

Economic Implications of Media Bias

Introduction

As political polarization in America has caused national tension and ideological separation, the people of the nation have taken social and political issues and associated them with one of two political parties -- a separation that has led to a divided government and a divided society. A divided society and government leads to ineffectiveness in congress and ultimately hinders the progression of the nation as a whole. As data trends show that congress is accomplishing less each year, the public opinion and trust in this system declines as well.¹ Ultimately, the question must be asked how media bias impacts effectiveness of the political system in the United States. To tackle this question, a myriad of perspectives must be used in order to fully grasp the entirety of this vast subject matter. This research will examine the implications of both economic influence of media bias, and how media bias impacts the national economy as a whole. Economic contributions from PACs and political parties show that bias in media is fueled by monetary means.

Analysis & Evaluation

Before analyzing whether or not bipartisanship affects the effectiveness of government, it must first be asked whether or not media actually does impact the divide that the nation is experiencing. To tackle this extremely demanding question, research should include why media is slanted toward certain parties, and how this political slant impacts the ideologies of citizens who are exposed to this media.

According to Han Soo Lee, PhD., who is a Political Science professor at Texas A&M University, conditions that exist in the nation facilitate the bias found in media.² Conditions such as economic inflation and unemployment can influence the type of information that media chooses to both report on and add opinion to. He reports that generally the media responds negatively to government spending. Opposition to government spending tends to be a conservative attribute due to the desire to conserve funds in the Republican Party. Depending on poor social and economic conditions, the number of liberal and conservative reports increases. This portrayal of partisan media therefore influences the nation based on the present conditions that exist in the nation at the time.

Considering that pre-existing conditions play a large role in public opinion, therefore media, it can be inferred that those who are in different stratifications of society have different opinions. This is very important when examining media partisanship because members of their respective parties are likely to vote in favor of that party. According to a conference held by Raymond Williams, an associate at the University of Maryland, the claim that income inequality "has little

¹ Ezra Klein. "14 reasons why this is the worst Congress ever." *Washington Post* (July 2012)

² Han Soo Lee. "Do National Economic and Political Conditions Affect Ideological Media Slant?." *Political Communication* 30, no. 3 (July 2013): 395-418

tie to government" is completely invalid.³ Williams counters this argument by stating research he found which relates political parties in power to the income inequality in the United States. According to his research, "under Unified Democratic government lower income Americans benefit the most. Under Divided Republican government, upper-income Americans benefit the most, although in a negative direction." These findings suggest that lower income citizens are more likely to support a democratic candidate, or the Democratic Party in general, while to the same effect, higher income individuals are likely to vote Republican. This information supports the notion that pre-existing conditions (e.g. socioeconomic status) largely impacts the way the public perceives politics.

One book, *US Politics and the Global Economy: Corporate power, conservative shift* by Ronald W. Cox and Daniel Skidmore-Hes, suggests that since the Republican Party tends to support the wealthy citizens and large corporations, the emergence of the United States in the global economy has caused a conservative shift in the United States. According to one review, the book associates different political priorities to their different economic interests -- Republicanism to capitalistic interests, and Democratism to public interest and welfare.⁴ The book states that New Deal era liberalism has faded with the resurgence of the United States economy and industry. The term used to describe this type of economic situation is known as "political economy", which takes two technically unrelated things, economy and politics, and suggests that the two are actually codependent. In Adam Smith's pure "laissez-faire" economy - which is the basis of capitalism - politics and economy stay completely autonomous entities. Since the beginning of American government intervention in economy, which became a clear necessity after the Great Depression, so-called American capitalism has not been purely capitalistic. The connection of economy and politics has fueled an urge for members of American society to associate with the political party that best serves their interests.

After analyzing the cause of economic factors in partisanship, the next logical step is to examine the economy as a whole, and contributing members of that economy juxtaposed with their party affiliation. Gerber and Huber (Yale University) conducted research based on party members' opinions of the economy while their party affiliations were in office.⁵ They found that partisans rate the economy more favorably when their political party held office. The cause of this opinion is contributed to a myriad of factors ranging from selective perception to selective exposure to information and media. Selectivism among partisans ultimately leads to the limitation of media sources to those reporting in favor of the partisans' views. The encouragement from partisans for media sources to report in favor of political opinions leads to skewed data and misinformation

³ Raymond Williams. "Income Inequality and Party Government." *Conference Papers -- Southern Political Science Association* (January 2013): 1-26.

⁴ Douglas Jaenicke "US POLITICS AND THE GLOBAL ECONOMY (Book Review)." *Political Studies* 48, no. 1 (March 2000): 168.

