

The Partisan Lens:
Analyzing News Media's Role in Political Polarization Through Coverage of Trump's Initiatives
Against DEI Within His First Week of Presidency in 2025

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By
Malia Juba
Department of Communication Studies

Dr. Karrin Anderson, Communication Studies

Dr. Nick Marx, Communication Studies

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Abstract

Political polarization has become entrenched in American citizens' political culture, altering how people ideologically think, associate with certain issues, and interact with the people and politics surrounding them. This literature review and case study examine how modern news media contribute to political polarization in the US through a case study on coverage of President Trump's first week in office (2025). To do so, I first review existing literature surrounding the origins of political polarization, the role of contemporary media, and how political polarization exists and operates in the twenty-first century. Next, I analyze this phenomenon through two distinctly partisan news outlets and their coverage of President Trump's first week in office and his early efforts to federally dismantle DEI programs. The findings of this study conclude that traditional news media's framing, language, and themes can contain partisan bias. This study contributes to the field of political communication by providing insight into the ways in which media frames political events and shapes public perception, particularly in the context of a highly contentious incident.

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Introduction

The United States has seen a new wave of political engagement in the twenty-first century. With the rise of more accessible national news media sources, the way that we interact with politics and partisan topics has fundamentally shifted. Political polarization has become entrenched in American citizens' political culture, altering how people ideologically think, associate with certain issues, and interact with the people and politics surrounding them. This rift, although always present in American politics, has grown increasingly more prominent following the 2016 presidential election, showing a dramatic divide between America's two primary political parties and the partisan issues associated with them. This divide is still ever present in Donald Trump's 2025 return to the White House, and as political polarization continues to define our modern political climate, the role of media in shaping these divides remains a crucial area of inquiry.

This analysis raises the question of the role of the media in contemporary political polarization in the United States. Its objectives are to analyze how conservative and liberal print news outlets framed Donald Trump during his first week in office in 2025 and to identify the key themes, tones, and frames used by each news outlet, emphasizing how partisan bias shapes the presentation of events. It also analyzes how media framing could affect political polarization through a comparative analysis. In highlighting these topics, we can gain insight into the state of political communication in the US and how we might go about decreasing the level of political polarization and divisions within the country.

This thesis consists of ten main sections contributing to these objectives. The first three sections consist of a review of existing literature covering the origins of modern political polarization, the role of the media in polarization, and how political polarization exists in the

twenty-first century. The following two sections provide the research methodology used in the analysis and background on the selected news outlets and their history within political coverage, as well as background on the selected news story and its contextual relation to US political discourse. Then, the following sections break down the news articles and how they report on the story, specifically analyzing the framing, language, key themes, and finally, comparing all the findings from each source against one another. The final section concludes the study's findings and emphasizes the media's role in political polarization.

Origins of Modern Political Polarization

Despite the growing assumption that the United States is facing a political divide that has never been seen before, political polarization has a foundational history within the country, and many aspects of American political history are reflected in the modern age. Party divisions have been widely present in US politics since the formation of the two-party system, and have developed throughout significant points in American history. Events like the American Civil War, industrialization, the Great Depression, and the New Deal era all contributed to how the Republican and Democratic parties have defined themselves and their ideological differences (Nivola and Brady 122).

Although these differences and divides were always present, and occasionally reached new heights at various points, Democrats didn't always necessarily mean liberal, and Republicans didn't always mean conservative. In the late 1960s and 1970s, overlaps between the political parties were common, and many members of Congress and American citizens found themselves somewhere in the middle of the political divide. According to the Pew Research Center, "five decades ago, 144 House Republicans were less conservative than the most conservative Democrat, and 52 House Democrats were less liberal than the most liberal Republican" (DeSilver). This overlap in liberalism and conservatism signaled a historically unprecedented level of bipartisanship among American politicians. However, the ideological overlaps began to shrink after arguments that the lines between political parties should be more defined to give the public a clearer idea of what they are voting for. With new election cycles and candidates running more clearly alongside one party or another, bipartisan candidates were phased out, and a new set of liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans became the standard. With this change, common ground between the two parties became a rarer occurrence,

and voters found themselves having to align more drastically with a specific party, due to the lack of middle ground ideologies and centrist candidates (DeSilver).

This shift in partisanship and political affiliation has meant several things for the state of the US's political affairs, but has had a particularly profound effect on polarization and how that term has come to be defined. The political polarization of the past, although present as it is today, was characterized by ideological divides and policy-based differences. Liberal Democrats and conservative Republicans found themselves at odds over partisan issues, and conflicts were centered around the decisions of political candidates and representatives. However, with the widening gap between the two major parties, polarization between members of each party became an entirely new entity.

Politics became increasingly associated with identifiers like race, ethnicity, religion, and social class, so much so that many could correctly assume a person's political affiliation based on just one of these identifiers. In her book *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity*, Lilliana Mason argues that “the American political parties are growing socially polarized. Religion and race, as well as class, geography, and culture, are dividing the parties in such a way that the effect of party identity is magnified. . . . Partisanship can now be thought of as a mega-identity, with all the psychological and behavioral magnifications that implies” (14). As partisanship became intertwined with social, cultural, and economic characteristics, so did the concept of identity. Our morals, beliefs, personal histories, and relationships, all things that make us who we are, have become ingrained in how we engage with politics and communicate politically with our communities. This concept can be identified as “identity politics.” It is important to note that although aspects of this concept contribute to modern political polarization, the concept of identity politics itself is not inherently negative, nor is it something

that only affects a certain demographic of people. In his book *Why We're Polarized*, Ezra Klein introduces the concept of political identity and argues that “everyone engaged in American politics is engaged in identity politics” (xx) and “all politics is influenced by identity” (xxi). By this, he means that identities are formed naturally, and letting our identities dictate our choices and interactions is a similarly natural process.

Within the realm of identity, Klein also establishes two types of polarization: issue-based polarization and identity-based polarization. The difference between these two forms of polarization is a reflection of the shift in division that occurred in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century. As the names imply, issue-based polarization occurs when sorting between the two political parties are reflections of policy opinions, and identity-based polarization occurs when parties reflect political identities (Klein 32). These forms of polarization play a part in deepening the partisan divide. When people's identities and beliefs push candidates to take certain stances, the political parties will follow suit and polarize to retain public support. Equally, when parties take strong stances toward specific issues, voters are forced to choose a side, each scenario deepening the partisan divide among a particular issue. This outcome has built up partisan issues like LGBTQ+ rights, abortion, and gun control to new heights, with people strongly supporting one side or the other, choosing a political party based on their views, and political parties becoming more extreme to meet the needs and wants of their voters. This is a basis for why some of these issues have become so ingrained in partisanship and why so few people classify as undecided. Even voters who don't take strong stances on the issues mentioned above often align their stance with their chosen political party for lack of other options. These aspects of polarization all address the systematic and frequently unconscious ways that American candidates and voters have shifted towards one party and away from

another, however, modern polarization has not developed into what it is today through entirely unintentional and unconscious means.

