

**How Much Does Media Portrayal Matter? The Impact of a Polarized Media on Politics  
and Political Ideology in the United States**

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## Abstract

**Background:** The American political scene continues to grow more polarized, particularly among the two major political parties. Republicans and Democrats dislike, demonize, and look down upon each other more than ever before. This is partially due to the media and its portrayal of the two parties as well as its increasingly apocalyptic messages about one party or the other. The goal of this research is to shed light on how the media portrays each major political party from 2020 to present day and the devastating impact this portrayal has had on American politics and on the American people. **Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to examine both traditional media forms such as print and cable news as well as contemporary media forms such as social media to determine their impact on politics and individuals' political ideology. The following questions will guide this research: 1) What are the differences in how the media portrays the two major political parties? 2) What are the effects of this difference in the portrayal of the two parties on United States politics? 3) What are the effects of this difference in portrayal of the two parties on the general population and individual political ideology? **Findings:** This study found that bias in the media manifests differently depending on whether the news outlet is left leaning or right leaning. It also found that this bias has a significant impact on the American public; particularly when it comes to polarization and an overall negative perception of others in the opposite party. This polarization among the people is reflected in the increasing division among lawmakers and political figures.

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## Introduction

It is well known in America that politics and religion are not dinner table topics of conversation. This is because the two subjects are often touchy and can be sources of confrontation. It makes sense that religion may not be a popular topic of conversation with strangers; an individual's religion is often synonymous with their way of life. Many wars have been fought over religious differences and people believe so strongly in their religions that they are often willing to die for them. This being said, why are politics such a taboo topic? In theory, political differences among Americans should be no more contentious than a simple difference of opinion on where one should go for lunch. After all, political ideology is just a set of opinions. However, this is not the case; polarization in American politics is at an all time high, and it shows. Americans hate each other for the sole reason that they voted for the seemingly wrong person in the last election. There are negative connotations associated with the words "Republican" and "Democrat." In congress, the two parties have never been more divided on so many issues. There are now news outlets dedicated to reporting news from only one side of the political spectrum or the other. In the majority of other first world countries, this level of political polarization is shocking and unprecedented. Americans now value and identify with their political opinions as strongly as they do their religion, in some cases even more so.

While there are a myriad of reasons for this division, this study will focus on one; bias in the American media. Undoubtedly, bias is inevitable. According to the study of epistemology, objectivity is impossible in humans.<sup>1</sup> This is because every individual has a perspective, or a lens, through which they see and analyze the world. Though it is traditionally believed that an unbiased reporter is a good reporter, it can be incredibly difficult for journalists reporting on political news to look past this lens and remain neutral and unbiased; especially given how

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<sup>1</sup> Victor Gijbers n.p.

important politics are to modern Americans. As a result, media and news outlets tend to have a political lean, either intentionally or unintentionally. While this may seem innocent, the bias in the media can and does have a significant impact on American politics and political ideology among the masses, but how much does bias in the media matter?

In the following study, it will be shown exactly how bias in news outlets manifests. This includes how the two political sides of the media slant their reporting in favor of or against the two political parties, politicians, and supporters of each party. It will also show how this bias impacts the two political parties; especially in how the media contributes to the polarization and lack of cooperation in the U.S. legislature. Finally, it will be shown how bias in the media impacts the general public in day to day life, online, and in the division of political ideology among the American people.

## Chapter 1: The Media Divided

It is a well known fact that journalists are more likely to identify as liberal than as conservative. A 2022 study found that 36% of journalists identified with the Democratic party while only 3.4% of journalists identified with the Republican party with the majority of the rest being moderate with a left lean.<sup>2</sup> In addition, a study conducted by the UCLA political science department found that of the twenty popular news outlets studied, eighteen “scored left of center.”<sup>3</sup> This means that of the twenty most popular news outlets, the vast majority had a stance that was more liberal than the average American voter. Though the majority of journalists have a bias towards the left, this does not mean that a conservative bias does not exist; this just means that it is much easier to find data and information about left-leaning news outlets than right leaning outlets.

The following chapter will examine the extent to which bias in the media manifests. It will specifically examine how bias in the media manifests on both sides of the political spectrum. When examining the political lean of news outlets, this study used a combination of common knowledge, personal judgement, and a study conducted by the League of Women Voters which categorized news outlets on a spectrum ranging from “most extreme conservative” to “most extreme liberal” and from “original fact reporting” to “contains inaccurate/fabricated info.”<sup>4</sup>

### **Republicans in Right Leaning News Outlets**

As one could imagine, right leaning news outlets tend to cover right leaning candidates more often than left leaning ones. During the 2020 election, President Trump was 15% more likely to be quoted compared to President Biden on Fox News.<sup>5</sup> On CBS News, it is the same

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<sup>2</sup> “Survey of journalists, conducted” n.p.

<sup>3</sup> “Media Bias: it’s Real” n.p.

<sup>4</sup> “The Media Bias Chart” n.p.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas E. Petterson n.p.

story with Trump being 36% more likely to be quoted.<sup>6</sup> The 2020 election shows this phenomenon exceptionally well because Donald Trump was not the winning candidate, nor was he projected to be.<sup>7</sup> This means that Republican news outlets continued to broadcast more information about Trump than Biden, despite the fact that he was not favored by the majority of the voting population.

Though right leaning outlets cover Republican individuals more often than Democrats, the same cannot be said about political issues. It is a well known saying that “bad news sells.”<sup>8</sup> Though politics would typically not be seen as “bad news,” for many Republicans, a Democrat win *is* bad news. For this reason, right wing news outlets are much less likely to cover right wing issues. In a 2021 study researching the content of Twitter posts from twenty four left leaning news outlets and twenty right leaning news outlets, it was found that right leaning news outlets tend to cover more negative topics.<sup>9</sup> These negative topics are likely to include winning issues from the Democrat party. The study also found that this occurs when the political climate leans right and when it leans left. This means that, regardless of the majority party, right leaning outlets still cover more left leaning issues..<sup>10</sup>

When it comes to the portrayal of Republicans and Republican ideas in the right leaning media, these outlets are friendly; Republicans are often portrayed as the voice of reason in U.S. politics and as the only rational thinkers. This can best be seen in some of the most polarizing issues plaguing the U.S. such as abortion. In a Daily Wire article about what the author, Zagorski, calls a “secret abortion scandal,” in a Virginia high school, a social worker is accused of encouraging and paying for two teenage students’ abortions without parental knowledge.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid

<sup>7</sup> Allan J. Lichtman 264-266

<sup>8</sup> Roy Greenslade n.p.

