charities partnering celebrity brands.” (Piazza 2011, 178). When celebrities take part in these philanthropic efforts, they are advocating for an issue and thus serving as celebrity politicians. This notion of using celebrity as a political tool is nothing new, but far more research in this area of political science is necessary.

## **Country Music as a Tool for Studying Celebrity and Politics**

Specifically, country music celebrities align themselves with particular political figures and public issues as discussed below, thus allowing for a measurable sample of celebrity politicians in one industry. Further, country music fans are engaged, as evidenced by the countless fans who attend Country Music Association (CMA) Festival each June. This strong fan base thus provides a strong sample of fans from which to collect data on celebrity and politics. Country music lyrics are also especially important to the genre compared to other music genres. The subject matter of country music songs often determines the success of the song. Thus, it is important that the words of country music matches what the fans want to hear or what country music radio assumes fans want to hear. This would naturally include matching the political

preferences and values held by fans. In one recent example, Little Big Town's "Girl Crush" evokes thoughts of homosexuality and thus did not score as well on Billboard's radio chart, as country music's fan base was expected not to approve of the lyrics (Freeman 2016). For these reasons and others, country music is a strong vehicle by which to study and discuss the concept of celebrity and politics.

### **PART I: Political Behavior/Human Nature**

The sub-field of celebrity and politics is very much a commentary on the study of political behavior and human behavior in general, as it is in the very nature of human beings to need a sense of belonging. According to biologist and naturalist E.O. Wilson, "people must have a tribe. It gives them a name in addition to their own and social meaning in a chaotic world" (Wilson 2012, 57). Humans are a very social animal and crave a sense of belonging to make sense of the world outside their own minds. Individuals must understand where their life fits into the lives of those around them.

Wilson goes on to explain that "people savor the company of like-minded friends, and they yearn to be in one of the best...any collectivity that can be comparted favorably with other, competing groups of the same category" (Wilson 2012, 58). Here, Wilson explains how this need for a sense of belonging manifests itself. Individuals of similar mindsets, interests, etc. flock to one another to form unique groups. These groups then take on their own senses of individuality, as the individuals that compose the group seek to ensure that their group is the best of its kind (i.e. best fan club, sports team, best political party).

In his famed book *The Blank Slate*, Steven Pinker discusses group mentality and argues that "we should forget about the mind of an individual person like *you*, that tiny and insignificant part of a vast sociocultural system. The mind that counts is the one belonging to the *group*,

which is capable of thinking, feeling, and acting on its own” (Pinker 2002, 26). Here, Pinker explains the importance of studying group behavior, as groups take on individualistic qualities.

These concepts regarding human nature are quite relevant to the study of celebrity and politics, especially when discussing country music celebrity. Celebrities establish their own “tribes,” as they attract “like-minded” fans. Celebrities thus serve as the leaders of these “tribes,” which think feel, and act on their own (Pinker 2002, 26). Fans then follow these celebrity leaders in order to maintain that sense of belonging. Country music celebrities are extremely accessible to their fans, as demonstrated by Broken Bow Records Vice President of Marketing JoJamie Hahr’s popular weekly web show which seeks to connect fans to country music artists (Hahr 2016). The positive fan reaction to this show (Hahr 2016) demonstrates fan appreciation of the accessibility to artists. This strong sense of connection to one’s tribe leader – in this case a country music celebrity – allows for an even stronger group bond among fans and artists. Therefore, it is interesting to speculate about how influential a country music celebrity making a political statement would be to fans. Country music is clearly a strong example of the ways in which evolutionary concepts of tribalism and group behavior and its connections to celebrity and politics can be studied.

## **PART II: Masculinity and the Presence of Alpha Males in Country Music**

As leaders of these tribes, many celebrities assume the role of alpha male, or a male figure who channels his perceived masculinity in order to be an effective leader. For the purposes of this inquiry, “masculinity” refers to the promotion of actions that society deems more masculine than feminine, such as heavy beer drinking, tobacco chewing, objectifying of women, etc. It is also important to note that this understanding of and masculinity is very heteronormative

and that further research could be conducted to explore how this notion of masculinity in country music celebrity politicians changes for non-heteronormative experiences.

This concept of channeling masculinity is quite present in country music. This paper offers two case studies of celebrity politicians, both of whom are male. This is no coincidence, as the majority of country music artists heard on the radio today are men. There is undoubtable structural sexism in the country music industry (Freeman 2016), and male artists appear to truly thrive when they channel their masculinity. Of the 25 singles on the Billboard Hot Country Chart for the week of July 23<sup>rd</sup>, only 3 singles are from female artists (Billboard Hot Country Chart, 2016). The full Billboard Hot Country Chart discussed here is included in the Appendix.

In addition to dominating the charts, male country artists often demonstrate very “alpha male-like” and stereotypically masculine heterosexual behaviors, such as chewing tobacco, discussing guns, and singing about the women with whom they want to have romantic relationships. For instance, Dustin Lynch can be seen participating in his famed “bicep chug” on various social media platforms. The action consists of Lynch placing a beer on his bicep, lifting his arm, and drinking the beer with no hands. (See Appendix for an image of this concept.) This concept went viral, and now one can easily search “#DLbicepchug” on Facebook and find various posts about Lynch’s famed bicep chug

(<https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=%23DLbicepchug>). Celebrating biceps and beer drinking is associated much more with masculinity than femininity.

