

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Bias in the media: a discourse analysis on CNN and Fox News The impact of news outlets on citizen's partisanship

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Lastly, this thesis is entirely the product of my own writing. The only assistance from AI tools (Zotero and ChatGPT) was used for the correct APA 7 style referencing for my bibliography and in-text citations.

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Introduction

This thesis will focus on the element of bias in two media outlets, CNN and Fox News, and more specifically the partisanship of news outlets and the impact it has on the audience. Given the historical background of these two media outlets, I believed it to be interesting to analyse the link between the media and the U.S bipartisan political system. That is why my thesis is divided into two parts: the first half lays out the theory to understand the background of CNN and Fox News, what bias means and entails and how the U.S political system works while the second puts these theoretical points into practice in the form of a discourse analysis on CNN and Fox News.

This thesis grew out of my desire to explore certain research questions: How does bias appear in the American media, a subject that intrigued me. Another important question that arose is: which media outlets and under which form ? I was familiar with CNN and Fox News, so the question of partisanship came easily as I'd known about the reputation of these politically divided news outlets. The last thing to do was to choose the format. This decision was purely practical. From a practical point of view, analysing online articles instead of transcripts from hours of TV footage would be an easier task, especially when finding the content. It would also allow me to narrow it down to one topic and facilitate my research; a topic that will be introduced in the chapter detailing my research question. Furthermore, written words seem to have more of an impact than spoken words. To support my point, I would like to share a quote by author Teresa Mummert: "Things spoken can be forgotten and forgiven, but the written word has the power to change the course of history, to alter our lives" ("Top 25 Quotes," n.d.). As this author expresses, written words are powerful and can have a certain influence on the reader. This is exactly what I will discover and prove in this thesis through the research questions I have alluded to above.

1 Research question

Now that the reasons justifying the topic of my thesis have been laid out, I would like to explain more in detail what I will cover in this research thesis and what I am trying to prove. As cited in my introduction, my thesis will focus on the fourth branch of government¹: the media, and more specifically its coverage on one topic that has been heavily discussed: abortion. According to the Pew Research Center, abortion was one of the most important topics in 2024 for voters (Pew Research Center, 2024). Another reason for opting for this topic is due to the fact that it is controversial and is easier to analyse from a linguistic perspective than other topics such as the economy. Such a controversial topic presents fewer difficulties as the language associated with it is often more straightforward and its bias or lack thereof is easier to detect. The coverage I have chosen to analyse will not concentrate on the presidential candidates' way of handling it in their political campaign but will rather be centred on two referendums: one in Arizona and the other in Florida, which were on the November ballot. I have chosen this route because my aim is to focus on the topic and not the candidate. I have also chosen Arizona and Florida because both states presented an almost identical referendum on abortion and were both put on the November ballot to amend already existing laws on abortion.

The next part of my thesis will explain my methodology and touch upon subjects like the history of two famous news outlets, CNN and Fox News and their relationship with the two main political parties in the US. No independent media outlet is included in my research because of the difficulty of finding a truly independent news source in the United States. One news source I contemplated adding was CNBC but I quickly realised its content was mainly to do with business and finance, which is not directly relevant to this study. Chapters 2.2 to 2.5 as well as chapter 5 will explain how bias portrays itself in the media and finally what impact this bias has on American citizens. After analysing these various topics, I will be able to give a nuanced answer to my two research questions: Are news outlets partisan? What impact do news outlets have on citizens' partisanship? I hypothesise that news outlets are all partisan and contain some kind of bias. This could be due to their historical background, the news anchors or journalists' own political affiliation or the relationship the news outlet to politics in general and to political parties in particular. In contrast, I suspect that the impact news media has on citizen's partisanship is more nuanced. It depends on the topics the coverage focuses on, how

¹ This topic will be handled in detail in another chapter.

readers perceive the content they are reading as well as the news outlets they choose to get their coverage from.

1.1 Methodology

My research questions were presented above as well as my hypothesis prior to conducting my research. The method used to answer these two questions and to conduct my analysis will be discussed below.