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Bellovary 1-13

<sup>10</sup> Ibid

<sup>11</sup> Sarah Zagorski n.p.

The school is also accused of intimidating and threatening the teacher who brought her concerns to them and eventually to the school board. Throughout the article Zagorski portrays the whistleblower teacher as the only rational individual in the situation. In addition, she condemns those involved for “deeply troubling” allegations, further enforcing the rhetoric that the right-leaning characters were the most level headed and rational actors in the situation.

In addition to positivity when it comes to Republican actors, the right leaning media tends to have a positive view of Republican ideals and policies. When investigating the issue of illegal immigration in 2025, it was found that right leaning news outlets speak positively compared to left leaning outlets about the lack of border crossings towards the middle of 2025. One such example can be seen in the following Fox News and MSNBC headlines titling stories of how illegal border crossings in the summer of 2025 dropped to zero. Fox News states that “Border Patrol Announces ‘Phenomenal’ Turnaround as Number of Monthly Migrant Releases Drops to Zero.”<sup>12</sup> Covering the same topic, MSNBC states that “Trump Administration Touts ‘Record Low’ Border Crossings in July.”<sup>13</sup> It is clear that in the Fox News article, the view of Republican policies is much more positive and hopeful than in the MSNBC article. Fox News portrays the lack of illegal border crossings as impressive and positive while MSNBC portrays it as a negative thing that the Trump Administration is attempting to spin positive.

### **Democrats in Right Leaning News Outlets**

As previously established, right leaning news outlets are much more likely to cover Republican party members and actors than Democratic party members and actors. Despite this, Republican-biased media outlets do not refrain from generalizing the other side by referring to “the left,” “leftists,” or even “the radical left,” frequently.<sup>14</sup> Right leaning news outlets tend to

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<sup>12</sup> Taylor Penley n.p.

<sup>13</sup> Shelby Bremer n.p.

<sup>14</sup> Emanuel Macuixtle n.p.

generalize Democrats rather than highlighting specific actors. One such example can be seen through the following news article headlines. CBS News, a moderately right leaning outlet, states that “Trump slams the left as new details emerge in Charlie Kirk shooting investigation.”<sup>15</sup> The Hill, in a 2023 article states “Tim Scott: Radical Left Sending ‘sinister’ messages on race.”<sup>16</sup> Finally, Washington Times writes about “The Left’s Climate Fear-Mongering, Christian-Bashing, Race-Baiting Fever Dreams,” in which the first line of the article states “Sometimes, you have to laugh at how obvious the leftists and their media have become in their quest to orchestrate ‘build back better.’”<sup>17</sup> This means that though right leaning news outlets are less likely to refer to left leaning individuals, outlets are still incredibly likely to refer to Democrats as a collective.

In addition to covering “the left” as a whole, right leaning news outlets are three times as likely to cover left leaning issues than right leaning ones.<sup>18</sup> This is because right leaning outlets are geared towards Republicans and, as previously discussed, bad news sells. According to a 2020 study conducted by Pew Research Center, Republicans rely heavily on Fox News, with 60% of its audience aligning with the Republican party.<sup>19</sup> The next most popular partisan news sources are the Hannity and Limbaugh radio shows with 19% and 17% of their audiences aligning with the Republican party respectively.<sup>20</sup> Further impacts of this will be discussed in later chapters, but this data is significant because it shows the reason that conservative news outlets cover more ‘bad news’ and Democratic policies and issues than Republican ones.

The right leaning media tends to paint Democratic party members and ‘the left’ as a whole, as misled, immoral, and corrupt. In the aftermath of the broad daylight shooting of United Healthcare CEO Brian Thompson, Taylor Lorenz, a former New York Times and Washington

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<sup>15</sup> “Trump slams the left” n.p.

<sup>16</sup> Cheyanne Daniels n.p.

<sup>17</sup> Robert Knight n.p.

<sup>18</sup> Emanuel Macuixtle n.p.

<sup>19</sup> “Americans are Divided by” n.p.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid

Post reporter and Democrat party affiliate claimed that she understood why many Americans stand by Luigi Mangione and his alleged actions in killing Thompson.<sup>21</sup> In an article by New York Post, the author condemns Lorenz and calls a Reddit community titled “r/FreeLuigi” a “deranged internet echo chamber.”<sup>22</sup> In an article on the same topic, a Daily Wire reporter insinuates that Lorenz is morally corrupt by highlighting the fact that she stated "you're gonna ask if I condemn Hamas next. This is insane!"<sup>23</sup> In the same article, the author highlights the fact that Luigi Mangione allegedly killed Thompson, a husband and a father, insinuating that the alleged action was immoral and that Lorenz was immoral for not condemning him.<sup>24</sup>

Another example of how right leaning news outlets portray Democrats can be seen in how the right leaning media portrayed President Biden as ignorant and deceptive. During his 2023 State of the Union Address, he claimed that he had presided over “the largest deficit reduction in American history.”<sup>25</sup> However, as National Review highlights, the budget deficit fell due to expiring COVID-era spending. In an article published by National Review, the author paints a picture of a growing national deficit and cites several sources, particularly left leaning individuals, who worry about the level at which the government is spending money.<sup>26</sup> The author, in highlighting these facts, portrayed the then president as either intentionally trying to mislead citizens, or too incompetent to understand the true reason for the falling deficit.

In addition to negativity towards Democratic individuals and ‘the left’ as a group, right leaning news outlets often portray Democratic policy and ideals negatively. One such example is the issue of transgender medical treatment for minors. In an article by The Federalist titled “Why Accepting Child Transgenderism Will Pave The Way For Accepting Pedophilia,” the author

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<sup>21</sup> Chris Nesi n.p.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

<sup>23</sup> Virginia Kurta n.p.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

<sup>25</sup> Judson Berger n.p.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid

argues that allowing minors to consent to permanently altering their body in the hopes of changing their gender, typically a Democratic issue, is immoral.<sup>27</sup> The author goes on to claim that transgenderism in minors has a legacy of abuse, beginning with sex researcher John Money, a pioneer of transexual therapy and a defender of pedophilia. Further, he reasons that this trend of grooming and abuse has continued and claims that “yes, they are coming for your children.”<sup>28</sup> In this article, the author asserts that there is a correlation between minors consenting to sexual surgeries, and the possibility of minors consenting to sexual acts. In doing so, he argues that the largely Democratic ideal of allowing minors to transition genders is immoral and, in his eyes, absurd. The same can be seen in how the media treats men who have transitioned to women in women's sports. Riley Gaines, a prominent political activist and former collegiate swimmer, frequently argues for the removal of “men in women’s sports.”<sup>29</sup> She, in an article by Fox Business, explains that she hates the term “biological woman” because it implies that a woman who is not biologically female can exist, which, in her opinion, is a “crazy” Democratic idea.<sup>30</sup>