Granger Smith also publically takes part in stereotypically masculine actions. He brands himself as a gun-toting, deer hunting, tobacco chewing man. During his performance at the 2016 Country Music Association (CMA) Festival in Nashville, Granger Smith, acting as his alter ego Earl Dibbles Jr., reached into his overalls pocket, pulled out a bag of chewing tobacco, and

proceeded to shove the entirety of the bag into his mouth. While of course this was a quite amusing act, the response of many male fans was not laughter. Rather, countless male audience members cheered in delight, thus demonstrating the power a celebrity has when channeling his masculinity and assuming not only a tribe leader position but an alpha male position. An image of Smith taking part in this action is included in the Appendix.

These artists then dominate the space they occupy – whether on a stage in a giant arena in front of thousands of fans or on social media while taking part in these stereotypically masculine behaviors and dominate the space they occupy, thus assuming the role as alpha male in addition to tribe leader. Fans seeking to fulfil their human necessity of belonging flock to these alpha-males and strive to be to like them or surround themselves with people like them. While there are certainly examples of “beta-males” in country music, these artists do not often have the same influence on their fans. Similarly, female artists who take strong stances and act quite “alpha” are not expected to be as influential on their fans as alpha males, due to the nature of the country music industry. This concept of alpha-males is essential to understanding the possible political influence country music celebrities can have on their fans, as a celebrity promoting his masculinity allows for a stronger influence they could have on their fans. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, Lynch taking part in his “bicep chug” and Smith shoving an excessive amount of tobacco in his mouth could significantly increase their credibility and influence.

### **PART III: History of Relationship between Country Music and Politics**

Political themes are woven throughout country music history, thus making country music history difficult to discuss without mentioning various political figures and events. When exploring the Country Music Hall of Fame and Museum archives, I found various primary sources that demonstrate country music’s historically strong link to politics.

Presidential history and country music is quite connected, and many newspaper articles discuss United States President Richard Nixon's affinity for country music. A 1971 article from the *Akron Beacon Journal* quotes President Richard Nixon as stating, "Country music speaks to what's tried and true for many Americans. It speaks of common things shared by all: the happiness of a family, the pains of a broken heart, the mercy of God, and the goodness of many" (*Akron Beacon Journal* 1971). Here, country music is publically appreciated by a conservative president, which connects country music to not only politics but conservatism itself.

Further, Americans appeared surprised when President George H.W. Bush publically demonstrated his love of country music through his country music-filled inaugural activities (Boston Lowell Metropolitan Aria 1989). The image of country music seems to complicate the New England image of President Bush, demonstrating that country music can help shape the image of traditional politicians, just as traditional politicians can help shape the image of country music.

Country artists have served political roles through their song lyrics as well. For instance, Waylon Jennings demonstrated extreme patriotism and a pro-military stance through his song "The Eagle" (Johnson City, TN Press). This concept of promoting support for the military and patriotism through country music song lyrics is still present to this day and can be observed by simply turning on a local country music radio station. Clearly, country music and politics have been linked throughout history. Further research about specific examples of this relationship should be conducted in relation to the other methodologies for studying celebrity and politics that are outlined in this paper.

## **PART IV: Case Studies of Various Country Celebrity Politicians**

### **Dustin Lynch**

First we will examine Dustin Lynch and his role as a celebrity politician. Lynch is a relatively new name in the country music industry whose career is gaining momentum, His first album was released in 2012 and reached Number 1 on Billboard's Top Country Albums chart, and his 2014 sophomore album debuted at Number 1 on the iTunes Country Albums Chart. Lynch has opened for various country superstars such as Keith Urban and Luke Bryan, and was recognized in *Rolling Stone Country's* "The Best Things We Saw at CMA Music Fest 2014" ([dustinlynchmusic.com/bio/](http://dustinlynchmusic.com/bio/) 2016). Further, Lynch was named *Elle's* "Best New Country Music Artist of 2013" and was chosen for *People Country* as well as *US Weekly's* "2014 Sexiest Men of Country" ([dustinlynchmusic.com/bio](http://dustinlynchmusic.com/bio/) 2016).

Lynch is a rising star in the country music genre whose fans not only appreciate his music but also his looks. His image as a clean-cut country boy with the relaxed style of an oversized cowboy hat, blue jeans, and cowboy boots draws males and females alike. He appears to males as a fun guy to hang out with, and he appears to females as an attractive young man (Gaffney 2014). While this characterization is obviously binary, these same concepts can be applied to queer individuals through further research. Nadine Hubbs' *Rednecks, Queers, and Country Music* is a fascinating book that can contextualize this further research (Hubbs 2014). These characteristics allow for Lynch to foster the "alpha male" persona described above, thus allowing him to have the potential of being an effective celebrity politician. This is part of the reason Lynch was selected as the CMT Empowering Education spokesman.