For most of America's history with political polarization, the term “polarization” has followed the definition listed above. Its primary focus has been the division of politicians and partisan voters and the impact of political sorting. Although this form of polarization is still relevant to this discussion and modern political environments, in the past couple of decades, there has been a rise in animosity between members of political parties outside of just ideology and policy. This phenomenon has been called affective polarization (Iyengar et al., “The Origins”). Unlike traditional polarization, based on ideological or policy differences, affective polarization refers to individuals' emotional reactions toward members of opposing political parties. This emotional animosity that has developed around American politics has resulted in a form of grouping and othering, where members of their own in-group dislike and “other” members of the out-group. This type of polarization has been the primary concern for scholars trying to understand the political environment of the United States. While traditional polarization has become a long-standing feature of the party system in democratic governments, affective polarization has the potential to create harmful consequences for socio-political behavior and public opinion.

The steady rise of affective polarization has meant the rise in behavioral extremity and the shift of social norms concerning how people of differing opinions and identities communicate with one another. Contemporary arguments over social and political divides have existed for decades within this country, however, hostility towards different political opponents has never been so acceptably hostile (Iyengar et al., “The Origins”). Political party leaders have increasingly pushed harsh and hateful campaigns against their opposition. In the modern political

environment, political leaders have deemed it necessary to fuel their own campaigns with content criticizing the opposition rather than bolstering their own party or policies. This trend has given rise to extremist labels associated with heavy leaning partisans like “Nazis” and “Communists.” These political leaders who create and endorse this form of political extremism have become their in-group's prototypical members, leading other members within the group to adopt these behaviors to continue feeling the same sense of belonging within their community (Hogg). Thus, a trend of creating negative narratives about the out-group to build in-group solidarity further divides the groups and encourages hostility.

Affective polarization has also had a dramatic effect on the social behaviors of people with political associations, resulting in a form of social distancing. This definition of social distancing looks at the social communities of people and the ways that they choose to distance or separate themselves from people with different political views and attitudes. According to Iyengar et al., “longitudinal survey data have shown that people self-report that they are less comfortable with social relationships without partisans” (“Affect, Not Ideology”). The same study showed that affective polarization has affected familial and marital relationships, with an increasing number of people less inclined to marry someone of an opposing political party, and parents increasingly stating that they would be unhappy if their child married someone of an opposing party. This trend has even brought about online forums catered towards certain political ideologies. In 2022, the dating app “The Right Stuff” was released on app stores and promised a space for conservative singles to find like-minded individuals, further separating people of various political beliefs and discouraging cross-party interaction (Portolan). The formation of platonic friendships and friend groups has also seen changing trends associated with partisanship. A study published in 2017 by *The Journal of Politics* found that “discordant

partisanship decreases people's likelihood of being friends with someone even if they do not want a romantic relationship” (Huber and Malhotra).

Even with efforts from particular groups to separate themselves socially from political out-groups, there has typically been a forced proximity aspect of socialization within cities, towns, and communities. However, Republicans and Democrats have increasingly begun to separate regionally. Most scholars agree that this trend is not entirely based on political affiliation but rather on other aspects of a person's identity, which often link with political parties and where they choose to live. A 2017 report from the Pew Research Center found that “most Republicans (65%) say they would rather live in a community where houses are larger and farther apart... [and] a majority of Democrats (61%) prefer smaller houses within walking distance of schools and shopping” (“The Partisan Divide”). These trends have all shown that polarization is no longer just a divide between political lines, but has spilled over into behavioral norms and social relationships.

Even politically, affective polarization has increased political participation, employing hate and resentment as a call to action. According to Iyengar et al., “prior to the era of polarization, ingroup favoritism... was the driving force behind political participation. More recently, however, it is hostility toward the out-party that makes people more inclined to participate” (“The Strengthening”). Participation driven by affective polarization, negative emotions, and animosity has created the political parties we know today: groups that name-call, misinform, and peddle hate for the out-group to bolster their own image.

The Role of Media

Media has always had a role and presence in shaping public opinion. Historically, media has also had a role in the political environment within the United States, however, the modern media landscape made a dramatic shift with the introduction of the internet and social media, shifting political communication with it. For most of the twentieth century, in addition to partisan news sources, news media provided non-partisan sources, aiming to cater to as many Americans as possible, on both sides of the spectrum. Additionally, with a select few national newspapers and TV news channels reporting events and advertising campaigns, political news and advertising could only reach so far (Klein 142). Communities relied on local newspapers and social interaction within their communities to educate and express their opinions, meaning that people were exposed to varying partisan views and were also able to see people as neighbors and friends above any political affiliation. The twenty-first century and the introduction of cable television and the internet dramatically altered this reality.

Now, more than ever before, we have countless ways to access news. There are hundreds of outlets just in the United States that source and provide news to Americans, and each of these news sources retains some level of bias that affects the manner in which they present stories. This phenomenon, when there are so many media choices available, including news channels, newspapers, radio shows/podcasts, and social media, is called fragmentation. The vastness of media sources provides individuals with a wide variety of options, but the bias and differences of news sources often present fragmented information (Borah et al. 417). As media fragmentation has become more substantial among popular and contemporary news outlets, people have become more ideologically polarized, flocking to certain partisan news outlets and outwardly

distrusting others. This phenomenon has created a link between the news media and the polarized state of our nation.

Part of understanding why people are inclined to trust and rely on certain news outlets and not others is understanding the motivational goals associated with what people want to get from their research experience. Borah et al. describe two primary motivations: accuracy and directional goals. According to Borah et al., “when pursuing an accuracy goal, people are motivated to find and use information in order to arrive at accurate conclusions. When having a directional (e.g., partisanship) goal, individuals are motivated to select and process information that is aligned with their preexisting attitudes and political views” (418). We find more frequently that Americans, particularly those who are not as invested in politics as a topic of research, have directional goals when seeking and selecting news sources. This motivational goal often results in trust being designated to biased news sources. Fragmentation and directional motivation are both signals of how the media contributes to ideological and affective polarization, however, it also has a role in creating polarization through the formation of partisan issues.