### **Republicans in Left Leaning News Outlets**

Far left leaning news outlets are about 7% less likely to cover politics than right leaning sources.<sup>31</sup> In addition, unlike right leaning sources, left leaning and far left leaning sources are almost equally as likely to cover both Democratic issues and Democrats (20%) as they are to cover Republican issues and Republicans (18%).<sup>32</sup> Though there are little to no conclusive answers to this phenomena, one can speculate. One possible explanation is that there are more slight left leaning news outlets than there are slight right leaning outlets. It is possible that if there existed more slight right leaning outlets, they too would cover each major political party

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<sup>27</sup> Spencer Lindquist, n.p.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid

<sup>29</sup> Kristen Altus, n.p.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

<sup>31</sup> Emanuel Macuixtle, n.p.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid

more or less as frequently as the other. Another possible justification is that left leaning outlets may attempt to mask their bias more than right leaning outlets, as will be explained later in this section. It may be that right leaning news outlets, in an attempt to acquire or retain viewers, select which stories to cover based on what will sell. Finally, it is possible that there are simply more left leaning outlets and journalists, and as a result, left leaning media is more representative of the media as a whole than right leaning outlets are.

The fact that left leaning outlets cover each major party's issues and people about as frequently as the other, may suggest that these outlets cover them equally. This is not the case. Left leaning outlets, while they tend to mask their bias, are nevertheless still biased. In a study conducted by All Sides, it was found that left leaning news outlets publish "sensational or slanted headlines, and [bury] context in the lower halves of the articles themselves, showing bias by information placement."<sup>33</sup> One example of this is an article by the New York Times titled "The G.O.P. Push for Post-Verdict Payback: 'Fight Fire With Fire.'"<sup>34</sup> This title shows a negative view of Republican leaders through the term "fight fire with fire" and with the assertion that the Republican party was seeking "payback."<sup>35</sup> Based on the title, it would seem that the article would discuss Republican leaders attempting to retaliate after President Trump's lawsuits with lawsuits against Democrat leaders. Though the article briefly discusses this in the initial few paragraphs, it then goes on to outline why various politicians disagree with the President's verdict.

Another example of left leaning news outlets publishing "sensational" headlines with more context in the lower half of articles is a story by ABC News titled "Commander of US Base

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<sup>33</sup> Emanuel Macuixtle n.p.

<sup>34</sup> Johnathan Swan Maggie Haberman, and Charlie Savage n.p.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid

in Greenland Fired for Email Critical of Vance Visit.”<sup>36</sup> This article states that a commander was fired as a direct result of an email he sent, and insinuates that, because the email criticized a Republican leader, that the Republican party, or even Vice President Vance, may be to blame. However, in the article itself, the author clarifies that Space Force commanders are expected to remain “nonpartisan in the performance of their duties” and that “no officer is above the expectation of apolitical service.”<sup>37</sup> This shows that the commander was not fired for the content of his political opinions specifically, as the title suggests, but rather that he was voicing any political opinions in the first place.<sup>38</sup>

Left leaning news outlets do not only publish these gripping headlines with context later in the articles when it comes to Republican members, they also do this when discussing Republican ideas and policy. In an article by CNN titled “Focus on ‘Parental Rights’ Chips Away at Gay Rights,” the author highlights a Florida law that requires schools to notify parents of any changes in mental health or counseling services provided to their child.<sup>39</sup> This headline has a negative slant, claiming that the law undermines individual rights. However, upon further examination of the article, context is given to show that the law intends for parents to simply be informed of their children's mental status. This can also be seen in an article by The Washington Post titled “An ‘SOS’ Sign of Detained Immigrants Says it All.”<sup>40</sup> The title insinuates that illegal immigrants detained in Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facilities were being severely mistreated. The article states that a “2024 investigation [...] uncovered mold in showers, nonfunctioning toilets, and broken sinks, among other unsanitary amenities,” just after mentioning the Republican president Trump’s increased deportation initiative, but fails to

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<sup>36</sup> Louis Martinez and David Brennan n.p. and Emanuel Macuixtle n.p.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid

<sup>38</sup> Ibid

<sup>39</sup> Zachary Wolf n.p.

<sup>40</sup> “An ‘SOS’ Sign of” n.p.

mention that the investigation was conducted, not under the Trump Administration, but the Democratic Biden Administration, showing bias. In addition, the article, in the second half, states that “ICE has higher detention standards than most U.S. prisons that hold actual citizens.”<sup>41</sup> In this article, The Washington Post shows bias by publishing a remarkable headline and including context only later in the writing.

### **Democrats in Left Leaning News Outlets**

Left leaning outlets tend to be fairly friendly towards Democratic individuals and leaders. In many instances, these outlets often portray Democrats as being deeply wronged by Republicans and Republican policies and as the voice of reason in the political scene. In addition, in the same way that these sources publish startling headlines and bury context later in the article when it comes to bias against Republicans and Republican ideals, they do the same in support of Democrats and Democratic ideals. An article by New York Times titled “Nebraska Teen Who Used Pills to End Pregnancy Gets 90 Days in Jail,” insinuates that a teen girl was prosecuted and charged with jail time for having an abortion due to a Republican law banning the medical procedure.<sup>42</sup> The article then clarifies, only in the later half, that the teen was convicted of “furnishing false information to a law enforcement officer and removing or concealing human skeletal remains.”<sup>43</sup> In addition, in the last few paragraphs, the author explains that the teen buried and dug up her baby’s remains three separate times, moved them, and attempted to burn them.<sup>44</sup> This article shows bias through its misleading headline and by portraying a left leaning individual as being prosecuted solely by Republicans and due to Republican legislation, with context only given later in the writing.

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<sup>41</sup> “An ‘SOS’ Sign of” n.p.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Levenson n.p.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> Ibid

In addition to Democratic individuals, the left leaning media also tends to favor Democrat leaders. In an article by The New Republic titled “Democrats Continue Their Doomed Push to Save Voting Rights,” the author insinuates that Democratic leaders were working against Republicans— as seen in the wording “save voting rights” and “doomed push”— and were the voice of reason.<sup>45</sup> However, the article then explains that Democratic leaders were not working against Republicans, nor were Republican leaders attempting to undermine voting rights.<sup>46</sup> Democratic leaders were instead pushing for a voting reform act that would require the federal government to approve election redistricting maps, a provision that the article states the Supreme Court has found unconstitutional as it restricts the right of the states to preside over election procedure.<sup>47</sup> In publishing a misleading headline painting Democratic leaders as the voice of reason and only including context later in the story, this article shows its bias.