## **Dustin Lynch and the CMT Empowering Education Campaign**

In 2010, CMT established a new campaign titled CMT Empowering Education (CMT EE) geared toward encouraging individuals to seek higher education, as well as education in general. Sarah Gaffney, CMT's Manager of Public Affairs, explains that the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, a key player in education policy and reform, had encouraged CMT to work with the issue of education (Sarah Gaffney 2015). According to Gaffney, CMT realized that they had the ability to utilize their name and position in the entertainment industry to create a tool to help individuals achieve higher education. Gaffney explains that the campaign seeks to use storytelling, which mirrors the philosophy behind country music itself, to share stories of celebrities, as well as everyday Americans, who have earned higher education degrees. In order to achieve their goals, CMT Empowering Education connects with organizations such as the Tennessee Higher Education Commission (THEC), the Governor's Office, the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), and various institutions of higher education. This provides a clear connection between policy objectives of politicians and country music artists who eventually assume the role of celebrity politicians. Traditional politicians can now tap into CMT's viewership as a new way to reach out to its constituents through country music celebrities. This interaction between CMT EE and traditional politicians allows country music celebrities, to serve as "middleman" figures, connecting traditional politicians and their initiatives to their constituents (Wareham 2015).

Lynch became the spokesman for CMT EE after the official public launch of the campaign in 2012 in Washington, DC, meaning that he became the face of Country Music Television's campaign to encourage adults to seek higher education. Lynch performed at the launch and was very passionate and excited about the work that CMT EE sought to accomplish



and thus became spokesman (Gaffney 2015). In 2012, Lynch's own career in the country music industry was gaining traction, and his celebrity has grown along with this campaign (Wareham 2015).

Lynch's Responsibilities as Spokesman. Not only do Lynch's responsibilities involve higher education; his responsibilities include advocating for quality education at every level. CMT partners with various organizations in order to achieve the goal of preparing young individuals for a future life of success. The inclusion of a celebrity such as Lynch in the work for political agencies and other organizations allows for an even greater reach to constituents who would not be part of the education conversation otherwise. Seeing as though CMT is headquartered in Tennessee's capital city of Nashville, Lynch has found himself strongly linked to Tennessee education in particular, and in 2014, SCORE and CMT EE teamed up to bring Lynch to the SCORE Prize (Wareham 2015).

The State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), an independent non-profit. As its title suggests, SCORE "collaboratively supports Tennessee's work to prepare students for college and the workforce" (SCORE 2015). SCORE is an essential member of the education issue network, and its partners consist of many agencies, as represented in both its Board of Directors and Steering Committee. These agencies include foundations such as the Hyde Foundation, businesses such as Blue Cross Blue Shield, business organizations such as chamber of commerce organizations and Tennessee Business Roundtable, and independent organizations such as Teach for America (SCORE 2015). While not all of these entities are normally thought to be associated with education agencies, all of these entities have a stake in education. Foundations fund nonprofits such as SCORE, and businesses are always concerned with having a highly educated workforce from which to hire employees. CMT EE recognizes the broad

importance of quality education, and they are a member of SCORE's own network of agencies (Gaffney 2015). Further, SCORE spends ample time and effort on connecting with lower level agencies, such as local school districts and schools/teachers, as well as constituents, meaning students and parents. SCORE seems to serve as a middleman between policymakers and constituents in the same way that celebrity politicians serve as middlemen (Wareham 2015).

SCORE's Operations Coordinator, Amber McCullough, worked with CMT EE when seeking a talent to perform at the 2014 SCORE Prize. Each fall, SCORE organizes an event called the SCORE Prize at which several school districts, schools, and individual students are recognized for excellence in education. Schools must go through an extensive application and interview process to become a finalist and then ultimately win the SCORE Prize. The SCORE Prize event is an immense physical demonstration of the interactions that are possible between a celebrity politician, policymakers, and fans. Individuals from countless governmental and educational entities are represented at the SCORE Prize. The Founder of SCORE, Former Senator Bill Frist, not only serves as host of the evening; he also serves as a representative of the federal government and is a traditional politician. In addition, representatives of independent businesses and agencies serve as announcers for awards, and state officials give speeches. TDOE Commissioner Kevin Huffman had a very visible on-stage presence at the 2014 SCORE Prize. Audience members consist of state legislators, teachers, business leaders, and possibly most importantly, many student and parent constituents.

One very intriguing component of each SCORE Prize is the performance of a special musical guest who serves as yet another member of the vast education issue network. In 2014, SCORE partnered with CMT's Empowering Education campaign to bring a country music artist to the event to add to the celebratory atmosphere. The atmosphere is not the only thing that these

guests add to the evening, however, as these guests add interest in the event overall. In fact, the *Tennessean* included that “Country music artist Dustin Lynch will provide a special musical performance” when discussing the finalists of the SCORE Prize (*Tennessean* 2014). This inclusion of Lynch in *The Tennessean*’s article about the SCORE Prize only demonstrates Lynch’s role in exciting people about the event and thus education. Young men who find Lynch’s music catchy and young women who find Lynch attractive may have wanted to come to the SCORE Prize once they heard that Lynch would be performing. Thus, constituents that were otherwise not very interested in the issue of education may have found themselves at the 2014 SCORE Prize (Wareham 2015).