First, I will present my literature review on bias and provide an overview of the two news outlets I have selected, detailing their history as well as their political affiliation. This will precede a detailed explanation on how media outlets attract their audience. To dive deep into how and if the audience is influenced by news coverage, I will introduce the general technique of framing, to ease the reader into the topic and show them that **framing** can be used in different ways, namely in the media. Another chapter will also explain in detail the various techniques used in the media to express bias consciously or not. One of these techniques, which is **word choice**, will be the main focus of this analysis. By using this technique, upon which I have drawn up a word bank, I will be able to determine the bias in the articles I selected.

Then, I will go over the United States' federal system, particularly its separation of powers as well as how the state governments work and how ballots initiatives are made. This will help later on to dive deeper into the ballots I have chosen to seek my coverage on. This chapter will create parallels between the federal and state system as well as highlight the differences between referendums and initiatives.

Finally, my last chapter will focus on my analysis and will give me the necessary answers to respond to my two research questions. The first research question: are news outlets partisan?, which will be answered thanks to the word bank I mentioned before. I will first highlight every time a word from this word bank pops up in an article and will then explain the results I have found from this analysis. These statistics will be presented in the form of multiple tables, showing the frequency of these words as well as a timeline showing the times at which this coverage was published on each referendum. My second research question, which seeks to determine the impact the coverage has on citizen's partisanship, will be answered by way of a **survey**

containing snippets of each media outlet's coverage on the selected topic. The aim of this survey is to observe if partisanship is impacted when confronted with different reportings on the same topic written by media outlets known to be affiliated with each political party.

2 Literature review on media and bias

Now that the research questions have been clarified as well as the methodology used to answer them, I will proceed with the literature review on the media and its possible bias. As two news outlets will be subjected to a discourse analysis later on, I think it is important to present CNN and Fox News, their background and the political affiliation they have. This will be followed by a detailed explanation on each type of news media and justification on why CNN and Fox News, in particular, are so popular amongst audiences. My literature review will end with two chapters zooming into the content that the media puts out in general. This will contain a presentation of the technique of **framing** and various techniques the media uses to influence consumers as well as the word bank I will use in my discourse analysis.

2.1 CNN and Fox News: a history

2.1.1 CNN

CNN, which stands for Cable News Network (Encyclopedia.com, n.d., para. 1), was founded by Ted Turner in Atlanta and first went on the air on June 1, 1980 (Erickson, 2025, para. 2). It was considered the first news channel to broadcast 24h news coverage. CNN mainly grew as a network by offering its audience continuous news and especially news coverage on all types of news. Their mantra at the time was “Go live, stay with it and make it important” (Erickson, 2025, para. 2). Their concept was to highlight the news and not the anchor. Their system was based on a “news wheel” (Hughes, 2004, para. 6). Major news was repeated multiple times a day sometimes adding some new information. New stories were added to that cycle periodically and sometimes breaking news could appear and be the dominating story. Furthermore, to attract a worldwide audience, the network adopted a policy by banning words like “foreign” and “here at home” (Erickson, 2025, para. 2).

CNN also praises itself for having captured important moments in history like the Gulf War in 1991 and having been the first news channel to share the news of the attack on the World Trade Centre on September 11th, 2001 (CNN, 2020).. Some nicknamed CNN the “Crisis News Network” (Hughes, 2004, para. 6) for their live coverage of important and critical events, which allowed them to gain a wide audience when breaking news was covered.

In the 1990s, CNN faced some fierce competition with new networks such as Fox News and MNCB. These networks amongst others were observed to have adopted the same news cycle systems that CNN had pioneered. Their coverage of various topics such as politics and sports is also called the “CNN effect” (Hughes, 2004, para. 13), praised by many. CNN’s dedication to 24h live coverage can be testified by Ted Turner, CNN’s founder, saying right after the network’s launch in 1980 “We won’t be signing off until the world ends. We’ll be on, and we will *cover* the end of the world, *live*, and that will be our last event.... and when the end of the world comes, we’ll play ‘Nearer My God to Thee’ before we sign off” (Hughes, 2004, para. 14).