Left leaning news outlets tend to be friendly towards not only Democratic and left leaning individuals, but Democratic policy as well. In an article by The Intercept titled “Abortion Bans or Democracy— You Can’t Have Both,” the author publishes a startling claim about the issue of abortion in the title, and buries context within the article.<sup>48</sup> The author discusses an Ohio initiative that looked to protect abortion rights in the state, and polled 58% of citizens in support of it. The legislature then proposed a constitutional amendment that would require a 60% majority for initiatives to pass, which was struck down. The citizens of Ohio, in response, passed a popular referendum that protects the right of abortion for women. Though this story is one of deceitful proceedings by the Ohio legislature in an attempt to prevent abortion rights, this is also a story of democratic proceedings in which the people’s vote ultimately prevailed. This shows

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<sup>45</sup> Grace Segers n.p.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Judith Levine n.p.

bias in that the title of the article makes a remarkable claim about left-leaning policies with context buried later in the article.

### **Conclusion**

It is clear that bias in the media is prevalent and misleading on both sides of the political spectrum in the U.S. Though there are more left leaning journalists than right leaning ones, and therefore more content to show liberal bias, this does not mean that right leaning outlets are not biased. Right leaning news sources tend to be much more open about their bias than left leaning sources. This means that right leaning sources strategically choose what and who to write about, and very clearly portray Republicans as the voice of reason and Democrats as misled, dubious, and incompetent. Left leaning outlets do not show bias in what and who they write about, but do show bias in how they write. These outlets often publish a staggering or misleading headline with biased information in the first half of an article, while burying context and information that supports the Republican side or goes against the Democratic side in the latter half.

## Chapter 2: A Polarized Media's Impact on American Politics

For most of American history, the Democrat and Republican parties have only been divided on only one issue at a time.<sup>49</sup> This means that both parties at any given time, were more or less aligned for but one issue in which they were split.<sup>50</sup> Americans have historically held the view that the parties were *too* similar.<sup>51</sup> As of 2025, the two parties are more divided than they have been in the last thirty years.<sup>52</sup> This is in part a result of the polarized media. As will be discussed in this chapter, the media has led to partisan divides, feelings of animosity, a lack of bipartisan discussion, and individuals identifying with a party rather than simply holding opinions on politics. This shift of the American public from the middle and towards more partisan divides has forced public officials to follow suit. The two parties have traditionally followed the will of the people, even switching to an extent during the latter half of the 20th century to continue to hold the vote. Today, the parties continue to follow and influence the will of the people, resulting in a polarized America.

### **The Party Divide**

According to a 2014 study conducted by Pew Research Center, the share of Americans who “express consistently conservative or consistently liberal opinions” has increased by 110% over the previous two decades.<sup>53</sup> This means that the share of Americans with moderate opinions has drastically decreased. The same trend can be seen in the United States congress. In 1971, there were 144 Republicans who were less conservative than the most conservative Democrat and 55 Democrats who were less liberal than the most liberal Republican.<sup>54</sup> In 2002 there was no

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<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Layman 85-86.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid

<sup>51</sup> Ibid

<sup>52</sup> “Political Polarization in the” *n.p.*

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Drew Desilver *n.p.*

overlap between the least liberal Democrat and least Conservative Republican.<sup>55</sup> This trend has continued, and by 2022 the gap had significantly widened.<sup>56</sup>

Even independents are not truly ‘independent’ of the party lines. Often, independents will caucus with the majority party because, in the senate, the majority party controls the agenda, guides the debate, and manages committee assignments. Throughout the history of U.S. politics, the senate has had 29 sessions with independent senators, of those, nineteen have been aligned or caucused with one party or the other.<sup>57</sup> Prior to 2001, these independents aligned themselves with the majority party as this is the most politically advantageous strategy. However, every session from 2001 to 2023— eleven sessions in a row— has had independents that were caucused with the Democrat party and has had none aligned or caucused with the Republican party. Despite this, and despite the fact that independents have historically caucused with the majority party, over this eleven session stretch there is no correlation between the majority party and the party with which independent Senators caucus. This shows just how polarized politics have become. Independent senators no longer act strategically when aligning themselves, and instead hold fast to their moral and political opinions regardless of strategy.

In addition to the division of the two parties, within each party, the extremes have grown as a result of the polarized voting population. According to research by Stanford University, 60% of the increase in the ideological gap between the two parties in congress is due to “the *replacement* of older and more moderate members by newer and more extreme legislators, with the remaining 40% due to *ideological migration*.”<sup>58</sup> In addition, in another study conducted by Adam Bonica, it was found that both parties have moved away from the ideological center. The

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<sup>55</sup> Drew Desilver n.p.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> “Party Division” n.p.

<sup>58</sup> Adam Bonica and Gary Cox 1

Republican party, between the years of 1979 and 2012 have moved .44 standard deviations to the right of center, while the Democrat party has moved .20 standard deviations to the left of center partially as a result of replacement of legislators, and partially as a result of ideological shift.<sup>59</sup>

The fact that moderate members in congress have been replaced by more extreme members shows that the extremes of both parties, and that the share of power these extreme factions hold has grown.

These extremes can make the already cumbersome legislative process that much more difficult. A recent example of this is the saga of House speaker McCarthy. After the 2022 midterm elections, the Republican party held a narrow 222 to 213 majority of the House of Representatives.<sup>60</sup> In January of 2023, when it came time to elect the Speaker of the House, Republican Representative Kevin McCarthy lost. Initially, twenty one Republicans defected, but over the course of fifteen votes, McCarthy dwindled that number down to six.<sup>61</sup> This strenuous vote occurred due to a small group of far-right representatives, most of which were aligned with the House Freedom Caucus and wished for concessions from McCarthy in order to gain their vote.<sup>62</sup> October 3rd of the same year, just ten months later, McCarthy was ousted as speaker.<sup>63</sup> Steven Scalise then won a closed door vote for the Republican nomination but withdrew when he failed to gain support on the house floor after one day. Jim Jordan was then nominated and remained the nominee for about a week, but over three votes progressively lost support from his party. Tom Emmer was then nominated and faced immediate backlash and withdrew hours later. Finally, after three weeks of votes, Mike Johnson won the House Speaker position.<sup>64</sup> This second round of House Speaker votes occurred after Speaker McCarthy made a deal with House

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<sup>59</sup> Adam Bonica 13

<sup>60</sup> Annie Karni n.p.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid

<sup>62</sup> Sam Cabral n.p.