Effects of Lynch as Spokesman. Further, the use of Lynch and his celebrity in the October 2014 proved quite wise, as Lynch’s career was beginning to really take off. As Lynch had a hit single, “That’s Where It’s At,” on the radio at the time of the SCORE Prize, the excitement and draw to the event because of the entertainment was different than in previous years.

Clearly, Lynch’s performance added to the celebratory atmosphere and excitement of the evening. Lynch’s presence excited individuals to listen to the mission of SCORE, the TDOE, and other key agencies in education policy and reform present at the event. Before hearing Lynch sing, however, these constituents had to watch videos about the virtues of Common Core and how Tennessee seeks to remain the fastest improving state in education. These constituents had to listen to speeches made by education stakeholders including Commissioner Huffman. The interaction between CMT EE and other the members of this issue network seem quite beneficial; it connects constituents with decision makers. By sitting in the seats at the event, these constituents were able to feel a sense of connectedness to decision makers. As a result, the public images of these decision makers improve, as they appear to reach out to a vast number of

constituents. Still, the members of the education issue network receive this public image spike without actually having to hear from the hundreds of constituents who attended the SCORE Prize whether due to a genuine interest in education or a genuine interest in Lynch (Wareham 2015).

In an interview, SCORE's Operations Coordinator, Amber McCullough explained that finding musical acts for this event can prove difficult, and partnering with CMT EE to bring Lynch to the event proved beneficial. McCullough did note that, the bigger name the artist has, the greater number of people could be encouraged to attend an event. (McCullough 2015). As a member of the education issue network, SCORE's Operations Coordinator, Amber McCullough, sees CMT EE's work as interesting (Wareham 2015).

### **Effectiveness of Lynch as a Celebrity Politician**

Since his start as spokesman for CMT EE, Dustin Lynch has done a lot of work to both foster an excitement in education among individuals of various ages and empowerment to seek a higher education among adults. Through this work, Lynch has inspired an interest in education and education initiatives from policymakers, thus connecting constituents to decision makers, or politicians, and serving as an effective celebrity politician (Wareham 2015).

Thus, celebrity politicians not only aid in connecting constituents with decision makers (whether just seemingly or in actuality) and elevates the voices of constituents, but celebrity politicians significantly aid decision makers in maintaining their public image. This is an interesting thought, as celebrity politicians may often diminish the voices of experts and may wrongfully relay information, as they do not have expertise. Still, celebrity politicians such as Lynch allow for agencies and their leaders such as the TDOE and former Commissioner Huffman to maintain a positive public image. This public image is one that is connected, thanks in great part to a celebrity such as Lynch, to their constituents. Lynch's true value as a celebrity

politician is just as much his ability to maintain the positive images of traditional politicians as it is his ability to advocate for education (Wareham 2015).

### **Granger Smith**

Granger Smith is another country music artist who advocates for various beliefs. Granger focuses on support of the military, and is very vocal in his beliefs. Each year, Smith embarks on a 100 mile walk in Texas in support of the military. He is pictured beginning his 2012 walk with Texas Governor Rick Perry, thus further cementing a relationship between country music and politics (Hensel 2015).

He also utilizes an alter ego, Earl Dibbles Jr. to satirize country lifestyles but also to advocate for issues such as gun rights, etc. In his recent song “MERICA” and respective music video, Dibbles outrageously satirizes members of the political right (YouTube “MERICA” 2016). In this song, he describes Americans as “back to back World War Champs,” thus establishing not only a patriotic tone but also a militaristic tone (YouTube “MERICA” 2016). Still, Dibbles approaches these tones in a comical way, thus presumably steering clear of truly offending a large part of his fan base. Also in this song, Dibbles sings that “we’ll probably send a man to the Sun,” a clearly idiotic goal for anyone to hold (YouTube “MERICA 2016). Still, this line is catchy and presumably excites a large portion of his fan base that gravitates toward strong displays of patriotism. Through the use of Earl Dibbles Jr., Granger Smith is allowed to exaggerate conservative political ideologies in a way that his fans can either characterize as humorous or inspiring. This allows Smith to promote an agenda while presumably maintaining and gaining fans.

## **PART V: Experiences of Country Music Industry Members**

### **Broken Bow Records**

This inquiry is a continuation of a previous study of Dustin Lynch's role as spokesman of CMT's Empowering Education Program. Dustin Lynch is an artist on Broken Bow Records (BBR), a prominent country music label and a member of Broken Bow Music Group. This inquiry operates under the assumption that record labels may each have a unique way of working with their artists concerning making political statements and advocating for causes. Thus, in order to compare and contrast two specific country music celebrity politicians, it is important that they are both signed by the same record label. This way, differences among the celebrity politicians can be traced to the celebrities themselves, rather than the way their label may have instructed them to act regarding politics.