Although there is no trace of endorsement to the Democratic party, Chris Licht, the new CEO of CNN, decided in 2022 to change gears and adopt a “nuts-and-bolt” (Helmore, 2022) approach to journalism. This decision comes after an overt left-leaning shift as Donald Trump made his debut in American politics. This transition to more centred news coverage includes reducing the frequency of breaking news and preventing news anchors from talking openly about their political views (Helmore, 2022).

Despite their efforts, various studies such as the independent study conducted by AllSides consider CNN to be left or left leaning. This result is based on their analysis on online content available on their website. Through blind surveys, researchers were able to determine this political affiliation. According to results from previous surveys, this news source has seen a transition from centre to left leaning from 2016 to 2024 (AllSides, n.d.).

According to another study conducted by YouGov, CNN ranks second highest amongst 52 outlets selected in this study. 32% Of the Americans having participated in this survey, say they’ve used this news source in the last month (May 2024). Although it isn’t considered to be the most trustworthy news outlet by Americans (see appendix 1) and ranks very low in that department, its viewability rate is very high (Orth & Bialik, 2024). According to a CNN press

release published on April 2nd 2024, “CNN brought in strong audience numbers across television, streaming digital platforms in March and in Q1 2024, ranking in the top 5 of the most watched networks in all of cable for both time periods [...]” (CNN Press Room, 2024, para. 1).

2.1.2 Fox News

Fox News was founded in 1996 by Rupert Murdoch and was part of Fox Entertainment Group, the film and television division of 21st Century Fox. After trying and failing to acquire already established news channel CNN, Murdoch decided to create his own and appointed television producer and former Republican consultant Roger Ailes as CEO. Ailes’ political affiliation is what later began to be associated with the network’s success (Ray, 2025). According to Tim Dickinson from Rolling Stone, Ailes achieved a lot as a Republican fixer. " [He] repackaged Richard Nixon for television in 1968, papered over Ronald Reagan’s budding Alzheimer’s in 1984, shamelessly stoked racial fears to elect George HW Bush in 1988, and waged a secret campaign on behalf of Big Tobacco to derail health care reform in 1993" (Sommerlad, 2018, para. 9).. Fox News trademarked itself as “fair and balanced” (Ray, 2025, para. 3) and wanted to differentiate itself from other news sources holding a liberal bias. An important slogan which summed up the network was “We report. You decide” (Ray, 2025, para. 3). Its confrontational style brought on by the numerous news anchors the network holds is what characterises Fox News (Ray, 2025).

A more recent slogan “Real news. Real honest opinion” replaced “Fair and balanced” which characterises Fox News’ new approach and serves as an implicit provocation towards rival networks (Sommerlad, 2018, para. 3).

Although Fox News praised itself for being “fair and balanced”, the network created strong relationships with members of the Republican party and the conservative establishment. For example, it donated \$1 million to the Republican Governors Association in 2010 (Ray, 2025). Another more recent example of Fox News’ support to the GOP, lead them to face legal action. In 2023, Fox News supported and endorsed Donald Trump’s claims that the 2020 elections were stolen from him and that voter fraud had taken place. Dominion, the company responsible for counting the votes, sued Fox News for defamation (Matza, 2023).

Despite numerous sexual harassment allegations made against Roger Ailes, which forced him to step down as CEO, Fox News remains a very popular network because of Ailes’ vision

and more specifically the populist approach he brought, considered as “appealing directly to the conservative Everyman”(Sommerlad, 2018, para. 11). Although Roger Ailes isn't in charge of Fox News anymore, the Republican values he held are still evident as seen in the independent study conducted by AllSides in 2024. According to this study, Fox News is labelled as a right-winged news source and is associated with “traditional and conservative thoughts” (AllSides, n.d.). In spite of Fox News being one of the least trusted media outlets in the US according to YouGov, the news source ranked first at 34% as the news outlet that was the most used at the time the study was conducted (May 2024) (see appendix 1) which proves that the network hasn't lost its notoriety amongst audiences in all these years (Orth & Bialik, 2024).

2.2 How does a news source attract an audience?

In this chapter, we will explore how a news source attracts its audience and creates a loyal consumer base.