<sup>63</sup> Lazaro Gamino et. al. n.p.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

Democrats to avoid a government shutdown and angered the same far right Republican who hindered his first fourteen votes. This saga shows that not only are the two major parties unwilling to collaborate with each other, but, in some ways, are unable to cooperate within themselves.

### **Public Officials and Campaign Approaches**

As a result of the polarization in the media, and the subsequent polarization of the people, officials identify with a political party rather than with issues and ideas. Though there have virtually always been political parties in the U.S., and though officials have almost always identified with them, this phenomenon has been exacerbated due to political polarization in recent years. In a study by Lafayette College, Andrew Clarke argues that the Democrat and Republican parties “brand” themselves.<sup>65</sup> This means that, in order to remain consistent with their respective beliefs and ideals, as well as sway the vote, the two parties portray themselves through a generic light that best aligns with the majority of their voting population. The bland branding helps to consolidate the ideals and issues most important to each party. Further, because the perception of each party is generalized, it is much easier for officials to gain votes with backing from one of the two parties. Though this system of branding is beneficial for the two parties, it also makes it incredibly difficult for any individual to run a successful campaign without the backing of, or aligning themselves with, one of the two major parties.<sup>66</sup> In sum, the polarization of the two parties has forced the parties to strategically brand themselves in such a way that further reinforces the polarization in American politics.

One example of this is Nancy Pelosi, a House Democrat leader and former Speaker. The first words on the homepage of her website are “*Donald Trump and Republicans know they can't*

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<sup>65</sup> Andrew Clark 453-468

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

*win fair and free elections.*”<sup>67</sup> The majority of Americans know Pelosi as a democrat, but very few know the details of her policies. This is because she positions herself as being anti-Republican and as a hard left Democrat, as seen in the message she chooses as the first impression of her on her website. Another example of this is Kamala Harris’ 2024 107 day presidential campaign. Though Harris had been the Vice President for four years previous, and though she had been involved in President Biden’s 2024 campaign for months before beginning her own short presidential campaign, voters did not know her stance on many important issues. This is because she positioned herself as an alternative to President Trump and an alternative to Republicans rather than a candidate in her own right. In a 2025 study, it was found that in the 2024 presidential debate between Trump and Harris, Harris referred to Trump a total of seventy times over the course of ninety minutes, while Trump did not refer to Harris by name once.<sup>68</sup> Further, in a BBC article intended to clarify her stances on key issues, published just a few weeks before the election, only three out of the ten issues had been clarified during her campaign.<sup>69</sup> The others, journalists had to look towards her previous career as a prosecutor to explain. In addition, on the issue of healthcare, the author writes that “details remain thin.”<sup>70</sup>

In positioning herself as a Democrat and anti-Republican rather than making her ideals widely known, Harris showed just how polarized American politics have become as a result of the polarized media. Because the voters have become more polarized and wish for either Republican or Democratic ideals, but very few moderate ones, the parties have been driven apart. As a result, the candidates backed by the parties have become more polarized and diverge from party ideals infrequently. This means that candidates like Harris must condemn their opposition

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<sup>67</sup> “Democrats United to STOP” n.p.

<sup>68</sup> Philipp Wicke and Marianna Bolognese sect. 6.2

<sup>69</sup> “Where Kamala Harris Stands” n.p.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid

and position themselves as the antithesis of their counterparts in the other party. Candidates and officials, in doing this, align themselves solidly with their party rather than with their own personal opinions or issues.

### **A Hostile Environment**

The polarized media has created an increasingly hostile environment in politics and among the two major parties. Whereas in the past, the environment has been at least partially collaborative, in recent years, politicians have adopted an “us v. them” mentality. This means that it is incredibly difficult to get things done when it comes to politics, especially at the national level. This can be seen in the history of government shutdowns. Throughout American history, while there have been lapses in funding to government agencies, they have largely been due to accounting errors.<sup>71</sup> Then, from 1977 to 1980, there were six lapses in funding due to disagreement in congress. These lapses did not result in shutdowns. However, in May of 1980, following Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti’s written opinion to President Carter, it was decided that government agencies would not continue operations if congress had not appropriated them funding to do so. Additionally, the Justice Department would enforce this. Between 1980 and 1995 there were a handful of shutdowns lasting less than ten days each, but in 1996, the House Speaker engineered two shutdowns as a political bargaining tool. This was the first time that a government shutdown had been utilized as a tool; this also happens to coincide with the progressing polarization in congress in which fewer members of the House and the Senate held overlapping ideals with the opposite party.<sup>72</sup> Though the media has not caused government shutdowns as a whole, it has played a part in inflaming them. As a result of bias and polarization in the media, the people have become biased and polarized as well. The people then

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<sup>71</sup> Tom Shoop n.p.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid

vote for ‘hard right’ and ‘hard left’ politicians to replace the more moderate ones, as previously discussed, and those politicians have trouble agreeing with each other. As a result, this disagreement leads to an “us v. them” mentality and the parties begin to take unprecedented action such as using government employee and military paychecks as bargaining tools in order to win the political game.

Another example of this “us v. them” mentality when it comes to government shutdowns can be seen in how politicians and government officials speak about the opposite party. In an X post by Karoline Leavitt, a Republican White House Press Secretary, speaking on the 2025 government shutdown, she states “Day 20 of the Democrat Party shutting down the government, and the consequences continue to roll in.”<sup>73</sup> In blaming the shutdown on the Democrat party and not congress as a whole, Leavitt shows just how uncooperative the two political parties have become. On the other side of the political spectrum, former president Barack Obama, referring to the same government shutdown, states on X that “Republicans would rather shut down the government than help millions of Americans afford healthcare.”<sup>74</sup> In this post, the former president also shows the polarization in the federal government. Both of these political figures demonstrate the lack of cooperation between the two parties and the mindsets that political figures have developed regarding the other party.

In addition to an “us v. them” mentality and blaming the other party for America’s problems, the polarized media has strengthened the partisan divide in terms of legislative cooperation. This can be seen in two ways; how each party votes, and which issues parties identify with. According to a 2017 study, bipartisan support of bills in congress has decreased by 30% since 1989, illustrating a severe and increasing lack of cooperation in congress over the past

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<sup>73</sup> Karoline Leavitt n.p.

