

**Big Reputations, Big Conversations:**  
**PR Backgrounder and Situational Analysis of the Kansas City Chiefs**

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## **Big Reputations, Big Conversations: PR Backgrounder and Situational Analysis of the Kansas City Chiefs**

The Kansas City Chiefs are a professional football team based in Kansas City, Missouri. They have been competing in the National Football League (NFL) for the last 64 years. The Chiefs organization has recently experienced great success, winning Super Bowl championships in 2019, 2023, and 2024 (National Football League, 2024). As of 2024, the team is worth around \$3.7 billion and is owned by the Hunt family (Ozanian, 2024).

There are two conferences in the NFL, the American Football Conference (AFC) and the National Football Conference (NFC) within the league, with 16 teams each. The Super Bowl matchup is the victor of a game between the champions of each conference. The Chiefs are a member of the AFC (NFL.com, 2024).

Football is hugely popular in the United States, and the Super Bowl in 2024 (Chiefs vs. San Francisco 49ers) amassed a record-breaking 200 million viewers, up 7% over the previous record (Archie, 2024).

### **Reputation Assessment**

At the end of 2023, the Kansas City Chiefs were ranked as the most popular NFL team based on public sentiment polls, with just under half of those surveyed stating they had a favorable opinion of the team (Gough, 2023).

National Football League teams compete for fans on and off the field. Of the 32 NFL teams, the Chiefs rank #8 in social media followers across all platforms and boast a large following. The top 10 team followings, as of February 2024 are as follows: Dallas Cowboys (18.9M), New England Patriots (17.4M), Pittsburgh Steelers (14.9M), Philadelphia Eagles

(12.1M), Green Bay Packers (10.8M), San Francisco 49ers (10.6M), Seattle Seahawks (10.4M), Kansas City Chiefs (10.3M), New York Giants (9.4M), Denver Broncos (8.7M) (Loyola, 2024).

Patrick Mahomes and Travis Kelce, two of the most popular players in the NFL at the moment, also have significant followings off of the field: Mahomes for his philanthropic work, with his charity as well as his recent appearance in the Netflix documentary “The Quarterback,” and Kelce, for a number on entrepreneurial ventures including his “New Heights” podcast and high profile relationship with Taylor Swift.

### **Potential Problem and Issue**

The Chiefs have been dealing with significant negative press in recent months, particularly concerning the activities of prominent team members off the field. In addition to the increase in public scrutiny that comes with their success and growing popularity on the field, Chiefs player Travis Kelce’s highly publicized relationship with pop star Taylor Swift has ushered in a large influx of new fans, traffic, and eyes on the team. Since the announcement of their relationship, the team saw a 300% increase in daily searches for their tickets on the ticketing site StubHub (DeArdo, 2023).

The negative press generated in the off-season threatens to significantly distract from team performance and fan satisfaction in the upcoming 2024 season.

### **Timeline of Recent Press Coverage**

While the majority of press coverage during the off-season typically surrounds training and player trades, several of the most prevalent stories in the press and media over the last three months center around team members' behavior and comments off the field.

- **March 30, 2024:** Chiefs wide receiver Rashee Rice is involved in a hit-and-run that caused injury to 4 people. In the following days, Rice turned himself into Texas police on

charges of aggravated assault. Rice faces lawsuits for a combined \$11 million in actual and punitive damages from the crash (AP News, 2024b). On **May 6, 2024**: Rice is allegedly involved in an assault at a Dallas nightclub. No charges are filed (AP News, 2024c).

- **May 11, 2024**: Harrison Butker, Kicker for the Chiefs, delivers a commencement speech at a conservative Catholic college in Kansas. His rhetoric offends many, as they find it to be sexist and discriminatory toward women and the LGBTQIA+ community. (Cacciola & Hoffman, 2024).
- **May 16th, 2024**: Chiefs offensive linemen Wanya Morris and Chukwuebuka Godrick are arrested in Kansas on misdemeanor drug possession charges (Teicher, 2024b).
- **May 30, 2024**: Chiefs Lineman Isaiah Buggs faces misdemeanor charges for animal cruelty in Tuscaloosa County, Alabama. He denies liability for the animals (AP News, 2024d).