In the past few election cycles, the American people have seen the ways in which traditionally nonpartisan issues have become partisan, particularly in relation to health services. The topic of vaccinations in general has become widely split between Republicans and Democrats, with many conservative Republican leaders expressing concerns with vaccinations, and liberal Democrats advocating for as many people as possible to be vaccinated. 2020, and the COVID-19 pandemic saw a spike in this behavior, with the politicization of how to handle and control the virus. A 2021 study found that “in the context of the recent COVID-19 pandemic, Stroebe et al. used panel survey data from the U.S. to show that political orientation was a

predictor of risk perceptions and health-protective behaviors over time” (Borah et al. 418).

Additionally, a study published in 2024 by Borah et al. found that a symptom of the US having among the highest number of confirmed COVID-19 cases and deaths was the highly politicized turn that the pandemic took in the US (417). News sources and politicians alike began to make the pandemic and suggested health measures a source of contention between parties, creating a news atmosphere where liberal news sources heavily endorsed measures suggested by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and conservative sources created pushback against these measures (Borah et al. 418). This politicization of the pandemic resulted in widespread misinformation and the exacerbation of a national health crisis. This example provides insight into some of the consequences of media fragmentation and directional motivation. The established trust between a media source that says what certain people want to hear and a viewer who enjoys what they are hearing gives power to misinformation and people seeking to deepen America’s partisan divide for their own interests.

This scenario also provides insight into confirmation bias and the ways in which people seek out news that meets their preconceived notions. People adhering to their system of beliefs and ignoring dissenting information has become easier than ever before with the rise of the internet and online media providing a source for nearly every preexisting opinion and belief system (Del Vicario et al. 1). Directional motivation and confirmation bias have reached new heights in the modern era, and one primary cited rationale for people only seeking and trusting information that is consistent with views and beliefs that they already held, is to avoid cognitive dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is what occurs when an individual feels discomfort or is made uneasy by being exposed to information that contradicts their predispositions. To minimize or avoid this negative feeling, many seek out, consume, and trust news that supports their

predispositions (Borah et al. 418). These systems are also made more extreme through the theory of echo chambers. When we encapsulate ourselves in a world where all of our information and news is echoing back at us our own opinions and beliefs, and telling us how correct they are, our own beliefs begin to grow more and more extreme (Klein 159). The connection of the internet also allows people to invite others into their echo chambers. According to Del Vicario et al., “the wide availability of content on the web fosters the aggregation of like-minded people where the discussion tends to enforce group polarization” (1). Groups of people collectively form over shared biases, and news media sources confirm those biases, which has resulted in the extremity of political polarization in the US.

These theories and understandings of media’s influence on political polarization bring us back to the concept of affective polarization and the creation of in-groups and othering. Modern news media’s colossal influence on sorting and grouping has led to a political environment where in-groups and out-groups have reached new heights, collectively forming over the following of certain media sources and online personalities. As people have become increasingly polarized and have begun separating their social and regional lives away from their political “others,” they have been unwilling and unable to engage with varying opinions. This is exacerbated by online content, from internet searches to social media, using algorithms and preferences to provide content that aligns with what users already enjoy. Additionally, the role of prototypical group members or quintessential examples of a group member has taken on leading roles within the media, altering the perceptions of the in-group and out-group of what the group believes in and represents. According to Kubin and Sikorski, “given that people are unwilling to engage in day-to-day interactions with their political adversaries, many build their impressions of opponents via the media – meaning media is increasingly shaping how we perceive the political

environment” (188). The rise of these political leaders as prototypical group members has led to a perception gap within parties.

In 2019, a report from *More in Common*, a non-profit research organization, analyzed political polarization in the United States and how members of the two major parties perceived each other. It looked at the concept of the “perception gap” and the extent to which Republicans and Democrats think they disagree compared to the amount they actually disagree (Yudkin et al. 6). The study found that “Democrats and Republicans overestimate the proportion of their opponents who hold extreme views by a factor of almost 2. While on average, they believe that 55 percent of their opponents hold extreme views, in reality, only about 30 percent are” (Yudkin et al. 14). This gap in perception is evidence of the lack of cross-party socialization. The study also analyzed potential causes for this gap, including particular media consumption. It found that “while consumption of media sources that are in line with one’s partisan identity is correlated with a larger Perception Gap, consumption of media across ideological boundaries appears to reduce it” (Yudkin et al. 31). These findings evidence the role of media in creating ideological borders between party members and also the role of only subscribing to single-sided sources versus consuming a variety of ideologically varied sources. The unwillingness of many people to cross that border and consume a variety of opinions online broadens the perception gap and, in turn, contributes to polarization.

We often like to think of choice as a good thing. When there are more opinions available, particularly news sources, people should be more likely to see a variety of sides and have the ability to make a more educated stance on the issues at hand. However, the provided review shows the many ways that media has become one of the leading causes of political polarization, both ideological and affective in the US.

21st Century Polarization

A key aspect of twenty-first century political polarization is the cultural shift of political leadership and the ascension of certain individuals into power. In the past two and a half decades, the internet has given power to every user to make content and post their opinions for a wide audience to see. In many ways, it has given a voice to the powerless and prompted diverse discussions that would have otherwise not been promoted by political elites and traditional news media. However, it has also created a space where specific individuals take up more ideological space than others.

The spiral of silence theory can help explain the string of events that lead to the disconnect between the average person and the voices that control political narratives. The spiral of silence theory is centered around the ebb and flow of public opinion around a particular controversy and the ways in which people align themselves based on their perception of the “norm” (Hayes & Matthes). It explains that most people within a group want to avoid being on the “wrong side” of debates, so they regularly monitor what other people are thinking in regard to controversial issues so that they can align their own public persona around those opinions. Monitoring and observation have taken shape in the twenty-first century in the media landscape. The mass media has become a primary informant for these controversial issues and has become responsible for creating climates of “public opinion” and shaping how comfortable people feel expressing their views (Hayes & Matthes). This theory, which has ultimately become defined by the effect of the media on the average person, has led to self-censorship and isolation. The failure of the media to accurately represent a wide range of views and opinions on issues has continued to distort what we understand as the “majority opinion” and, in turn, has resulted in a political environment where free and diverse expression suffers.

Given the new media and political landscape that has taken shape in the US in the twenty-first century, the way that political leaders choose to exert influence and control narratives has also taken on a new and extreme form. During Donald Trump's first campaign run and presidential term, his utilization of media changed the manner in which political elites communicated with the public and the things that they said to gain favor. At the time, Trump's use of the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, was unprecedented for a presidential candidate. Over the course of his campaign, Twitter had become a base for Trump to speak and connect with his audience directly and immediately, bypassing the traditional connection between political elites, the media, and viewers. Having a presidential candidate who was so successful with this shift of connecting to his audience broke the seal for other political leaders to see the value in uncensored media sharing. The sense of community and relatability that was built through Donald Trump sharing his every thought in real time on social media entirely changed the "norm" of political language and cleared the previous standards for what political leaders could and couldn't say. It showed what this new media landscape was capable of: giving a voice to the voiceless and promoting free speech, but also providing a platform for demagogues to control narratives. Stolee and Canton argue that "a medium like Twitter is a Janus-faced figure or a double-edged sword, at once promoting the likes of a demagogue as easily as it might a democrat, Caesar as easily as Cicero" (157). In the last several years, politicians, news personalities, podcasters, and social media influencers have taken control of extreme political narratives, and the standardization of their language has given rise to an environment where misinformation and affective polarization thrive.