<sup>74</sup> Barack Obama n.p.

three decades.<sup>75</sup> This, coupled with the lack of overlap among the two parties, and the group mindset rather than one of partnership paints an ever increasingly polarized picture in congress.

Given that there is a lack of bipartisan collaboration and legislation in congress, it is not surprising that parties, in recent years, have begun to identify with a policy agenda that differs from the agenda of the other party. As recently as 2008, the Republican and Democratic parties were in agreement that the U.S. border was under-patrolled and in need of increased security. In 2008, the official Democratic approach to immigration acknowledged that “we cannot continue to allow people to enter the United States undetected, undocumented, and unchecked.”<sup>76</sup> Along the same lines, the official Republican approach to immigration emphasized that “the rule of law suffers if government policies encourage or reward illegal activity. The American peoples’ rejection of en masse legalizations is especially appropriate given the federal government's past failures to enforce the law.”<sup>77</sup> In 2008, the two parties were not easily distinguished by their view on illegal immigration.

In 2025, however, it is clear which party focuses more on preventing illegal border crossings and which focuses more on expanding pathways to citizenship. It is not difficult to determine which party was which in the previous statement because the two parties identify themselves through their policies. As previously discussed, the two parties build a brand for themselves to appear more consolidated to the voters in the media. However, the branding not only makes it difficult to run as anything but a Democrat or a Republican as already established, but the branding, in recent years, creates vast divisions between the two parties. The brand of immigration policy is a good example of this. In order to differ from the Republicans when it comes to immigration, the Democrat Party moved away from preventing illegal activity, and

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<sup>75</sup> “Bipartisanship down 30% since” n.p.

<sup>76</sup> Matt Welch “Democrats on Immigration Since” n.p.

<sup>77</sup> Matt Welch “The GOP’s 35-year” n.p.

toward promoting legal immigration. On the other hand, the Republican party moved away from blaming the government of the past for the lack of border security and towards blaming the Democrat Party of the present for a lack of border security.

Another example of the lack of cooperation between the two parties is the existence and recent spiral of non-census year gerrymandering. Gerrymandering is a practice that has existed almost as long as the U.S. has.<sup>78</sup> However, until recent years, the practice was not fully utilized as an integral political tool, nor has it routinely occurred during non-census years. However, as a result of the media and increasing polarization in politics, politicians on both sides, but primarily the Republican party, have begun to utilize gerrymandering at unprecedented rates.<sup>79</sup> In 2025 Texas launched a plan that would theoretically deliver the Republican party five additional seats in the House of Representatives.<sup>80</sup> As a result, California proposed its Proposition 50 which would temporarily give up its independent redistricting committee in favor of a district map that would theoretically give the Democrat party five House seats. In response to both of these, Missouri and North Carolina both passed district maps that would theoretically give the Republican party one more House seat each.<sup>81</sup> All of these plans occurred during a non-census year which is unprecedented. The fact that states are redistricting as a tool to gain more seats in congress, and are fighting to gain more seats than the other party at the expense of the democratic process, shows the polarization in American politics. The two parties, rather than collaborating in the House, fight to gain more seats than the other so that they do not need to cooperate and essentially attempt to choose their voters rather than the voters choosing the representatives.

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<sup>78</sup> “Where We Have Been” n.p.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid

<sup>80</sup> “The Fight to Redraw” n.p.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid and Lynn Bonner and Galen Bacharier n.p.

## **Conclusion**

The polarized media has created a hostile environment in American politics, especially at the federal level. The two parties are more divided than ever before, with not a single person in the U.S. House or Senate overlapping ideals with a member of the other party. The extremes of each party have grown exponentially, and those extremes hold the legislative process back regularly. Public officials no longer identify with their political issues, but rather with their party because the parties identify with political issues for them. This makes it difficult for independent and third party candidates to gain votes and for party representatives to diverge from the party brand. The political scene has become increasingly competitive and politicians often hold an “us v. them” mindset when it comes to the other party. Political figures blame each other for America’s problems and bipartisan collaboration is at an all time low. Finally, the competition and lack of cooperation between the parties has increased so drastically in recent years that the two parties compete and gerrymander to gain more seats in congress rather than work together and bring bipartisan legislation.

### Chapter 3: A Polarized Media's Impact on the American People

The people are the heart of American politics. It is often forgotten that, though politicians hold the power to write and amend laws, affecting the lives of their constituents, they still work for the people. In addition, America is a democratic republic with a free and fair electoral system. This means that, for the most part, the composition of the federal government will reflect the will of the majority of the people. This works no matter what the people will, with the exception of unconstitutionality. Further, the modern media has become increasingly biased and polarized. This bias and polarization has influenced the people by pulling them to one side or the other. The American public is more divided than ever before, especially on key issues such as abortion, illegal immigration, and LGBT rights. This is in part caused by the media, and it negatively impacts politics, as previously established. This chapter will discuss how exactly the media impacts the will of the people and the actions individuals take as a result of that polarized will.

#### **Polarization in the American Population**

According to a study conducted by Yale University, the media has the ability to change an individual's political opinion.<sup>82</sup> The study took a group of people who regularly watch Fox News and had them instead watch CNN for five days. It also followed individuals who continued to regularly watch Fox News. It was found that the group that switched to CNN for five days, on average, shifted their views and adopted slightly more liberal positions than previous, and more liberal than those who continued to watch Fox News. This shows that biased news is capable of changing an individual's opinion on politics. Further, this change in opinion can happen quickly, in as little as five days. The study found that the majority of the test group did not continue to

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<sup>82</sup> David Broockman and Joshua Kalla, 1-31

watch CNN but instead went back to regularly watching Fox News after the study concluded.<sup>83</sup> This should not be interpreted to indicate that the effects of the biased media do not last. Instead, the fact that the Fox News viewers returned to Fox News after the study shows that the effects *are* lasting. This is because, even after individuals' opinions had slightly shifted as a result of watching CNN News, the strong opinions fostered by Fox News remained and the Fox News viewers returned to regularly watching the channel that reinforced their opinions. It is not clear whether the group's opinions would have been permanently changed had they watched CNN regularly for an extended period of time but the possibility should not be ruled out. It is also not addressed whether Fox News caused the group's original opinions or if their opinions had an impact on whether or not they decided to begin watching Fox News in the first place. It is likely that the truth is a little bit of both. It could be reasonably assumed that the group had pre-existing political opinions, as most individuals do, and chose their daily news source based on this. Then, the bias in Fox News' program, as previously established in chapter one, further reinforced the strong opinions. Nevertheless, it is clear based on this study that bias in the media has the potential to shift the political views of individuals, even within a short period of time.