While all of these instances have gone viral on social media, only the Butker incident has generated significant, sustained fallout in media and social channels for the team. In this document's appendix is a chart tracking the Google Trends report for March through May of 2024 (Figure A). Of the significant incidents of players above, only the Rice crash and Butker's comments coincide with significant spikes in search trends for the team. Butker's comments represent the highest search volume seen in the period.

### **The Organization's Response**

The Chiefs organization rarely directly comments on players' controversial statements and behavior off the field. The organization's silence does not extend to its players and coaches. Mahomes offered several short statements on the issues at hand. Teammate Kelce and Coach

Andy Reid made similar statements, representing three of the most influential voices in the Chiefs organization (Cronin, 2024).

Regarding Butker's controversial speech, Patrick Mahomes offered the following statement:

There's certain things that he said that I don't necessarily agree with, but I understand the person that he is, and he is trying to do whatever he can to lead people in the right direction, and that might not be the same values as I have (...) At the end of the day, we're going to come together as a team, and I think that'll help out as eliminating those distractions outside of the building, as well. (Mahomes, as cited by Cronin, 2024).

Mahomes, a team captain and highly popular and respected player within the league, also offered commentary on teammate Rice's legal issues:

I mean, obviously, that was a big mistake. But you have to learn from it, make sure it doesn't happen again and try to do whatever you can to be the best person you can be in society, not only for yourself but for the people around you. And I think he is doing that. But right now, we're just going to keep trying to do whatever we can to get him on the right path so that he can be a great football player, obviously, but we want him to be a great person too. (Mahomes, as cited by Cronin, 2024).

### **Response from Other NFL Teams**

Other teams are using the virality of the Chiefs' recent circumstances to their advantage regarding their marketing. For example, the Los Angeles Chargers released their 2024 schedule in a video imitating the popular Sims video game. In the video's end credits, they poke fun at the

Harrison Butker speech. The video depicts Butker doing housework in a kitchen, which he described as a woman's vocation in his speech (Los Angeles Chargers, 2024; Hollingsworth, 2024).

The NFL issued a statement explaining that Butker's remarks "did not match the league's values" (Cacciola & Hoffman, 2024).

### **Social Media Responses**

Continuing the organization's silence on players' off-season behavior, much of the content posted to team socials focuses on pre-season training and OTAs and continued coverage of Post-Super Bowl celebrations, such as their recent trip to the White House. President Joe Biden donned a team helmet at the event (Kansas City Chiefs, 2024b, 2024c, 2024e; Teicher, 2024e; Skretta 202b).

The White House visit presents an interesting segment of the online sentiment toward the Kansas City Chiefs. Despite this being a decidedly celebratory event for the team, there has been much negative commentary among commenters on social media regarding recent events.

The celebratory posts are overshadowed in the comments by Butker criticism (multiple instances), dissatisfaction with the team visiting a Democratic president, and other criticism that is not strictly related to their on-field performance (Kansas City Chiefs, 2024a, 2024d, 2024e). A selection of these comments is included in the appendix of this report (Figures B & C).

### **Audience Impact & Key Publics:**

- **Fans:** The Chiefs have a very loyal base of fans both in the Kansas City area and around the country. In addition to lifelong fans of the team, it's important to include fans who are new to the sport, including recent arrivals attributed to the Travis Kelce- Taylor Swift relationship (Morgan, 2024).

- **Team and Organization Members:** Hundreds of employees work for the Kansas City Chiefs organization, on and off the field. The popularity, reputation, and value of the brand directly impact their careers.
- **Community:** Residents and businesses in Kansas City benefit from the team's economic and social contributions (Skretta, 2024a).
- **Sponsors and Partners:** Corporate sponsors and business partners who are invested in the team's reputation and their association with the brand.
- **NFL and Other Teams:** The broader NFL community, including other teams and league officials, is invested in maintaining the integrity, morale, and reputation of the league.
- **Media:** Sports journalists and media outlets that shape the public perception of the sport through their coverage.

## **Conclusion**

While it is unclear at the moment what the impact of the team's off-season antics will be come September, when the Chiefs play their first game of the season, it is critical that the organization and the players seriously consider the impact that continued scandal can have on the team. Corporations that act as NFL sponsors have a history of pulling out when players are embattled in crime and controversy. In 2014, amid player Ray Rice's (much more extreme domestic violence allegations, Procter & Gamble pulled back their sponsorships, and several other companies issued statements condemning the crime and urged the NFL to address the issue (Stastna, 2014).