To understand news outlets, one must first divide them into types of news sources. We can identify five big categories: print media, broadcast media, online news websites, social media, alternative and niche news sources.

First, we should look at what these five types of news sources represent and include. **Print media** ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023), with its newspapers and magazines, has a long history amongst its readers and has always been considered a trusted news source. The type of audience attracted by this first category of news outlets includes readers searching for detailed analyses and a trustworthy news source. The second category of news sources we will be focusing on is **broadcast media** ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023), which includes TV and radio. It revolutionised the 20th century with its live reporting and fastness at sharing breaking news. This media outlet attracts a wider audience with a large demographic, varying from consumers looking for captivating content to those who look at the latest news on their way to work. Then, **online news** websites ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023), which have made their appearance later on, offer a large range of content, from articles to videos. Their target audience includes consumers passionate about technology and fast-paced news. On the contrary, **social media** ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023), with its popular platforms like Facebook, Instagram and X, adds to the easy access of latest news and allows users to share it amongst them. This type of news outlet particularly tailors to its audience's

preferences by showing them content that corresponds to their interests through an algorithm. Lastly, there are alternative and **niche news sources** ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023) that attract audiences that are passionate about specific topics like politics or business. That's why this type of media outlet usually attracts consumers looking for detailed coverage on a said topic.

Next, after exploring the different types of media outlets, understanding how the audience is segmented helps us see how each media caters to the needs of consumers and constructs the news. The audience is segmented based on three pillars: demographics, psychographics and behaviour.

Demographics, which include metrics like age, occupation, gender and income play a vital role in determining which audience the news outlet plans to target and how it will do that based on content. For example, if a media outlet targets a younger demographics, the content selection will tend towards pop culture and social matters ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023)).

In contrast, **psychographics** dive a bit deeper into the consumer's attitudes, beliefs and value. In order to have a major influence on an audience, a news outlet will spin the message according to this psychographics. To exemplify this, let's use a situation that relates to the outlets I have mentioned in previous chapters. If consumers have more traditional values and focus on issues that reflect their values, news outlets such as Fox News that align with conservative views will tailor their messages to this type of audience. This technique is called framing and will be explained with more detail below. What also plays into demographics and psychographics is the accessibility of the news outlet, whether it is free or not. Usually, free content attracts a wider audience, and paid content attracts a more specific and financially stable audience willing to the extra mile to get news ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023).

Finally, **behaviour** is based on consumer behaviour. Media outlets use data to track how much time users read an article or how many times a certain topic has been clicked on or search. With these results, news outlets adapt their format or content length accordingly. Another aspect that goes hand in hand with consumer behaviour is content format, which focuses on finding the best format for the reader, whether it be a more visually attractive headline or a detailed article ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023)

Lastly, other factors such as editorial stance, geographic coverage, language and cultural context, political affiliation, content format and accessibility help target and attract a specific audience. The **editorial stance** ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023) along with political

affiliation will help attract readers that share the same values by centring and selecting the appropriate content around these specific values. Consumers not only want to be thought of by including their values but by where they come from and more specifically where they live. That's why **geographic coverage** ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023) plays such an important role. This factor helps news outlets decide if they want to do more local coverage or tend to a national audience. Focusing on local issues or covering news which resonates with a wider audience creates a sense of belonging and shows the consumer that his needs are taken care of ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023). Unfortunately, local news outlets are suffering in the US and there are fewer and fewer today than ever before. This partly due to the pandemic and to private equity firms buying or shutting down news outlets, which has contributed to the fact that people now turn to social media to get their news (NPR, 2024).

In addition to geographic coverage, the **language and culture** also relates to local or national adaptation by tailoring the language, whether it be by adding expressions or by using more standard English, to the audience based on local or national/international news coverage. This linguistic adaptation doesn't include using terms that might appeal to certain values or others but rather focuses on the varieties of the English language ("Exploring the Diverse Audiences," 2023).