This shift has also led to a rise of demagoguery in political discourse, which has further divided the American people and blurred the lines between political ideology and personal

existence. According to author of *Demagoguery and Democracy*, Patricia Roberts-Miller, “demagoguery is discourse that promises stability, certainty, and escape from the responsibilities of rhetoric by framing public policy in terms of the degree to which and the means by which (not whether) the out-group should be scapegoated for the current problems of the in-group” (Roberts-Miller 33). In a general sense, demagoguery is a kind of rhetoric that separates “us” and “them” and chops problems down to the fault of “them.” It is often a comfortably digestible answer to complicated and polarized issues and makes people feel like they are closer to their community as part of the “in-group” and superior to the “out-group” which is an active and evil threat the the “in-group.”

American political leaders have been using demagoguery for decades to garner support and trust through means of othering. Extremely successful campaigns have won due to demagogic language and the ease with which audiences consume the demagogic content that is fed to them. However, its use in the twenty-first century has been exacerbated by the media. The significance of the media in political discourse is undeniable, and in such a case, media outlets and political leaders alike have rushed to cater to consumer bases. The rise of partisan media bias and demagogic language is a reflection of the ways in which these groups are trying to sell entertainment and gain “cult-like” followings. Now, demagogic media produce content that presents news stories and events that are often altered or fabricated to meet certain expectations and hold onto loyal viewers. According to Roberts-Miller, “consumers of such media sincerely believe they already know what they think, and therefore don’t need to look at original sources, dissenting points of view, or any evidence they might try to present. (Roberts-Miller 91). By choosing media sources that capitalize on misinformation, viewers become victims of

confirmation bias and become susceptible to the normalization of demagogic language on a large scale from political leaders and within their own social echo chambers, in-person and online.

Although the twenty-first-century presence of affective polarization, bias, extremism, and demagoguery is most commonly noted in social media and cable news sources such as FOX News and MSNBC, traditional news media sources like newspapers are also susceptible to these changes and have an influential role in shaping public opinion. According to Kubin and Sikorski,

Most studies found that traditional media predicted increased affective polarization.

Reading a news article about an in-party scandal, having a highly diverse media environment alongside exposure to negative political ads, being exposed to like minded (vs. cross-cutting) news media, and incivility on news media from out-party sources, were associated with increased affective polarization (196).

Traditional news media, although seemingly less prevalent than it was twenty years ago, still act as a significant informant for news as a whole. Many news outlets rely on the reporting of traditional media sources like newspapers to provide their coverage of stories and events. This being the case, it is essential to provide additional literature on the role that traditional media plays in contributing to and shaping political polarization.

Method of Analysis

In the following analysis, I examine two distinct news sources and their coverage of the same events in a defined time frame. To comprehensively and rhetorically analyze these sources and the meanings and ideologies behind each story, this thesis will conduct a “Framing Analysis” as outlined by Jim A. Kuypers. In ““Framing Analysis" How to Conduct a Rhetorical Framing Study of the News,” Kuypers examines the role of framing in press news and the power that it holds in shaping public perceptions of events. He defines framing as “the process whereby communicators act—consciously or not—to construct a particular point of view that encourages the facts of a given situation to be viewed in a particular manner, with some facts made more or less noticeable (even ignored) than others” (Kuypers). This understanding of framing highlights the nature of frames to selectively emphasize and omit information, creating personalized narratives based on the narrow amount of information presented. Additionally, it highlights the role that aspects of framing, like tone, language, and information selection, play in shaping public perceptions of reality. Kuypers notes that framing is a normal part of the communication process, and filtering information before presenting it is a natural and everyday function of communicating. He connects this understanding of framing to the impact of rhetoric, particularly within the mainstream American press network (Kuypers).

This method of analysis explains that the news media have power in establishing the relevance of certain topics and issues. Therefore, it has the ability to control content, and in many instances, it tries to tell the public how to think about certain issues. It does so through the use of rhetorical framing, organizing the context through which the public views news (Kuypers). In the context of this thesis and analysis, framing will be analyzed as a means by which the two selected news articles create narratives and inform of partisan biases.

Text Selection

This study analyzes a total of six news articles from two prominent print news outlets, three from the conservative-leaning *Wall Street Journal* and three from the liberal leaning *New York Times*. These two outlets were selected to provide a comprehensive look at how partisan media frames events, and key choices in the coverage of events can signify bias, a potential cause and catalyst of political polarization. A primary identifier of the general leanings of these outlets is provided by the Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart. Ad Fontes is a public benefit corporation (for-profit) based out of Colorado that specializes in analyzing media sources and investigating their bias and reliability. The Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart rates US news sources on a political bias scale ranging from “Most Extreme Left” to “Most Extreme Right.” Ad Fontes provides ratings through a team of analysts who rate individual news stories and generate overall source ratings based on an average score. The Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart gave *The New York Times* a rating of -8.05, meaning most stories typically skew left (liberal). The chart gave *The Wall Street Journal* a rating of 4.5, meaning most stories from the source typically skew right (conservative).

Additionally, source bias can be identified through the way that opinionated political leaders have spoken in favor of or against these media outlets. On May 30th, 2020, while serving his first term, President Trump tweeted “Much more “disinformation” coming out of CNN, MSDNC, @nytimes and @washingtonpost, by far, than coming out of any foreign country, even combined. Fake News is the Enemy of the People!” (@realDonaldTrump). As a very conservative and right-leaning political leader, President Trump’s comments that express his animosity toward *The New York Times* can identify the source as non-conservative, leaning away from the right-wing ideologies that President Trump supports and campaigns for.