In our incredibly divisive society, the Kansas City Chiefs must ensure that their players understand the incredibly influential position that they are in, both as faces of a multi-billion dollar organization and as a pastime much beloved and essential to the morale of so many.

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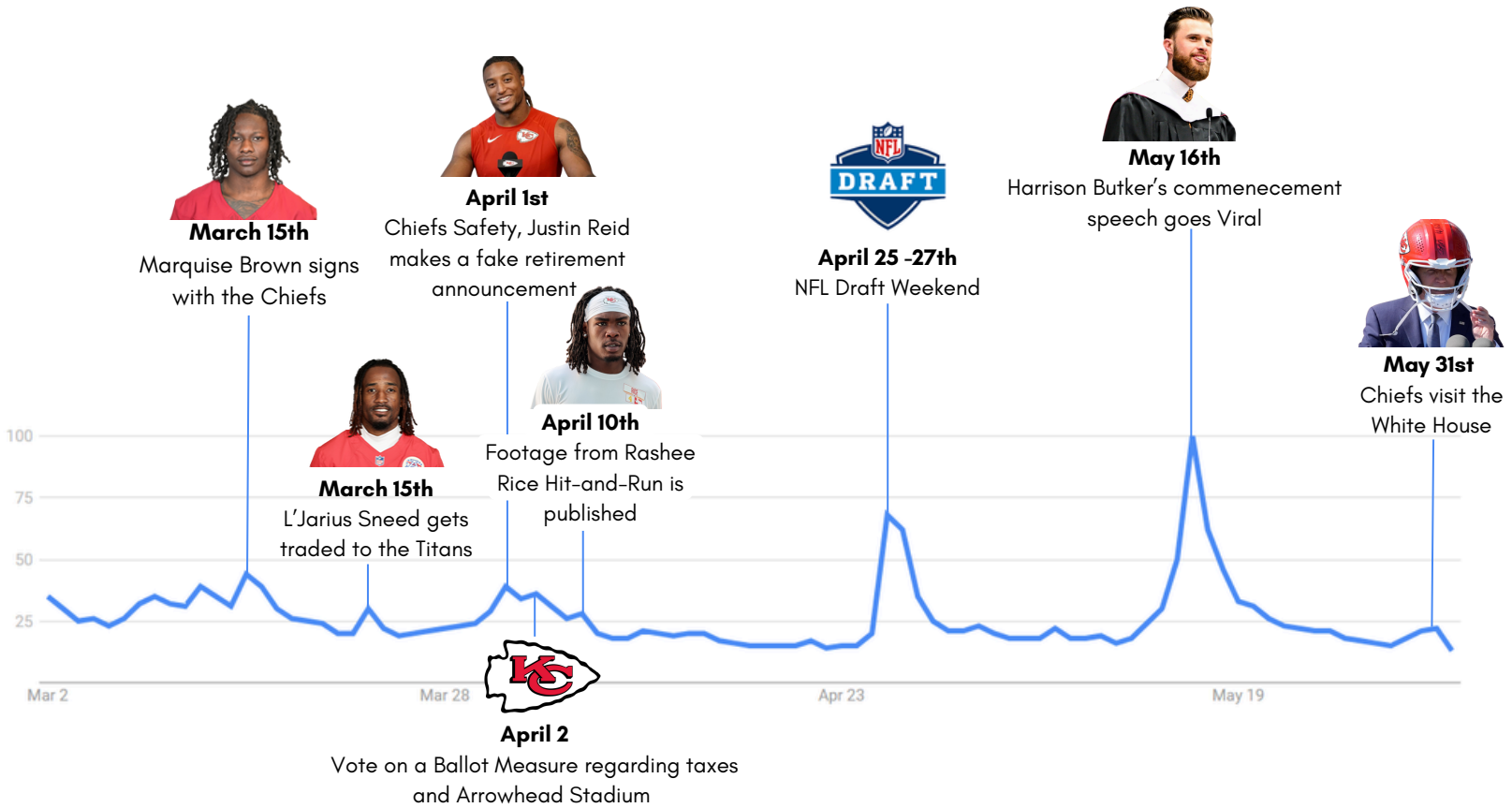
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# Search Trends for the Kansas City Chiefs

March - May 2024 (Source: Google Trends)