I selected Granger Smith as the second country artist and celebrity politician to study in this inquiry. Smith is also signed with Broken Bow Records, but his actions as a celebrity politician look quite different than those of Lynch who serves as a more reserved spokesman. Thus, BBR is a logical record label around which to focus this inquiry.

I interviewed JoJamie Hahr, Vice President of Marketing at Broken Bow Records, regarding her thoughts when discussing politics with Broken Bow's artists. It is important to understand whether industry executives instruct their artists to be vocal with their beliefs or to keep their beliefs to themselves. It is also important to understand how much fans are thought about when this type of instruction is given to artists.

Hahr provided interesting insight into the way in which the country music industry – and Broken Bow Records specifically – deals with celebrity and politics. Hahr's job is consumed by fans, and she expressed her immense love for country music fans. She was interviewed right

before filming a segment of the BBRMG show, which seeks to connect fans with artists. Hahr collects questions about artists from the fans, asks the artists the questions personally, and reports back to the fans (Hahr 2016). This allows for a continuation of the “tribe” concept discussed earlier.

Hahr explains that she will often ask fans questions about their habits (i.e. what makes a fan buy a song rather than just stream in online). She also explains that the political ideologies of fans is not thought about to a great extent (Hahr 2016). Instead, if fans seem to be enjoying an artist’s music, purely the music will be focused on.

Hahr also brings up an interesting point about the relationship between authenticity and political beliefs. She believes that fans flock toward artists who are obviously authentic in their likes, dislikes, and values. She sites Granger Smith as an artist who passed up a promotional deal with a boot company because he is loyal to Redwing boots. Hahr believes that this type of authenticity is what she looks for in artists, rather than particular political ideologies or aptitude to express them (Hahr 2016). Many studies could be conducted on the relationship between authenticity and politics. Are there positive correlations between artists who have high levels of authenticity and artists who have high levels of political efficacy as celebrity politicians?

I also interviewed Jon Freeman, a journalist for *Rolling Stone Country*. Freeman explains that he does think about politics to some extent while writing, but he feels that fans do not want artists saying anything too extreme. As mentioned before, Freeman brings up questions regarding women in the country music industry. During his interview, Freeman posed the question of whether women country celebrity politicians and men country celebrity politicians experience differing amounts of pushback after they take a political stance (Freeman 2016). Freeman cited the Dixie Chicks’ criticism of President George W. Bush which severely hurt the band’s career

(Freeman 2016). More research into the differing responses to women versus men country celebrity politicians should be conducted.

Further research should also explore those country celebrity politicians who do not fit into the stereotypical conservative messages expected from country artists should be. While Hahr believes that authenticity is key to fan acceptance of an artist, would that opinion change if the artist in question was an extremely outspoken liberal? Does the gender of the artist in question affect how their political stances are viewed? These questions and others should be explored through further exploration into the experiences of country music industry members.

### **Benefits of Celebrity Politicians are Multi-Faceted**

While celebrity politicians, as seen in the cases of Lynch and Smith, are effective in connecting constituents to initiatives and policy efforts, the benefits of celebrity politicians are much broader. Celebrity politics also improves the public image of the celebrity him or herself (Wareham 2015).

### **How Lynch Benefits as a Celebrity Politician**

In Lynch's case, he went from a rising voice on country radio to a role model for countless American students, parents, and educators. His popularity grew because of his involvement with CMT EE, and he is able to utilize his position as spokesman to increase his fan base. Lynch's social media posts regarding education advocacy efforts only connect him to more individuals, as people have more reasons to take note of him, "like" his page on Facebook, and "follow" him on Twitter and Instagram. His Facebook post from March 4, 2015 exemplifies this notion quite well. This post includes a picture of Lynch sitting at an elementary school desk holding a copy of Dr. Seuss' *The Cat in the Hat* (Lynch 2015). At first glance, it seems as though Lynch is simply advocating for young children to read. Upon closer examination, however, one



notices that there is a headshot of Lynch and a Sharpie also on the desk, suggesting that he was not only advocating for reading at that desk but also signing autographs for young fans. While there is absolutely nothing wrong with signing autographs, this demonstrates the idea that Lynch can simultaneously serve as a celebrity politician promoting the CMT EE brand while promoting his own brand. As of July 15, 2016, this post had 27,458 “likes,” 228 “comments,” and 227 “shares” (Lynch 2016). Thus, this post has reached many individuals who are now more aware of Dustin Lynch, CMT EE spokesman as well as Dustin Lynch, country music star (Wareham 2015).

The caption of this picture is also interesting as it reads, “Back in elementary school today... The Cat in the Hat is #WhereItsAt” (Lynch 2015). This caption could be interpreted as simply a clever explanation for the picture, but the hashtag reading “WhereItsAt” suggests more thinking was done on the part of Lynch than is obvious. “Where It’s At” is the name of one of Lynch’s popular recent singles, as well as the name of his new album. Therefore, parents, students, and educators who are drawn to this post because of the education advocacy work being done could easily become acquainted with Lynch’s music with the simple click of the mouse on the hashtag. In fact, when one clicks on the hashtag, Facebook directs to a page that includes all posts that have used that hashtag in the past. A good portion of the recent posts regard Lynch and his music (Lynch 2015). As a result, individuals excited about CMT EE are now more likely to listen to Lynch’s music. This smart utilization of social media demonstrates the multi-faceted benefits of celebrity politics. Not only does CMT EE, the education issue network, and individuals benefit from Lynch’s involvement, Lynch’s own career benefits as well. Thus, whether intentionally or not, the industry benefits from the work of celebrity politicians (Wareham 2015).