⁵ Alan S. Gerber, and Gregory A. Huber. "Partisanship, Political Control, and Economic Assessments." *American Journal of Political Science* 54 no. 1 (January 2010); 153-173.

regarding politics and economics. Regarding media in America, an article by Reece Peck argues that Fox News, in an attempt to moralize producerism in the US during the Great Recession, actually revolutionized the way the wealthy and business class is portrayed in the media.⁶ He argues that instead of the historical negative portrayal of big business, Fox presented the wealthy as "job creators," therefore increasing positive perception of big business. This, in turn, changed public perception as a whole.

The rise of a political party's power in government makes for a large amount of changes. James Fowler suggests that the victory of a political party is not nearly as important as the margin of victory by which the party wins -- especially when it comes to economic implications regarding these politics.⁷ Fowler suggests that when a party is predicted to win an election (via primary elections, etc.), then the public support for that party increases. **When the support for the party increases, it becomes a "self-fulfilling prophecy" of sorts.** Economic control of the party then comes into fruition when the victorious political party obtains control.

Synthesis & Argument

After analyzing a multitude of sources that examine the economic implications of media bias, one must consider how all of these separate articles relate back to the main argument -- how media bias impacts the economics of the United States. While news sources such as Fox and CNBC tend to contribute information with a political lens, the information portrayed by sources can impact the perception of the public. The ultimate effect of this selective perception is a public that divides itself among party lines. Since media has become extremely capitalistic, the public receives information they demand. After this research it becomes evident that economic factors play a large role in the facilitation of bias in the media. Members of political parties, who fund news sources, expect to see reports and shows that please their interests. The information that comes from these sources is shown to impact the way citizens vote, therefore how citizens control economic decisions and actions. As stated in Peck's article, Fox News Network revolutionized public perception of big business and the perception on its role in the national economy. This suggests that media does have the power to make political and economic changes. Some sources claim that politics has very little impact on the economy.⁸ According to an article in *Political Theology*, the presidency doesn't really matter because the economy depends more on the perception of the United States by the rest of the world -- something that the author argues is not important to the nation as a whole. According to the other sources however, politics and the nation's perception of politics is the defining factor in perception of the national economy.

⁶ Reece Peck "'You say rich, I say job creator': how Fox News framed the Great Recession through the moral discourse of producerism." *Media, Culture & Society* 36, no. 4 (May 2014): 526-535

⁷ James H. Fowler "Elections and Markets: The Effect of Partisanship, Policy Risk, and Electoral Margins on the Economy." *Journal Of Politics* 68, no. 1 (February 2006): 89-103.

⁸ Aruna Gnanadasan. "DOES A CHANGE IN PRESIDENCY OF THE US REALLY MATTER IN AN AGE OF ECONOMIC GLOBALIZATION?." *Political Theology* 8, no. 4 (October 2007): 399-415.

Conclusion

After analyzing media bias from an economic perspective, it becomes clear that there is a correlation between the fact-based reporting that media portrays, and the public's perception of these agenda-filled reports. Between the funding that news sources receive, and the economic impacts that the news affects, economy is one of the most influential aspects regarding media bias. Biased media has one positive impact though •• Gerber and Huber's research shows that when parties receive attention and favor from the public, they gain funding that is poured back into the American economy. Statistics reported by Fowler show that political parties come in phases. After Americans become dissatisfied with a political party in office, they tend to look at other options. Overall, economic influence is one of the largest contributing factors when it comes to politics and their appearance in media.

Reflection

Upon the announcement of my group members before the group task period officially began, my mind began to think of the multitude of options available for research. After a quick group poll of research themes, my group and I decided we would look into Communication. We had decided on the sub-theme of linguistics and the technological impact on literacy rates. This idea was fairly researchable, however did not leave much room for the variety of perspectives we wished to utilize. After lengthy periods of thought, we decided that we would examine Media Bias. This process was intriguing as we found a myriad of research options on EBSCOhost. After settling into the topic, we became extremely excited to begin research.

Our group decided, under the guidance of our instruction facilitator, that to fully articulate as many perspectives as possible, it would be best to each choose a lens and examine the lenses' implications regarding our topic to the fullest extent. The lenses we chose to approach the topic with were as follows: Political, Economic, Historical, Social, and Scientific. After taking one of these lenses each, we discovered the many implications of media bias. Overall, our group had trouble working together on this project because there were very few days where every group member was present at school. This became a huge problem, and the group members were talked to and the importance of attendance was discussed. We continued to make changes and revisions to our IRR's while we worked collaboratively on the WTR.

When beginning the WTR process, the first step was reading and fully comprehending the other group members' IRR's. The collaboration process became increasingly difficult as the group suffered absences a majority of in-class days. To overcome this, our group utilized the Google Docs application to edit and construct the Written Team Report remotely via internet connection. Overall, while the AP Capstone assignment at first appeared to be a daunting task, it turned out to be so much more challenging than we ever could have expected.

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