

# [***How Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce became the focus of baseless political conspiracy theories***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B7C-PGR1-DYMD-64BW-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

The budding love story featuring music superstar Taylor Swift and Kansas City Chiefs tight end Travis Kelce took an unexpected turn into the world of political conspiracy theories this week after the team [*advanced to the Super Bowl*](https://apnews.com/article/travis-kelce-nfl-record-postseason-receptions-2d1bde50cb0535dc031e76f59f0000ec).

Myriad baseless rumors emerged on social media — everything from claims that Swift has played a part in Pentagon psychological operations to the idea that she and her two-time Super Bowl champion boyfriend are key assets in a secret plot to help President Joe Biden get reelected in 2024. Another variant: That the Chiefs’ success was rigged as part of the plan for the game on Feb. 11 in Las Vegas.

Political and media figures on the right, including former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy, political activist Laura Loomer and One America News Network host Alison Steinberg, have amplified the allegations.

The claims are ludicrous and may well reflect the fear on the right that someone as famous as Swift, whose landmark Eras Tour is the first tour to [*cross the billion-dollar mark*](https://apnews.com/article/taylor-swift-eras-tour-billion-dollar-record-52945111233438b1f2166aa19eee365f), could indeed influence the presidential race should she urge her legion of fans in one direction.

Pop culture and ***politics*** have long been entwined. The entertainment industry has been a deep well of political contributions. And candidates often try to draft on the celebrity of stars to add to their own allure.

The potency of the impact is less clear. In Swift's case, there is some proof that she can at minimum generate more voter registration.

In September, Swift posted a short message on her Instagram account encouraging her 272 million followers to register to vote. The post led to more than 35,000 registrations on the nonpartisan nonprofit [*Vote.org*](http://vote.org/).

Swift’s massive fan base gives her a powerful voice. An SSRS poll conducted in October 2023 found that about 6 in 10 U.S. adults called themselves at least casual fans of the singer, with 8% saying they’re big fans. The poll also found that 8 in 10 U.S. adults said they had heard of her relationship with Kelce and the majority of those familiar with it considered it a real relationship, rather than a publicity stunt.

“Pop culture people identify with this stuff, they pay attention to it. And that’s what moves ***politics*** now. It’s attention and identity,” Joel Penney, an associate professor at Montclair State University whose research includes the intersection of ***politics*** and pop culture, said. Indeed, Donald Trump's improbable march to the presidency in 2016 was propelled in part from the celebrity he gained as a reality television star.

But the false claims about Swift are of such an extreme nature that they will test the limits of how potent a conspiracy theory can be. Penney sees the recent deluge of posts aimed at Swift as an attempt to preemptively blunt her impact by discrediting her.

Penney said Swift’s influence could prove a difficult force to contend with, especially if she publicly supports Biden, [*as she did in the 2020 race*](https://twitter.com/taylorswift13/status/1313938080290803715).

The attacks on Swift could also galvanize young voters who want to rally around her.

“Young people are fighting their political battles through a language drawn from pop culture,” said Henry Jenkins, a professor at the University of Southern California who also studies ***politics*** and pop culture. “That’s what connects them. That’s what they’re engaged with.”

Both Swift and Kelce have made public statements about ***politics*** and other issues that put them at odds with the far-right.

Swift [*broke her long-standing refusal*](https://apnews.com/article/dd2cbd01016942d094dea3952101cbb5) to discuss her political views in 2018 when [*she announced*](https://www.instagram.com/p/BopoXpYnCes/?hl=en&taken-by=taylorswift) in an Instagram post that she would be voting for Tennessee’s Democratic Senate candidate Phil Bredesen and Democratic House incumbent Rep. Jim Cooper. She also slammed then-U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn, the Republican candidate, citing Blackburn’s opposition to certain LGBTQ+ rights and her vote against the reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act in 2013. Blackburn won election to the Senate.

In 2020, [*Swift endorsed*](https://twitter.com/taylorswift13/status/1313938080290803715) Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris in [*an interview*](https://vmagazine.com/article/the-thought-leaders-issue-taylor-swift/) with V Magazine, noting that “under their leadership, I believe America has a chance to start the healing process it so desperately needs.”

Kelce [*faced criticism*](https://apnews.com/article/behind-call-kelce-rodgers-2f0725e098511f88ba36a25faa760503) in September for [*appearing in an ad*](https://www.instagram.com/reel/CxgXyUHxv4H/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=71da0e27-e078-45bb-8b6d-40568c0cde4d) promoting the double dose of the flu and COVID-19 vaccines, as recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The ad was part of a partnership with Pfizer, the pharmaceutical company that developed a vaccine in response to the pandemic and has since become a common mark for anti-vaccine activists and conspiracy theorists.

Pop culture figures and the industry that surround them have been enmeshed in political campaigns long before the duo some fans refer to as Swelce. Former President Bill Clinton [*first appeared on MTV*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rLN117VChTQ) during his 1992 campaign while he was still governor of Arkansas. Major stars including Johnny Cash, Mary Tyler Moore and Willie Nelson endorsed former President Jimmy Carter more than 40 years ago when he made his second run for the White House. Ronald Reagan got his start in ***politics*** after a career as an actor.

“That question of, does this stuff work in pop culture? It absolutely can,” Penney said. “And it does. And history has shown that.”

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