2.2.1 What makes CNN and Fox News so reputable?

First, from what we can gather from their historical background, these two news outlets began as being part of the broadcasting media category and then slowly transitioned to the online websites to make a blend of two types of media. If I base my conclusion off of the criteria of broadcasting media and online websites, it would mean that the mixture of the two results in attracting an audience that represents a broad demographic sample of Americans and that seeks at once different types of content, be it video or article, and captivating content; not specifically trustworthy like print media, but content that can be consumed at a fast pace.

Then, many factors, as seen above, influence an audience. The one I would like to focus on is political affiliation. The two news outlets' political affiliation helps them attract consumers and, in a way, creates their brand or reputation. Fox News and CNN especially, because they are political opposites and feed off of this reputation. For example, Fox news overtly shows support to the Republican party as seen in their endorsements. This support is reflected in the media. This can be observed in a study conducted by Pew Search Center in 2009, which shows

that 47% of the interviewees perceive Fox News as “mostly conservative” (Pew Research Center, 2009, para. 4). Because of this, readers and viewers aligned with these traditional values naturally feel attracted to news sources sharing their same opinion and feel supported by the content they consume. Of course, this content is tailored to their needs and is framed in a way that corresponds to their point of view. This doesn’t only apply to Fox News but to CNN as well. CNN, being a partisan of the Democratic party, attracts a more liberal audience and tries to adapt its content to be portrayed as more inclusive and open, as seen by the stance they took even in the earliest years of the network by banning words like “foreign” Erickson, 2025, para. 2) to present CNN as more open minded.

Because these two media outlets take such open political stances, it’s interesting to dig a bit further and discover which vocabulary they use and if this can make a difference in citizen’s partisanship. How are their opinions expressed? Does it have an impact? These questions will help further my research for this thesis and hopefully make more sense of consumer behaviour when it comes to the media during important periods such as the period leading up to November 2024.

2.3 Framing

Because we have already established that CNN and Fox News both hold a political affiliation and both attract audiences because of it, I want to understand how they tap into psychographics and how they showcase this political preference as well as how their content is expressed and selected because of it. That is why I would like to present the general technique of framing. One might think this only applies to the media, but it is not the case. Framing can take place in all types of contexts, from conversations between two people to political campaign speeches.

To understand what this technique actually entails, let’s have a look at its definition. Framing “involves the selective presentation of information to highlight specific aspects while downplaying others, thereby shaping audience perceptions and interpretations” (Song, 2024, p. 1). This concept doesn’t limit itself to a theoretical aspect but manages to heavily impact public opinion on topics such as immigration. “Lyengar and Kinder further illustrate that the way news is framed can prime specific considerations in audience decision-making, ultimately affecting how issues are perceived and discussed in public spheres” (Song, 2024, p. 3) . With the digital

era, framing has evolved and expanded thanks to social media. Research has shown that social media platforms like Twitter and Instagram enhance certain frames and downplay others, creating a perception of the world surrounding the political and social sphere. Studies have also shown that framing in this digital context triggers misinformation and polarises society. This could mean that the public doesn't trust the media anymore.

This can directly be tied to one of the types of framing, according to Kirk Hallahan. The framing of news or “how news stories are portrayed or framed by the media in an effort to explain complex or abstract ideas in familiar, culturally resonating terms “ (Hallahan, 1999, p. 221) plays a pivotal role in the media as journalists use it “[...]to construct social reality for audiences and thus give meaning to words and images” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 222), according to Tuchman's research.. Framing is also considered as another way of approaching topics like bias and objectivity. According to Hackett, “framing is not necessarily a conscious process on the part of journalists but is the result of their unconscious assumptions about the social world” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 222). As mentioned above, framing acts on different social issues such as immigration, abortion, climate change but also on political topics regarding news coverage and candidate political campaigns. Essentially, framing of news as well as other types of framing are based on ideology and how this set of values can be tested and perhaps changed by the shaping of reality (Hallahan, 1999).

Although multiple types of framing exist such as framing of news, framing of issues or framing of attributes, the one thing they all have in common is contextualization. Indeed, “framing puts information into a context and establishes frames of reference so people can evaluate information, comprehend meanings, and take action, if appropriate” (Hallahan, 1999, p. 224).