### **How Smith Benefits as a Celebrity Politician**

Smith also benefits as a celebrity politician. His work as celebrity politician manifests itself in his work as Earl Dibbles Jr. This persona helped launch Smith's career, and it helps maintain it today. Thus, the politically charged work of Smith allows for the advancement of his career, as well as his ideas. This results in greater concert and music sales, as well as increased publicity. In effect, Broken Bow Records also benefits from the work of Smith as a celebrity politician.

### **PART VI: Fan Perception and Opinion of Country Celebrity Politicians**

This inquiry seeks to explore the ways in which celebrity and politics can be studied quantitatively. Thus, a survey was conducted regarding fan perception of country music celebrities. As Hahr points out, fans are essential to the country music industry, and understanding fans is essential to understanding celebrity and politics. To explore this concept, 151 fans completed a survey asking questions regarding their demographics, political ideology, as well as perception of country music and its artists. A complete list of the survey questions is included in the Appendix.

Most of these questions were formulated in the form of Likert Scales, in which each multiple choice response could be represented with a number value. The survey responses can then be translated into these number values, thus allowing for different variables to be compared with each other. This way, qualitative concepts such as political ideology and how frequently a respondent listens to country music can be studied quantitatively. Using these practices allows for celebrity and politics to be studied quantitatively.

## Results

The 151 survey responses were analyzed and the following was found. Over 71% of the respondents were born between the years 1992 and 1998, suggesting that almost two-thirds of the survey results come from younger millennials. Respondents reside in many states across the nation, and one respondent resides in the United Kingdom. Slightly over half of the respondents identified as female. Over 57% of the results come from country music fans, or individuals who “strongly like country music” and “moderately like country music.” Just over 20% of the respondents self-described themselves as conservative, while over 81% of the respondents believe the overall political ideology of country music artists to be conservative.

When asked how often country artists should voice their political beliefs, about 22% said that artists should voice their political beliefs “daily/as often as possible.” A similar percentage (20%) of respondents said that artists should “never” voice their political beliefs. This is interesting, as there is no clear consensus from fans regarding how much or how little a country music artist should voice their political beliefs. This notion of fans not caring about the frequency with which artists voice their opinions justifies Hahr’s belief that politics is not focused on when thinking about the relationship between celebrity and politics in the country music industry.

A common theme throughout this inquiry has been the expected link between conservatism and country music, and this notion should be tested and through further research. This inquiry begins to complicate this concept, as these data found a statistically significant negative correlation between respondent political ideology and perceived ideology of artists. The more liberal respondents are, the more conservative they perceive country artists to be. The more conservative respondents are, the more liberal they perceive country artists to be. Further

research should be conducted to find the average political ideology of country music artists, and this ideology should be compared to liberals' and conservatives' perceived artist ideology. This methodology would begin to explore just how conservative country music really is. Clearly, this inquiry demonstrates the ways in which celebrity and politics can be studied quantitatively.

## **Conclusion**

### **Concerns Regarding Celebrity Politicians' Influence**

Celebrities seem to connect themselves to issues, but they might only seem to be connected, or they may simply be connected by a personal interest in a particular issue. This does not suggest that the celebrity has the credentials (education, knowledge, expertise, etc.) to actually make judgments and assertions about certain issues (Wareham 2015).

Jenny McCarthy and Lack of Expertise. For example, actress Jenny McCarthy has assumed the role of celebrity politician in the vaccination issue network (Collier 2013). She advocates extensively against vaccinations, as she believes that they are linked to autism (Collier 2013). While this thinking has not been proven scientifically correct, she advocates against vaccinations, and she uses her celebrity to convince many constituents to agree with her. Clearly, many individuals will choose to follow a famed celebrity politician over proven science. Jenny McCarthy is an actress, which does not translate to being a medical expert. Still, the public treats her as such when they buy into her claims regarding vaccinations. While it could be argued that the public is just as much at fault for choosing a celebrity's personal opinion over scientific fact, this is a demonstration of how celebrity politics go awry. If celebrity politicians are relied upon too heavily, expertise may become obsolete. Mere fame does not grant someone the right to speak on behalf of experts and, in many cases, have a far greater, diverse, and attentive audience than experts. Because social media is increasing the role and influence of celebrity politicians,

constituents must think hard before simply believing and buying into everything their favorite singer, actor, or athlete says regarding a public issue (Wareham 2015).

Expertise Not Always Essential. While the utilization of celebrity politicians does have its dangers, there are many times that the role of celebrity politicians does prove to be quite beneficial and virtuous. As Lynch is the official spokesman for the CMT EE campaign, he clearly has the credibility to advocate for improvements in public education. Because the main goal of CMT EE is to increase the number of individuals attending higher education, it is hard for Lynch to go wrong when serving as spokesman. It is difficult to advocate for high education in the “wrong” way (Wareham 2015).