Although both sources have a perceivable overall political bias, this study will examine official news articles and opinion pieces, meaning that authorship will also play a prominent role in deciphering biased coverage of the selected event. The first source from *The Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) is titled “How Trump’s Assault on DEI Will Ripple Across Corporate America.” The article was published on January 24th, 2025, and was written by Lauren Webber. Since 2011, Webber has worked as a reporter for *The WSJ*, focusing on employment and workplace issues. Webber has also had freelance work appear in newspapers, including *The New York Times* and *The Los Angeles Times* (Weber). The first source from *The WSJ* is titled “Trump Blames DEI, Democrats for Deadly Plane Crash.” The article was published on January 30th, 2025, and was written by Tarini Parti and Alex Leary. Parti is a White House Reporter for *The WSJ*, with most of her articles centered on US politics and national security events (*The Wall Street Journal*). Leary is also a White House Reporter for *The WSJ*, previously working for the *Tampa Bay Times* and focusing his articles primarily on US politics, national security, and economics (“Alex Leary”). The final source from *The WSJ* is an opinion piece titled “Foreign Lessons in the Perils of DEI and Affirmative Action.” It was published on January 29th, 2025, and was written by Sadanand Dhume. Dhume is a columnist for *The WSJ*, focusing his bi-weekly column on Indian and South-Asian politics. Dhume is also a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, D.C. (“Sadanand Dhume”). These four authors each have education and experience within the field of journalism, and each brings a personal perspective and bias to their work for *The WSJ*, which will be further analyzed in the following analysis.

Two articles and one opinion piece from *The New York Times* (NYT) will also be analyzed as a comparative news outlet. The first news article from *The NYT* is titled “The War on D.E.I. Heats Up.” It was published on January 23rd, 2025, and was written by Andrew Ross

Sorkin, Ravi Mattu, Bernhard Warner, Sarah Kessler, Michael J. de la Merced, Lauren Hirsch, and Edmund Lee. This article's large group of contributors can help provide a more comprehensive look at the biases of *The NYT* as a whole. The second news article is titled "Trump Blames D.E.I. and Biden for Crash Under His Watch." It was published on January 30th, 2025, and was written by David E. Sanger. Sanger is a White House correspondent for *The NYT* who has worked with the publication for over four decades, and his stories focus on US politics and foreign policy (The New York Times). The final source from *The NYT* is an opinion piece titled "Trump's Plan to Crush the Academic Left." The article was published on January 23rd, 2025, and was written by Michelle Goldberg. Goldberg has worked as an opinion columnist for *The NYT* since 2017 and covers politics and culture from a left-leaning, feminist point of view ("Michelle Goldberg"). This range of articles and authors employed by *The NYT* will provide a comprehensive look at the articles that *The NYT* chooses to publish and the internal biases that may be present within the organization.

Each article was pulled from the two sources over a week-long period of coverage, occurring from January 23rd, 2025, to January 30th, 2025. The specific event covered in the articles is an overview of Trump's first week in office, and specifically his early initiatives to dismantle federal DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) programs. This event was chosen due to the high volume of stories and coverage that were published after Trump's announcement of the federal DEI rollbacks. Additionally, as a contentious subject, particularly in the modern US political landscape, its coverage can reveal partisan biases within reputable news platforms.

To provide further context to the event and the articles that cover it, the following will explain what DEI is and how the White House and President Trump framed it in the executive order. The concept of diversity, equity, and inclusion, or DEI, provides a framework for

understanding systems of oppression and opportunity within organizations, including aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, gender, cultural background, sexual orientation, and national origin (Comello et al., 561). Although DEI is a very broad framework that can apply to a multitude of places and scenarios, within organizations, it frequently shows up in hiring practices when organizations aim to hire employees from underrepresented groups, or through organizational initiatives to promote a more inclusive and comfortable space for all of its members.

On January 20th, 2021, President Biden signed Executive Order 13985, “Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government,” stating that “Federal Government should pursue a comprehensive approach to advancing equity for all, including people of color and others who have been historically underserved, marginalized, and adversely affected by persistent poverty and inequality” (Federal Register). On January 20th, 2025, President Trump released his order, “Ending Radical And Wasteful Government DEI Programs And Preferencing.” The order called for the “termination of all discriminatory programs, including illegal DEI and “diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility” (DEIA) mandates, policies, programs, preferences, and activities in the Federal Government” (The White House). This order quickly initiated a swarm of reports and articles from the media, including those provided in this article.

The Wall Street Journal: News Source #1

The first article from *The WSJ* to be analyzed is Lauren Webber’s “How Trump’s Assault on DEI Will Ripple Across Corporate America.” The first part of this analysis looks at the language used within the article and the word and phrase choices that indicate partisan bias. Parts

of the language within the article set a formal tone, engaging formally with the facts and statistics of the story. Sentences such as “In 2024, women held 29% of executive-level roles among major North American companies, according to the consulting firm McKinsey” and “In fiscal 2020, the last complete fiscal year during Trump’s first term, the agency investigated 83 complaints, compared with 63 in President Joe Biden’s final complete fiscal year in office,” (Webber) display facts within the story without any personal choices or opinionated language. However, more prominently, the article uses language that is intended to draw the reader’s attention. The title of the article includes the word “assault” in reference to Trump’s initiatives to get rid of DEI, and headers within the article are phrased as questions including “How much of the business world could Trump’s executive orders affect?” and “Why did companies create these programs in the first place?” The beginning of each section also answers these questions, including “A good chunk” and “No. For one thing.” These language and phrasing choices generate intimacy and informality between the reader and writer, which can generate stronger emotions and opinions among readers. The choice of the word “assault” and other phrases such as “A blitz of executive orders” and “The government uses its clout” are also significant in understanding how the author feels about Trump’s actions. Although the article doesn’t directly align with a partisan ideology, the author’s choice of words suggests that they find the President’s action very abrupt and that they are not a staunch supporter of the rollbacks. The article also concludes with a section on “Why did companies create these programs in the first place?”, stating statistics surrounding the disparity of women and minorities in executive leadership roles. Webber states, “Such data suggests employment barriers still exist for women and people of color, which also means companies might be missing out on talent.” The language and tone within this section also indicate potential support for the initiatives being rolled back.

In addition to language, the article's framing is a key distinction in how the event is presented to the reader. The article is centered on the topic of Trump's executive actions against DEI. However, it is labeled as a business article due to its focus on workplaces and the sectors of businesses and employment that it could affect. This framing is apparent throughout the article, including in the title and subtitle, containing language like "Corporate America" and "Executive orders aim to use the government's purse strings to reshape the diversity practices of companies it does business with" (Webber). Within the article itself, subheaders, statistics, and quotes revolve around the role that DEI has previously played within corporate America, and how new orders from the federal government will affect companies and employees. Webber also identifies government contractors as some of the first companies to be affected by the changes, citing language from the Trump administration where DEI initiatives are considered "illegal." The article also concludes with a statement referencing the murder of George Floyd and the effect that the Black Lives Matter movement has had on the pressure that companies have felt in the last four years to remove equal opportunity barriers (Webber). The inclusion of this social justice aspect within the story shifts the overall focus of the article from just business to a piece promoting social awareness of the history of DEI initiatives.