2.4 Bias in the media and ways to detect it

The previous chapter sought to indicate the different ways in which framing can be used by constructing a different perception of reality in different situations and contexts. Now, I would like to come back on the main type of framing mentioned before: framing of news, which could entail that news coverage is spun in favourable ways to the person writing, by putting certain frames into focus and bypassing or putting others to the side. In this chapter, we will see how that's possible by citing and analysing different techniques. Because framing is often used to

address bias, as mentioned before, it is important and crucial to understand the meaning of the word “bias” and what it implies before getting to the main topic of discussion. According to the Cambridge University Press (n.d.), the word “bias” implies the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing in an unfair way, because of allowing personal opinions to influence your judgment. The aim of my thesis is to identify if the media can be defined as partisan and biased in the way the coverage is written and if said “bias” has an impact on citizen’s partisanship. This goal can be achieved by identifying and understanding the different techniques used in the media.

Existing research has already presented some conclusions on the matter of bias. Journalism has long since given up on the fact that media and its content is completely objective and neutral. That’s why we speak of bias in the media and more importantly how to detect it. The main aspect of controversy for this topic is that of intentionality. Some say that journalists are intentionally biased, and others are convinced that bias can’t be avoided and is unconscious.

Readers and consumers are well aware of bias in the media and seek more and more unbiased or at the very least the least unbiased content they can find. Because of the fact that readers are supposedly aware of bias, I decided to analyse the content media puts out. To do this, I researched how one can recognise bias in the media. Although the opinions on this matter differ, we can find some common denominators to define bias in the media. This includes three factors. The first factor expresses the fact that journalists have the intention of influencing the public and leading them in a certain direction. The second factor implies that the bias is recurrent and appears in multiple media pieces. The last factor explains that bias is added to the article to create a memorable story for the public (Rodrigo-Ginès, Carillo-de-Albornoz, & Plaza, 2023).

Bias in the media also depends on the context. Three different types of contexts can be identified. First, we talk about coverage bias. It references the visibility of some stories in the media and their coverage rather than others. One tendency could be the one to focus on negative stories. The media does this to create conflict and attract a lot of attention. In coverage bias, different media outlets can cover the same event but focus on different aspects. For example, the Huffington Post would focus on electoral debates while CNN would emphasise how the government managed the pandemic (Rodrigo-Ginès, Carillo-de-Albornoz, & Plaza, 2023).

Then, we have the gatekeeping bias, which is also called the selection bias. It refers to how media outlets filter the information they want to share by selecting some stories or neglecting

others. This can be seen with media outlets that have different political affiliations and decide to report or not on LGBTQ issues (Rodrigo-Ginès, Carillo-de-Albornoz, & Plaza, 2023).

Lastly, the third type of context is named the statement bias. It explains how the media decides to talk about certain topics. This includes the use of language. Two techniques are identified withing this topic: labelling and the word choice (Rodrigo-Ginès, Carillo-de-Albornoz, & Plaza, 2023).

The technique of labelling is a type of statement, which includes certain words or sentences used to describe a person or a situation in order to influence their opinion. For example, talking about an “illegal immigrant” instead of an “undocumented worker” gives a negative connotation (Rodrigo-Ginès, Carillo-de-Albornoz, & Plaza, 2023).

On the other hand, the word choice technique resembles labelling but refers to words used to make an argument more persuasive and convincing. For example, using the word “abortion” rather than “choice” might generate an emotional reaction and influence the public in a certain direction (Rodrigo-Ginès, Carillo-de-Albornoz, & Plaza, 2023).

Another bias that is interesting to take into consideration is the subjective qualifying adjectives bias. It entails that when journalists use qualifying adjectives, they may push subjective bias, consciously to influence the public’s opinion, or unconsciously because of their own opinion and beliefs. These adjectives may sway the reader into a certain direction and change or influence their opinion/perspective. For example, if a journalist used the words “fiery” and “passionate” referring to how a politician conducted a speech, these two words might have different connotations and portray the public figure differently (Rodrigo-Ginès, Carillo-de-Albornoz, & Plaza, 2023).