The idea that Americans have become increasingly divided on key political issues is a widely accepted one. According to a 2014 study conducted by the Pew Research Center, in 1994 only 64% of Republicans "were more conservative than the median Democrat," while 70% of Democrats were "more liberal than the median Republican."<sup>84</sup> However, those numbers jumped to 92% and 94% respectively in 2014.<sup>85</sup> Further, just as the political parties have become more extreme, so have the American people. In 1995, 58% of Republican voters identified as

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<sup>83</sup> David Broockman and Joshua Kalla, 1-31

<sup>84</sup>"Political Polarization in the American Public" *n.p.*

<sup>85</sup> Ibid

“conservative or very conservative; that number jumped to 77% by 2024.”<sup>86</sup> Additionally, the number of Republican voters who identified as “moderate” in 1995 dropped from 33% to 18% and the number of Republican voters who identified as “liberal or very liberal” dropped from 8% to 4%.<sup>87</sup> This trend of voters adopting more extreme ideologies and identifying themselves as more extreme is mirrored in Democrat voters. Democrat voters who identified as “liberal or very liberal” in 1995 jumped from 25% to 55% in 2024, those who identified as “moderate” dropped from 48% to 34%, and those who identified as “conservative or very conservative” dropped from 25% to 9%. This trend directly coincides with the progressive polarization in the media as discussed in chapter one and the progressive polarization in politics as discussed in chapter two. This is a strong indication that bias and polarization in the media has in part led to polarization in the American population and, consequently, in politics.

### **The People’s Perception of the “Other Side”**

As a result of the media’s biased portrayal of political parties and politicians, the American population has become so divided that stereotypes of individuals who support each party have shifted in recent years. Stereotypes of the two political parties have existed as long as the party system has, as can be seen in political cartoons throughout American history. However, in recent years the stereotypes have transformed. As previously covered, Americans have become increasingly politically divided. Further, the population has become less moderate, leading to a larger portion of individuals who identify as “very conservative” or “very liberal.” These identifications come with a general set of beliefs, as discussed in chapter two, because the parties brand themselves in a way that appeals to their voter base. This is the scene in which the shifting stereotypes have come to fruition.

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<sup>86</sup> Megan Brenan n.p.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

A study published by Political Science Research Methods asked a group of people to name four words to describe Republicans and four words to describe Democrats in 2016, and again in 2021.<sup>88</sup> The study differentiated between Republican respondents and Democrat respondents. In 2016 respondents provided words concerning ideology such as those pertaining to class interests and liberal ideology for Democrats and those pertaining to traditional values and class interests for Republicans more than in 2021. Additionally, in 2016 respondents provided words concerning personal traits such as those alluding to individuals being caring and inclusive, smart and honest, lazy, and immoral for Democrats and those alluding to individuals being religious, selfish, and patriotic for Republicans less than in 2021.<sup>89</sup> This means that, on average, the respondents shifted their gaze from ideological beliefs to character traits over the six years when it comes to stereotypes of individuals on the other side of the political spectrum.

While Americans have historically held at least mildly negative views towards members of the opposite party, the changing of stereotypes also indicates an increasingly negative mindset towards members of the opposite party. According to a 2016 study, 47% of Republicans viewed Democrats as immoral.<sup>90</sup> That number jumped to 55% in 2019, just three years later. In 2016 35% of Democrats viewed Republicans as immoral, with that number jumping to 47% in 2019.<sup>91</sup> 77% of Republicans and 72% of Democrats believe that the two parties cannot agree on basic facts.<sup>92</sup> The political division in the U.S., as a result of the polarized media, has increased so rapidly in recent years that more Americans than ever before harbor negative feelings towards members of the opposite party.

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<sup>88</sup> Ethan Busby, Adam Howat, and C. Daniel Myers 606-612

<sup>89</sup> Ibid

<sup>90</sup> “Partisan Stereotypes, views of” n.p.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

<sup>92</sup> “Partisan Antipathy: More Intense” n.p.

This has manifested in an increase in political violence. 85% of Americans believe that politically motivated violence is on the rise.<sup>93</sup> The public is not incorrect in this belief; according to United States Capitol Police, between 2017 and 2024, the number of threats against members of the U.S. Congress investigated increased from 3,939 to 9,474.<sup>94</sup> One such example of this increase in political violence is the assassination of Charlie Kirk and the subsequent reaction. In September of 2025, the political activist Charlie Kirk was shot and killed on a college campus.<sup>95</sup> His murder was noteworthy because Kirk had never held office, nor had he ever been on a campaign; he was simply an activist. This means that he was killed not for his policies, as many victims of political violence are, but for his opinions. According to a poll conducted by YouGov, 25% of adults who identify as “very liberal” and 17% of adults who identify as “liberal” believe that political violence can sometimes be justified.<sup>96</sup> Additionally, 4% of those who identify as “conservative” and 3% of those who identify as “very conservative” believe that political violence can sometimes be justified. It is not surprising then, given this difference in beliefs, that there was significant internet discourse immediately following Kirk’s death.<sup>97</sup> The discourse over the justification and morality of Kirk’s death shows the polarization in today’s political scene. The fact that a significant portion of Americans believe that political violence can be justified is yet another indication of just how polarized the country has become. A difference in opinion can, in some cases, become reason for violence.

In addition to an increase in negative feelings towards other Americans and politicians, bias in the media has also harbored distrust in the media itself. According to Pew Research Center, a majority of Republicans distrust ABC, NBC, CNN, and CBS News while 56% trust

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<sup>93</sup> Joseph Copeland and Jocelyn Kiley n.p.

<sup>94</sup> “USCP Threat Assessment Cases” n.p.

<sup>95</sup> “What You Need to” n.p.

<sup>96</sup> David Montgomery n.p.

<sup>97</sup> “What You Need to” n.p.

Fox News.<sup>98</sup> The opposite can be said for Democrats, with a majority trusting ABC, NBC, CNN, and CBS News and only 19% trusting Fox News. Fox News, as discussed in chapter one, is right leaning. It is not surprising then, that 57% of Republicans and only 18% of Democrats receive news from the outlet.<sup>99</sup> This trust or distrust is likely a result of confirmation bias. If an individual holds a positive opinion of the president and another holds a negative opinion, those two people would interpret the president's actions in, for example, brokering a peace deal differently. The former individual might view the peace deal positively while the latter individual might criticize the peace deal for not being sufficient. This explains why Americans trust or distrust various news sources. The former individual interpreted the hypothetical peace deal as positive because they already harbored positive views towards the president and would therefore not be inclined to receive news from a source that frames the peace deal as insufficient. This is because that individual would likely believe that the news source was inaccurate in its interpretation of the peace deal.