At a surface glance, this article is mainly unbiased, reporting the event with the inclusion of statistics and credible content related directly to the business focus of this story. However, with deeper inspection, the author expresses a bias through their selective language use and framing of the event. The bias generally leans away from the overall bias of *The WSJ*. Through the arguments and the topics chosen to be represented, the author does not seem to support President Trump's actions, which differs from traditional conservative media sources.

The Wall Street Journal: News Source #2

The second article that will be analyzed from *The WSJ* is Tarini Parti and Alex Leary's report titled "Trump Blames DEI, Democrats for Deadly Plane Crash." The language in this article differs from the previous one, as it focuses on a different subject within the larger event, and the authors speak substantially through quotes from key political figures related to the story. The report is centered around a deadly plane crash that occurred in January, just outside of Washington D.C., and Trump's comments surrounding the crash's possible relation to DEI hiring practices. The article includes nine direct quotes of President Trump's statements concerning the event, with additional language from Republican political leaders, including senators Ted Cruz and Thom Tillis, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, and Trump advisor Elon Musk. Quotes from President Trump include comments on the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) and former President Biden, stating that the former President was "actively recruiting workers who suffer severe intellectual disabilities and psychiatric problems and other mental and physical conditions under diversity and inclusion hiring initiatives" (Parti and Leary). Other quotes from the President include Trump expressing his feelings about the crash, stating that it was a "tragedy" and "a dark and excruciating night in our nation's capital," as well as further comments about the potential role of "incompetence" in the crash.

Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth were also quoted in the article, stating that US safety and leadership roles should be filled with the "best and brightest," criticizing the potential role that DEI has played in a lack of safety in the country. A post from Elon Musk's *X* account was also featured, stating, "Do you want to fly in an airplane where they prioritized DEI hiring over your safety? That is actually happening" (Parti and Leary). These quotes are significant to the overall tone of the article because, although the

authors themselves do not make any opinionated claims, by almost exclusively including opinionated claims from Republican political leaders and outspoken conservative ideologists like Elon Musk, the article leans on conservatively biased statements. The article does contain one quote from a Democrat, the former Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, however, the section is brief and does little to contribute to the overall conservative tone of the article.

The Wall Street Journal: News Source #3

The third and final article from *The WSJ* is an opinion piece by Sadanand Dhume, titled “Foreign Lessons in the Perils of DEI and Affirmative Action.” As an opinion piece, this article takes on a vastly different tone from that of the news articles previously analyzed. In the subtitle of the article, Dhume states, “The Trump administration saves the U.S. from going the way of India, South Africa, and Malaysia.” The use of the word “saves” aptly represents the opinions expressed throughout the article. This article is focused on President Trump’s early executive orders rolling back DEI initiatives, and how similar DEI and Affirmative Action initiatives in other parts of the world have negatively affected those countries. This article also utilized the word “assault” in reference to Trump's actions against DEI initiatives, taking on a similar tone to the first news article.

Additionally, the author makes his opinion known through other language choices. In the article’s fourth paragraph, Dhume states, “Mr. Trump deserves credit for helping America dodge a bullet.” This sentence signifies a bias in favor of President Trump. The author also expresses disdain for the affirmative action practices that have historically and presently occurred in other countries, including India, South Africa, and Malaysia. In the article's 6th paragraph it states “Instead of embracing the principle of colorblindness after the end of Apartheid in 1994, South

Africa erected an elaborate system of laws and regulations to benefit the black majority at the expense of the white minority” (Dhume). This sentence’s use of the word colorblindness and the phrase “the expense of the white minority” both create a narrative that DEI regulations are unjust, making it known to the reader that these legal and cultural actions should not have a place in America, for its own good. In his conclusion, the author argues that these countries’ DEI initiatives, in their various forms, have contributed to a “brain drain,” where these countries’ “most talented and driven people” have decided to leave to find better employment opportunities elsewhere. (Dhume). This overarching narrative creates a tone of fear and animosity against DEI initiatives in America, identifying to readers the potential threats of these initiatives. It also highlights President Trump as the solution to this threat, characterizing his efforts as “keeping with the American spirit” (Dhume).

It is also important to note that, as an opinion piece, this article gives the author more argumentative liberty in what they choose to write. These opinions and arguments are not necessarily indicative of *The WSJ* as a whole, which is something readers should know going into the article, as it is labeled “opinion.” However, the author of this article, Sadanand Dhume, writes a bi-weekly column that is published by *The WSJ*, meaning that his writing style, language, and arguments are valued by the outlet. This aspect of opinion articles can be indicative of themes and biases within the larger news organization.

The New York Times: News Source #1

Similar to the three analyses presented above for *The Wall Street Journal*, three articles from *The New York Times* will be dissected and analyzed for political or partisan bias. The first article from *The NYT* is by Andrew Ross Sorkin, Ravi Mattu, Bernhard Warner, Sarah Kessler,

Michael J. de la Merced, Lauren Hirsch, and Edmund Lee, and is titled “The War on D.E.I. Heats Up.” Out of all of the selected texts, this article has the most general focus on the overall event. This article provides a report of the recent events pertaining to President Trump and his attacks on DEI initiatives and policies, as well as how some individuals and companies have responded to these actions. The article asserts an opinion on the story early on, through the use of imagery. The first and only image presented after the subtitle is of a mural depicting a diverse group of working individuals. Above these individuals, the mural reads “People Are The Fabric Of Our Community.” Being placed at the forefront of this article, this image represents the opinion that diversity, equity, and inclusion are beneficial to workplace cultures and American communities. Additionally, the language in the following report seems to be consistent with this ideology. The article characterises President Trump’s actions as an “attack on DEI” and in reference to the speed at which President Trump began taking aim at DEI initiatives, the authors state that his actions have “set off alarm bells in boardrooms” (Sorkin et al.). They also go on to state that “Companies are worried.” The article also uses words like “vulnerable” when talking about programs that engage in and promote DEI practices within an organization. This language creates a narrative for the reader that most companies will suffer and be negatively impacted by these actions, while Trump continues to make these “attacks.”

The framework of this article is also selective in referencing examples related to the event. The fourth section of the article centers on the reactions of two companies, Costco and JPMorgan Chase. The article referenced these particular companies because of their stance on “standing firm on D.E.I.” despite pressure from the federal government to do otherwise. The article reports that Costco’s board had drafted up a “full-throated defense of D.E.I.,” and JPMorgan Chase CEO, when asked about potential challenges to the organization’s DEI

initiatives, stated, “Bring them on...we’re very proud of what we’ve done” (Sorkin et al.). By selectively choosing to include these case examples, the authors further center the narrative that standing firm on DEI is the correct thing for companies to be doing, and by doing so, are fighting against corrupt powers.