## Sample of Instagram Follower Loss (@chiefs account)

May 2024 (Source: SocialBlade.com)


2024-05-22	Wed	-491	4,222,147	--	422	+2	10,865
2024-05-23	Thu	-473	4,221,674	--	422	+3	10,868
2024-05-24	Fri	-381	4,221,293	--	422	+1	10,869
2024-05-25	Sat	-514	4,220,779	--	422	+2	10,871
2024-05-26	Sun	-599	4,220,180	--	422	+1	10,872
2024-05-27	Mon	-554	4,219,626	--	422	+1	10,873
2024-05-28	Tue	-689	4,218,937	--	422	+1	10,874
2024-05-29	Wed	-995	4,217,942	-1	421	+3	10,877
2024-05-30	Thu	-682	4,217,260	--	421	+2	10,879
2024-05-31	Fri	-781	4,216,479	+1	422	+3	10,882
2024-06-01	Sat	-397	4,216,082	--	422	+4	10,886
2024-06-02	Sun	-705	4,215,377	--	422	+1	10,887
Daily Averages		-340		+1		+2	
Last 30 days		-10,200		+30		+60	

Appendix: Figure B


# Summary on Harrison Butker's Viral Commencement Speech and Online Fallout & Opinions

LINK:  
[Video of Harrison Butker's Speech to Benedictine College](#)


LINK:  
[Full Text of speech](#)




kissmycasss  
yall leave Harrison Butker at home?!  
1d ago   Reply   129



Missy  
I hope I can get away from the kitchen in Gilead to watch....  
5-17   Reply   6




moooonica  
Unable to view this since it's not a page of the Bible or a recipe book 😊👉  
5-17   Reply   7




Jenna  
They're purposely not showing Harrison-we know his suits are always featured  
1d ago   Reply   592



Rere  
Happily profiting off a woman's professional success to sell tickets all season then silently supporting a bigot who belittles every professional women's worth is crazy  
Reply   5

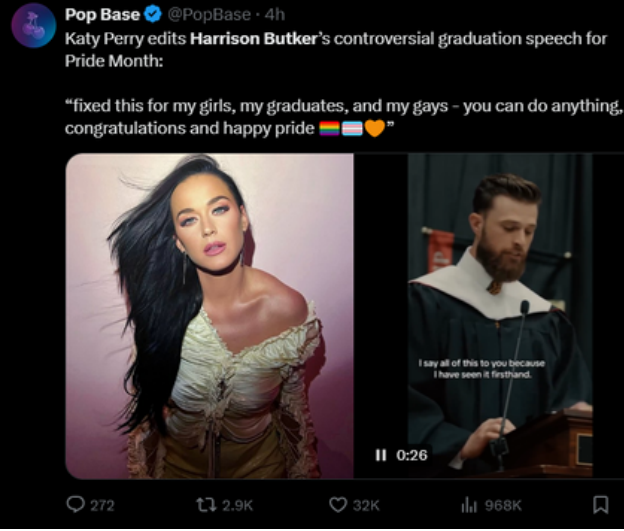


Aaje  
Your silence on butkers crappy speech is speaking VOLUMES.  
5-21   Reply   5

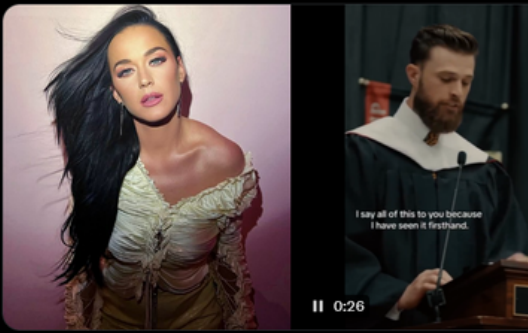


Ashley Theveny  
Don't worry, my husband gave me permission to post! I'm just a woman so I wouldn't know better but where's Taylor's boyfriend's co-worker?  
5-21   Reply   5   Back to top ↗





Pop Base · 4h  
Katy Perry edits **Harrison Butker's** controversial graduation speech for Pride Month:  
"fixed this for my girls, my graduates, and my gays - you can do anything, congratulations and happy pride 🏳️‍🌈💖"