### **The Added Effects of Social Media**

Throughout most of American history, news outlets and word of mouth were among the only ways to receive news about politics. However, in 2008 the internet surpassed all media except broadcast as the most popular way for Americans to receive news.<sup>100</sup> Since 2008, the share of Americans who utilize the internet for political news has only grown.<sup>101</sup> The increase has allowed a wider population of people to stay well informed on national and international politics. This has also opened the field of political journalism to a wider range of people. While these can be positive things, in many scenarios, the usually high standard that journalists hold themselves

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<sup>98</sup> Elisa Shearer, Kirsten Eddy, Michael Lipka, and Katerina Matsa n.p.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> "Internet Overtakes Newspapers as" n.p.

<sup>101</sup> "Social Media and News" n.p.

to are not as binding to internet creators and influencers when it comes to discussing news on social media. These amateur journalists have the ability to post very skewed and sometimes even blatantly false news with little to no repercussions.<sup>102</sup> The two main reasons for knowingly posting and publishing “fake” news are to capitalize, and to support a favored candidate.<sup>103</sup> In addition, there is a partisan asymmetry when it comes to getting flagged for misinformation online. According to a 2025 study, Republicans are 2.3 times more likely to be flagged on X for misinformation.<sup>104</sup> It should be noted that this study did not take into account whether the information was truly false or misleading, but only examined whether the post was flagged and if other X users marked the flag as “helpful.”<sup>105</sup> For this reason, it cannot be certain whether there is a true asymmetry in *posting* misinformation. However, the fact that one party members’ posts are flagged more often than the others’ is telling of the polarization among the American general public.

The term “echo chamber” is a well known one. It refers to a common effect of many social media algorithms in which an individual will watch a video or “like” a post and more content similar to it will generate more often. This can be problematic because the social media algorithm has the ability to select what type of content an individual will see on a daily basis. Echo chambers on social media essentially mirror the selective trust and viewership of news coming from one side of the political spectrum or the other. Where it differs, however, is in the fact that traditional news outlets, even those who report severely skewed news such as Fox and CNN, do not intentionally report blatant falsehoods as influencers can. For this reason social media echo chambers can be particularly dangerous to political ideology. These echo chambers

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<sup>102</sup> Hunt Allcott 217-219

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Renhault n.p.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

can present intentionally skewed and blatantly false information regarding politics and political candidates and can shield individual users from differing opinions.

While it is alarming just how easily social media platforms can alter the composition of content an individual sees, this would not influence the individual more than simply consuming biased media from traditional outlets if disinformation and misinformation did not have a significant effect. Misinformation is not only spread more rapidly than factual news, but it has also been proven to alter the behavior of individuals.<sup>106</sup> This was especially prevalent in misinformation pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of false news claiming that the drug chloroquine, a malaria treatment, was an effective treatment for the disease, there were several cases of overdoses. Additionally, rumors about a complete lockdown induced panic buying of groceries and paper products, leading to a shortage of toilet paper in 2020.<sup>107</sup> In sum, misinformation has the ability to blur the lines between fact and false news, in turn, influencing individuals' reactions to nonexistent problems and false information<sup>108</sup>.

## **Conclusion**

As has been shown, biased media has the ability to alter an individual's political opinion, and it has. As a result, the general population has become incredibly polarized, with very little overlap between political ideologies. This polarization has gone so far that the perceptions of those who vote for the "other side" have become much less ideological based, and more personal. Americans increasingly believe that who one votes for impacts their person rather than just their opinions. Further, these perceptions have become increasingly negative. The negative perceptions of others based on political ideology has led to a significant increase in political violence, and even more alarming, an increase in the normalization of political violence. In

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<sup>106</sup> Samia Tasnim, Mahbib Hossain, and Hoimonty Mazumder n.p.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid

<sup>108</sup> Zoe Adams, Magda Osman, Christos Bechlivanidis, and Bjorn Meder n.p.

addition to a negative perception of others, the American public has begun to hold an increasingly negative opinion and a heightened level of distrust towards news outlets leaning opposite of them. In addition, the expanding popularity of the internet, specifically social media, has allowed a larger population to remain well informed on politics. However, it also allows a larger population of people to report on the news, often falsely. The structure of many social media platforms allow for users to get stuck in echo chambers full of self-affirming, biased, and false media. These echo chambers of misinformation and biased media have a genuine potential to alter an individual's opinions and actions.

## Conclusion

It is clear that bias in the media has served to divide Americans and the two major political parties. Among right leaning news outlets, journalists tend to have an outwardly friendly view towards Republicans and right leaning lawmakers and a negative view of Democrats and left leaning lawmakers. Additionally, right leaning outlets show their bias blatantly. Journalists are often shameless in their wording and in their strategic structure of writing. On the other side, left leaning news outlets tend to be more friendly to Democrats and left leaning lawmakers while being more hostile towards Republicans and right leaning lawmakers. These outlets are often less obvious in their bias and tend to bury the lede rather than injecting personal opinions into the story as right leaning journalists do. It is not clear which form of bias is more dangerous but it could be assumed that bias on the left could be more influential. This is because, upon first glance, the stories are not biased at all. This suggests that the general public would be less likely to spot bias and more likely to internalize the slanted information as fact than they would with right leaning outlets.

This bias in the media has led to an increase in polarization among lawmakers and political figures. Independents are no longer truly independent, the parties are more divided than ever before, and even within the parties, members tend to be more extreme. All of this has led to a severe lack of cooperation between lawmakers and has left congress in a stalemate over many issues, including funding bills required to keep the federal government running. This polarization is mirrored in the American public. Americans distrust, dislike, and look down upon members of the opposite party simply for the fact that they are members of the opposite party. Political affiliations are now closely linked with personality traits and morality rather than sets of

opinions. Politically motivated violence is on the rise and social media has only served to accelerate all of these issues.

Given all of this, a change must be made. How to navigate this while also navigating journalist's first amendment rights of free press and freedom of speech is yet another issue. What is apparent then, is that the change must come from the media itself rather than as a regulation set upon it. Historically, journalists have coveted the responsibility of providing the American public with factual, unbiased news; but in recent years this has fallen by the wayside. In the age of information, Americans need reliable access to unbiased news more than ever before. With social media usage on the rise and amateur internet journalism growing in popularity, the public's information hubs are entirely oversaturated with biased and often outright false news. If the great experiment of American democracy is to remain successful, it is imperative that the voters have access to political news they can trust.

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