This article also has a significant connection to framing and public memory through its anecdotal language use and clear connections to historical atrocities. In the second section of this article titled “The latest in Trump’s attacks on D.E.I.,” the article states that federal workers are now at the risk of facing “adverse consequences if they don’t report colleagues who defy orders to purge their agencies of such efforts” (Sorkin et al.). The use of the words “defy orders” and “purge” invokes memories of militaristic control, authoritarianism, and ethnic cleansing. The memory of these concepts creates a deep sense of distress and anxiety for the reader, furthered by the additional report that “One employee said it felt like being recruited to the Gestapo” (Sorkin et al.). The rhetorical connection to Nazi Germany and dangerous over policing, contributes to the overall tone of this article. These elements form a clear ideological bias in favor of DEI initiatives and the companies that support them, and against Trump’s executive actions.

The New York Times: News Source #2

The second article from *The NYT* is by David E. Sanger and is titled “Trump Blames D.E.I. and Biden for Crash Under His Watch.” This article's focus is similar to the second *Wall Street Journal* article, centering on the fatal aircraft crash that occurred in January outside of Washington, D.C.. This article reports on the aircraft collision and Donald Trump’s immediate response, citing several quotes from the President and his team from inside the White House briefing room, and provides context for the claims made surrounding the event. Early on in this

article, the author makes a statement, suggestive of his own personal bias towards the event. The subtitle reads, “President Trump’s remarks, suggesting that diversity in hiring and other Biden administration policies somehow caused the disaster, reflected his instinct to immediately frame major events through his political or ideological lens” (Sanger). The structure of this sentence, particularly the word “somehow” and the claim that Trump instinctively makes claims to further his own political agenda, set a disapproving tone of Trump early on. The following content of the article chronologically reports on the statements that Donald Trump and his team made during his press conference at the White House. Each segment of reporting, although inclusive of direct statements and facts surrounding the event and the President's responses, is also ingrained with opinionated language. The article reports that Trump was indecisive about his claims and frequently jumped to blaming previous democratic administrations for promoting diversity within the FAA. Sanger states, “President Trump blamed diversity requirements at the Federal Aviation Administration and his two Democratic predecessors for the midair collision,” “Mr. Trump cited no evidence that diversity programs had anything to do with the fatal accident,” and “Moments later, he blamed the pilots of the Army helicopter” (Sanger). This reporting structure emphasizes Trump’s indecisiveness and focus on “his political or ideological lens, whether the facts fit or not” (Sanger).

The article also provides several instances of context to strengthen its arguments surrounding President Trump and his inclination to make claims supporting his political ideologies rather than fact-based evidence. Sanger chooses to reference Trump’s response to a terrorist attack in New Orleans on January 1st, blaming immigration, and his response to the wildfires in Southern California, blaming Democratic Governor Gavin Newsom. The article provides additional context to these events and makes arguments as to why Trump’s claims were

false. After including these events, the article reiterates its identification of a pattern in Trump's responses to crises as a demonstration of his political instincts and detachment from facts and empathy towards victims.

Additionally, the author provides responses from other involved parties, including the Organization of Black Aerospace Professionals, Democratic Senators, Disability rights groups, Disability Justice Initiative at the Center for American Progress, and the Congressional Black Caucus. Each of these groups had negative responses to Trump's claims, citing his use of ableism and racism, and the unreliability of his claims surrounding "lax" standards for air traffic controllers. The selective inclusion of these groups and their responses also indicates the author's personal and ideological bias against Trump, providing additional sources that support his opinions and arguments. These elements all contribute to the overall tone of the article and the centering of left-leaning arguments and claims.

The New York Times: News Source #3

The third and final source from *The New York Times* is an opinion piece by Michelle Goldberg titled "Trump's Plan to Crush the Academic Left." Similar to the opinion piece provided by *The WSJ*, this article is not just a news report but rather an overview of the event and reaction through the author's ideological lens. This article focuses on academic institutions in the United States and how Trump's actions concerning DEI initiatives and the influence of the right-wing strategist Chris Rufo could affect these institutions and their students going forward. This article also begins with opinionated language choices in using the word "crush" in the title. This word choice creates a narrative that Trump is using his power to forcibly damage his left-wing opponents.

The article continues by introducing Chris Rufo and his outlined strategies to punish Ivy League institutions for discrimination against white, Jewish, and Asian students and faculty members. It also references institutions in Florida that have changed aspects of course content and introduced new courses like “The ‘Woke’ Movement.” The majority of the first half of this article is a report on the groundwork that has been laid for Trump’s second term, and how many of these concepts are coming to fruition early on in his presidency. It reports that Trump’s early executive orders have set investigations on private institutions, including Ivy League academic institutions, for “illegal” DEI practices, as well as established a foundation for eventually deporting foreign students who have engaged in anti-Israel activism (Goldberg). This report is followed up by Goldberg's argument that these actions are part of a campaign to “crush the academic left.”

The author claims that the actions of the Trump administration, regarding investigations of private universities, are “ominous” and an assertion of “political control over American higher education” (Goldberg). These language choices also identify bias from the author through the way that they assert a clear stance against the Trump administration and what they are currently doing to academic institutions. It is also important to note that the use of the term “academic left” is used in this article as an identifying factor, leaning more towards a positive perception of the group, simply as highly educated students and faculty. In other, more right-wing contexts, this term may be used as an insult, highlighting the educated left’s elitism over working-class Americans. The left-leaning use of this term contributes additional context to the bias of this article.

Similar to the other articles analyzed in this section, this article utilizes outside resources to support its argument and provide additional context to the event. This article cites Will

Creeley, the legal director of the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, who states, “I think you’ll see professors investigated and terminated. I think you’re going to see students punished, and I think you’re going to see a pre-emptive action on those fronts.” (Goldberg). The inclusion of this individual from an organization that works to protect First Amendment freedoms, as well as his prediction that bad things will happen to professors and students at American institutions, adds to the narrative that academic institutions are at risk, and people should be fearful of what this administration might do to beloved institutions of higher education.

Comparative Analysis

Media coverage of Donald Trump and his second term has become a topic of contention among partisan media outlets, and the events surrounding his administration have led to an influx of polarized reports. The coverage of Trump's actions against diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives is no different, prompting outlets and reporters to integrate their own ideological bias into their news articles. The conservative-leaning *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ) and the liberal-leaning *New York Times* (NYT) offer contrasting perspectives on the events that took place in Trump's first week in office in 2025, specifically those related to his actions against DEI initiatives. A comprehensive analysis of six articles' language, tone, rhetorical framing, imagery, and key themes revealed both outlets' ideological biases and rhetorical strategies.