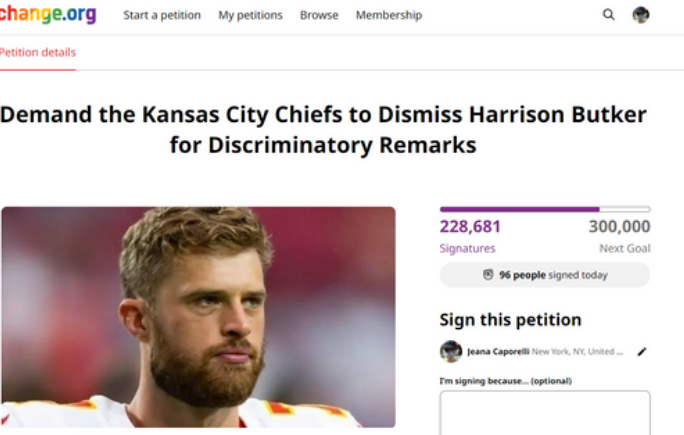
0:26

272   2.9K   32K   968K



Justice Horn · May 14  
Harrison Butker doesn't represent Kansas City nor has he ever. Kansas City has always been a place that welcomes, affirms, and embraces our LGBTQ+ community members. 🏳️‍🌈

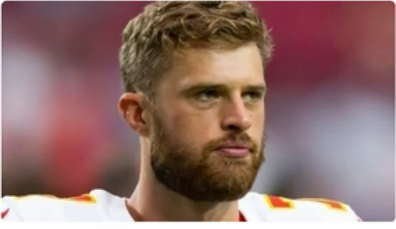




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Petition details

### Demand the Kansas City Chiefs to Dismiss Harrison Butker for Discriminatory Remarks



228,681 Signatures   300,000 Next Goal

96 people signed today

Sign this petition

Joana Caporelli New York, NY, United States

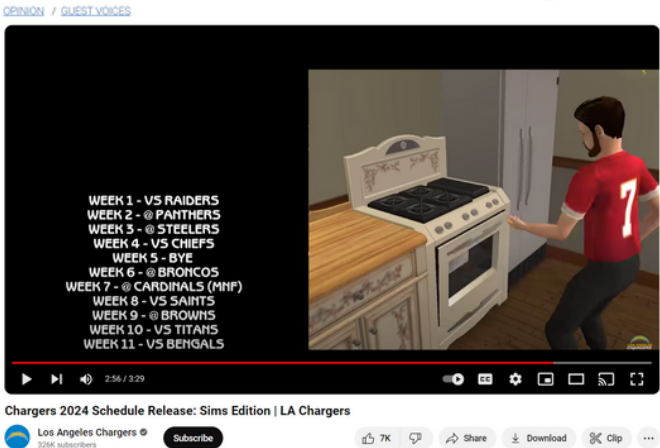
I'm signing because... (optional)




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## The casual, but dangerous antisemitism in Harrison Butker's commencement speech



OPINION / GUEST VOICES



WEEK 1 - VS RAIDERS  
WEEK 2 - @ PANTHERS  
WEEK 3 - @ STEELERS  
WEEK 4 - VS CHIEFS  
WEEK 5 - BYE  
WEEK 6 - @ BRONCOS  
WEEK 7 - @ CARDINALS (MNF)  
WEEK 8 - VS SAINTS  
WEEK 9 - @ BROWNS  
WEEK 10 - VS TITANS  
WEEK 11 - VS BENGALS

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# Additional Tweets on Rashee Rice and Isaiah Buggs



Imagidadnation

@imagidadnation · May 29

Chiefs PR manager this offseason







0:02



MLFootball

 @\_MLFootball · May 29





BREAKING NEWS

#Chiefs DL Isaiah Buggs is facing 2 warrants issued by local police for second-degree CRUELTY TO DOGS, according to reports. ...



Squirrely Yinzer

@Pitt\_Squirrel

Rashee Rice's agent trying to think of an easy rebound PR idea



0:09




Hayley Lewis

 @HayleyLewis\_ · May 29

#Chiefs Wide Receiver Rashee Rice sharing this video via Instagram Tuesday

Rice saying, "It's your boy double R..we're out here with some water and some pizza in the summertime. Everybody's got to eat, you know what I'm saying, it..."


Show more



petra

@iceclldpreston · May 29

every day something comes out that makes the **kansas city chiefs** more hateable




ESPN


Chiefs DL Isaiah Buggs facing two misdemeanor warrants for cruelty to dogs in the second degree


now


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