Thus is the case for most valence issues, or issues that do not have much controversy surrounding them. Advocating for higher education in areas of the country that are in desperate need of a more skilled and educated workforce is certainly a valence issue. Other valence issues could include advocating for healthy eating or domestic violence prevention. It is considered hard to advocate for initiatives surrounding these issues in a negative way (Wareham 2015).

Expertise Replaced with Role Model Status. In these kinds of situations, when the actual topic that is being advocated for or against is not very controversial, the main danger lies in the celebrity politician’s personal life choices. As Street characterizes celebrities as individuals on the “public stage,” celebrity politicians must never cease to be aware of the public stage that they are on (Street 2004). Not only do they need to continue to perform well at the task that made them a celebrity in the first place, but celebrity politicians must be fully aware of the consequences that each of their personal actions will have. In the case of Lynch, he advocates for improved K-12 education and increased higher education attendance levels. He is a role model to constituents of all ages. Thus, he must be fully aware of this and must be sure not to perform

illegal acts, say something politically incorrect or otherwise offensive, or simply do anything that might make constituents see him as any less than a role model. While he is not an expert in education policy, he does not need to be an expert in this capacity in order to advocate for improved education generally. He is a successful college graduate who can speak about his experiences. This, in addition to maintaining his role model status, is the “expertise” needed for this instance of celebrity politics (Wareham 2015).

### **Potential Effects of Research in the Celebrity and Politics Field**

Just as with any emerging sub-field of a larger field of academic study, it is important to evaluate the potential effects of exploring the sub-field. Better understanding of celebrity’s influence on the political process allow for understanding of several concepts. First, academics will better understand human responses to celebrity, as well as what causes humans to become civically engaged or take part in other activities. If a significant positive correlation can be drawn between Dustin Lynch’s work as spokesman for CMT’s Empowering Education program and community college enrollment, then academics could argue that celebrity has a significant impact on human behavior.

Further, the study of celebrity and politics could aid political stakeholders such as politicians, campaign consultants, and issue advocates. Politicians and campaign consultants could learn how to use celebrity as a tool to win elections, and issue advocates could use celebrities to advocate for and bring attention to their causes.

This field of study does not go without negative side-affects, however. Celebrity can be used to manipulate fans’ thoughts just as easily as celebrity can be used to raise awareness for a cause. For instance, a country music artist may be endorsing a particular political candidate, and that candidate may have that artist perform at a campaign rally. In this situation, the artist and the

candidate each gain, as the candidate gains an endorsement, and fans gain exposure. Fans, as a result, may be more-likely to vote for that candidate not because they like what that candidate stands for but because an artist they like endorsed the candidate. Thus, there are clear benefits and drawbacks for the study of celebrity and politics.

### **Question of Effectiveness, Benefits, and Drawbacks of Celebrity Politicians**

A question is posed as to the effectiveness of celebrity politicians if primarily used to connect to constituents. Street provides a unique perspective on this thinking about celebrity politicians, as he questions the virtue in the utilization of a celebrity as a political figurehead. While these celebrities rarely have the credentials to serve as experts and policymakers, do their voices still have value because they help connect the constituents to the decision makers? (Street 2004). Do their voices still have value because they excite constituents and cause them to become engaged in certain issues (Wareham 2015)?

Not only are there questions regarding the value of celebrity politicians, there are also questions about the possible drawbacks that the utilization of celebrity politicians can cause. In most cases, as seen with Lynch, Smith, and Bono, the utilization of celebrity politicians pose mainly benefits, as celebrity politics is usually used as a vehicle to connect individuals to their representatives. As celebrities become more and more connected with fans through increases in social media usage, celebrities can reach millions of constituents with the touch of a “post” button on Facebook, Instagram, or Twitter. Celebrities are gaining more and more potential representative power. Thus, celebrities have become a vital component in issue networks and subsequently democracy itself.

### **A Possible Illusion of Connectivity**

Another question is then posed regarding a possible discrepancy between the constituents' perceived representation provided by the celebrity politician and the actual representation provided by the celebrity politician. A celebrity's ability to bring an issue to the minds of millions of constituents does not always suggest that the celebrity has the ability to bring the concerns of those constituents to the minds of the decision makers. While some celebrities are employed as spokespeople to make these connections, oftentimes celebrity politicians only have the ability to provide an illusion of connectivity between constituents and decision makers (Wareham 2015).

### **Final Thoughts**

In summation, this inquiry demonstrates the importance of celebrity and politics as an emerging sub-field in the broader study of political science, focusing on country music as the vehicle by which to effectively study the actions of celebrity politicians, intent of industry executives when interacting with celebrities, fan perception of celebrity politicians, and much more. Further, this inquiry outlines six methodologies that should be used by scholars when studying celebrity and politics, especially through the lens of country music.