Key similarities and differences between the two print news outlets are revealed through each article's use of language, tone, and framing. As a whole, the analysis of *The WSJ* revealed that the outlet utilized a significant amount of formal language and quotes to create narratives surrounding the topic. At face value, the two news articles, excluding the opinion piece, maintain a tone of neutrality throughout the texts, with Lauren Webber's article centering around facts and statistics, and Tarini Parti and Alex Leary's article citing a variety of quotes from political leaders. However, after a deeper inspection, the use of specific language in the first article, including "assault," "blitz," and "clout," introduces the author's emotional charge regarding the topic, and in fact, suggests a subtle opinion opposing DEI rollbacks. The second *WSJ* article's choice to inform the narrative of the event almost entirely through conservative voices and quotes suggests a bias that favors these leaders and DEI rollbacks. This framework, although most excessively used in the "Trump Blames DEI, Democrats for Deadly Plane Crash" article, is

also utilized in the other five articles to provide specific context and support the author's arguments. Quotations are also used in all six articles to add depth and reliability to the report.

Comparatively, *The NYT* also utilizes language to inform bias, however, the first two news articles analyzed from *The NYT* employ more direct language to convey opinion. The authors of “The War on D.E.I. Heats Up” use the word “attack” to set a confrontational tone, and their choice of imagery and the language within it shows support for diverse working communities. Similarly, Sanger’s article repeatedly uses language to critique Trump’s reaction to a plane crash and his history of responding to other crises, taking the side of other left-leaning sources and organizations. The language within the first two *Wall Street Journal* articles and the first two *New York Times* articles is similar in their reporting of facts and inclusion of quotes to provide context, and differs in the language used surrounding Trump and his administration’s actions. Additionally, the language used by each outlet's opinion piece includes more prominent differences that shape narratives and identify bias. Dhume’s opinion piece on the dangers of Affirmative action and its adverse effects in foreign countries uses language that clearly favors Trump, arguing that the reader should be grateful for President Trump’s actions against DEI and affirmative action. Golberg's opinion piece for *The NYT* comparatively uses language siding with the academic left to create a tone that is disapproving of right-wing politicians. The narrative that *The WSJ* creates is centered around policy and business interests, also linking to conservative business mindsets. While *The NYT* creates a liberal narrative more directly against the current administration's actions, creating a sense of fear and crisis for the reader.

Both publications also utilize rhetorical techniques that contribute to the partisan narratives that they create. *The WSJ*'s coverage is memorialized in the context of corporate America and how certain histories are relevant in a modern context. As an outlier to the other

two *WSJ* articles, Webber's article "How Trump's Assault on DEI Will Ripple Across Corporate America" invokes memories of the murder of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement to contextualize the current cultural and political climate in the US. By invoking this memory and using it as a foundation for current DEI initiatives and practices, Webber creates a subtle narrative resisting Trump's actions. Dhume's piece also utilizes rhetoric, however, its use invokes fear of the negative consequences of DEI by providing foreign histories of its use.

While *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* both report on similar events and themes regarding President Trump and his actions against DEI in his first week of presidency, their ideological leanings and rhetorical strategies differ. The analysis of three case articles found that The *WSJ* has a combination of conservative and liberal stances, although it primarily covers the influences of politics on business. A majority of the coverage from the articles focuses on the potential dangers of DEI policies and amplifies right-wing voices. The analysis of three *NYT* articles found that a majority of the coverage framed DEI as a progressive and vital aspect of American workplace and academic cultures. Each article also highlighted the negative implications of President Trump's actions, amplifying a wide range of left-leaning and liberal perspectives to aid in their critique. These varied uses of language, tone, rhetorical framing, imagery, and key themes reflect subtle biases in each outlet.

Conclusion

Political polarization has become an essential aspect in understanding the modern political culture of the United States, and the role of media has ingrained itself as a significant contributor to this issue. Existing literature has provided evidence supporting the claim that political polarization has seen a dramatic increase in partisan divides in the twenty-first century. The shift in US politics from policy-based to identity-based has led to a rise in affective polarization, creating a political culture where negative emotions towards political others foster animosity and extremism within political parties. These historical trends have shown to deepen the partisan divide, and create a more polarized society. A key contributor to the rise in identity politics and affective polarization is the modern media landscape. The rise of the internet and social media has intensified political polarization in the US by fragmenting news sources, leading people to seek information that aligns with their beliefs, exacerbating confirmation bias. This has politicized issues like public health, deepened ideological divides, and created online echo chambers. Finally, a review of existing literature has revealed that twenty-first century modes of communication have reshaped political discourse and allowed extreme voices to gain prominence and dominate political conversations. Political leaders like Donald Trump have utilized social media outlets like *X* (formerly known as *Twitter*) to bypass the restrictions of traditional media, creating a more direct relationship to audiences and voters. This shift has amplified and normalized demagoguery, creating spaces where harmful rhetoric and misinformation thrive.

To further understand these phenomena and contextualize the issue, this thesis examined the role of media in shaping political polarization in the United States, with a central focus on President Donald Trump's actions to dismantle DEI initiatives and practices in his first week in

office in 2025. Through the analysis of two prominent print news outlets, the conservative-leaning *Wall Street Journal* and the liberal-leaning *New York Times*, it is evident that the outlets report on the same political events, but both employ different ideological biases and rhetorical strategies. The comparative analysis of these outlets highlights key differences in language, rhetorical framing, imagery, and key themes. These distinct aspects create a difference in narratives and public perception, an aspect of modern media that likely contributes to the increase of political polarization in the US.

In the context of the twenty-first century political culture in America, this analysis also poses the question, “When highly contentious events happen, including harmful actions of political figures, how do journalists report on these events without including bias?” This study's literature review and analysis have proven that complete neutrality in news reporting is not plausible within our news media landscape. However, the attempt of journalists and news outlets to try and report without bias is still a significant solution to reducing political polarization and not promoting misinformation. The content within this analysis provides evidence to argue that, although bias is an inevitable part of news reporting, especially in the context of contentious events, the language and framing choices made by journalists are significant to reporting an event that does not push the viewer to take one side or the other. Through the use of non-opinionated language and a wide range of contextual information, including references and anecdotes relevant to both major political ideologies, news articles have a greater chance of promoting a well-informed audience and less of a chance of promoting misinformation and bias.

Ultimately, this thesis outlines the need for greater awareness of media bias and its potential to exacerbate political divides. As political and media landscapes continue to evolve, with an increasing reliance on the internet and digital platforms, it is essential for both news

organizations, journalists, and consumers to critically engage with the information that they are being presented with to minimize confirmation bias and affective polarization. Addressing the role of media in political polarization helps identify pathways to fostering a more informed and less divided political community within the United States.

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