The next step in my personal research is to choose a specific topic in the sub-field of country music celebrity and politics and explore that topic using the six methodologies I have identified. I plan to focus on the question of how conservative country music truly is, seeking to test and possibly complicate the expectation that a strong link between country music and conservatism exists. This way, I will have a well-researched and nuanced response the next time a security guard at a country concert tells me "you'll only be allowed in if you aren't voting for Hillary Clinton."



## Appendix

## Billboard Hot Country Chart – Week of July 23, 2016

1. “H.O.L.Y.” – Florida Georgia Line
2. “Church Bells” – Carrie Underwood\*
3. “Lights Come On” – Jason Aldean
4. “Record Year” – Eric Church
5. “Head Over Boots” – Jon Pardi
6. “Wasted Time” – Keith Urban
7. “Huntin’, Fishin’ & Lovin’ Every Day” – Luke Bryan
8. “Peter Pan” – Kelsea Ballerini\*
9. “From the Ground Up” – Dan + Shay
10. “T-Shirt” – Thomas Rhett
11. “Make You Miss Me” – Sam Hunt
12. “American Country Love Song” – Jake Owen
13. “Somewhere On A Beach” – Dirks Bentley
14. “Fix” – Chris Lane
15. “Noise” – Kenny Chesney
16. “Humble And Kind” – Tim McGraw
17. “She’s Got A Way With Words” – Blake Shelton
18. “Different For Girls” – Dirks Bentley ft. Elle King\*\*
19. “Came Here To Forget” – Blake Shelton
20. “Night’s On Fire” – David Nail
21. “My Church” – Maren Morris\*

22. "It All Started With a Beer" – Frankie Ballard

23. "Castaway" – Zac Brown Band

24. "Without A Fight" – Brad Paisley ft. Demi Lovato\*\*

25. "If I Told You" – Darius Rucker

\*Denotes a single by a female country artist

\*\*Denotes a single featuring a female artist

## Images

Dustin Lynch bicep chug



<http://975kgkl.com/dustin-lynch-inspiration-bicep-chug-and-signature-cowboy-hat-explained/>

(Full citation in References)

Granger Smith as Earl Dibbles Jr. with chewing tobacco



## Sample Survey

**Rhodes College Undergrad Research Project**

The following is a brief survey about your experiences as a country music fan. Your responses are completely anonymous, and you may choose not to respond to any question you so choose. By selecting "I accept" below, you are giving consent for your anonymous responses to be used as part of my research project (which may be shared with others). Thank you very much for your participation!

- a) *I accept.*
- b) *I do not accept. (Please stop your survey participation here.)*

**What is your state of residence?**

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**In which year were you born?**

- a) *before 1942*
- b) *1942-1951*
- c) *1952-1961*
- d) *1962-1971*
- e) *1972-1981*
- f) *1982-1991*
- g) *1992-1998*
- h) *1999-2004*
- i) *after 2004*

**What is your gender?**

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**What are your thoughts on country music?**

- a) *Strongly dislike country music*
- b) *2-32*
- c) *Neither like nor dislike country music*
- d) *Moderately like country music*
- e) *Strongly like country music*

**1. How often have you listened to country music?**

- a) *Never*
- b) *Less than Once a Month*
- c) *Once a Month*
- d) *2-3 Times a Month*
- e) *Once a Week*
- f) *2-3 Times a Week*
- g) *Daily*

**2. In the past year, how often have you attended live country music events?**

- a) *Never*
- b) *Less than Once a Month*
- c) *Once a Month*
- d) *2-3 Times a Month*
- e) *Once a Week*
- f) *2-3 Times a Week*
- g) *Daily*

**How would you characterize your political ideology?**

- a) *Extremely Liberal*
- b) *Liberal*
- c) *Slightly Liberal*
- d) *Moderate*
- e) *Slightly Conservative*
- f) *Conservative*
- g) *Extremely Conservative*

**How would you characterize most country music artists' ideologies?**

- a) *Extremely Liberal*
- b) *Liberal*
- c) *Slightly Liberal*
- d) *Moderate*
- e) *Slightly Conservative*
- f) *Conservative*
- g) *Extremely Conservative*

**How often should country music artists discuss their political beliefs?**

- a) *Never*
- b) *Once a year*
- c) *2-3 times a year*
- d) *Once a month*
- e) *2-3 times a month*
- f) *Once a week*
- g) *Daily/as often as possible*

**When should country music artists discuss their political beliefs? (Check all that apply. Only answer if you did not select "Never" in the question above.)**

- In song lyrics*
- On stage during performances*
- In interviews*
- Through social media*
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_*

**Has a country music artist ever encouraged you to do any of the following?  
(Check all that apply.)**

- Vote*
- Attend a public meeting*
- Get involved in community service*
- Run for office*
- Go to/stay in school*
- Contact a public official*
- Get involved in a political campaign*
- Donate money to a charity*
- Donate money to the military*
- Post on social media regarding a current event or political figure/issue*
- Discuss in person a current event or political figure/issue*
- Research a specific cause (i.e. animals, mental health, education)*
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_*

**If you checked any of the boxes above, please explain including the artist name and whether it was through social media, a concert, a song, a music video, etc.**

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