Although these different techniques can bring out different aspects of bias in an analysis, this type of research is very complex and would need much more time and length of explanation than what this thesis allows me to do. That’s why I have decided to focus my work on labelling and word choice, for which I have drawn up a list containing words indicating some sort of bias related to ideology.

2.5 Lexicon

I wouldn't be able to analyse the coverage and put my theory to the test without a point of reference to fall back on. That is why I've drawn up a lexicon, a list of words coming from different sources I consulted, that show some sort of bias and bring a positive or negative connotation to the term depending on how it is used.

Abortion	
In favour of	Against
anti-choice	pro-choice
anti-abortion	pro-abortion
Birthing person / pregnant person	Woman
	Pro-life
Abortion ban	Abortion law
Abortion later in pregnancy/ abortion at weeks of gestation	Late term abortion
Medication abortion	Chemical abortion
Abortion procedure	Surgical abortion
Medication abortion	Abortion pill
Gestational age bans	Heartbeat bill
Embryonic cardiac activity/fetal cardiac activity	Fetal heartbeat
Dilation and evacuation ban	Dismemberment ban
Physician(s) who provide abortion/ provider/ doctor	Abortionist
Embryo/fetus	Baby/unborn child/preborn child
Self-managed abortion	Self-induced abortion
Abortion/ induced abortion	Elective abortion
Intact dilation & evacuation	Partial-birth abortion
Perinatal palliative care	Post-birth abortion
Uterus	Womb
Abortion	Abortion-on-demand
Abortion or name the procedure	Maternal-fetal separation
Reproductive rights	Abortion rights / right to an abortion

The aim of this list is to observe, if these terms holding some type of bias in favour or not concerning the topic of abortion, are present in the articles I have selected from CNN and Fox News covering the abortion ballot in Arizona and Florida².

First, I will explain the connotation these words have and how and why they could be associated with a right or left leaning bias. I will divide my explanation into different parts, based on the sub-topics related to abortion and the sources consulted and will regroup some terms that come from each literature.

Now, let's look at the green section in the table. These words have been grouped together because they show a stance for or against abortion. According to an AllSides study on bias, the

² My exhaustive method to tackle these articles will be explained later once the articles will be presented.

terms “anti-choice”, “pro-choice”, “anti-abortion”, “pro-abortion”, “pro-life”, “birthing person” and “woman” all hint to a left-leaning or right-leaning ideology and have been used in news outlets. AllSides doesn’t explain each word besides recognizing that the words hold “political implications” (AllSides, n.d., para. 40). Therefore, I turned to other sources to get some more explanation on why it determines a stance on the topic of abortion. My literature includes dictionaries like Merriam Webster and the Cambridge dictionary, blogs and websites like planned parenthood or ThoughtCo. Some of them might not seem like official sources or might express opinions but since the aim of this thesis is to determine bias and if it has an impact on readers, I believe digging a bit deeper into what people think and how they perceive certain words might help us get more insight on the matter. If we look at the definition of the words “pro-abortion” and “anti-abortion”, the dictionaries explain that pro-abortion “supports supporting the belief that women should have the right to have an abortion (= the intentional ending of a pregnancy) if they need or want one”(Cambridge University Press, n.d.) and that anti-abortion is “opposed to abortion and especially to the legalization of abortion” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). These two definitions give us a clear explanation of where the words position themselves on the political scale. This doesn’t imply that all left-leaning citizens support abortion and that all right-winged voters are against abortion. This merely shows us that both words support a certain ideology, which is associated with the Democratic party and the Republican party. The same can be said about the terms “anti-choice”, “pro-choice” and “pro-life”, which are much more complex than they might seem because there is no black or white point of view when it comes to deciding whether abortion should be permitted or not. It depends on the context and the situation at hand. That’s why, according to Planned Parenthood (n.d.), these terms shouldn’t be used anymore. The website ThoughtCo goes even further by mirroring the latter’s opinion and explaining what these words entail. According to the article published on this website, “Someone who is "pro-life" believes that the government has an obligation to preserve all human life, regardless of intent, viability, or quality-of-life concerns” (Head, 2025, para. 3) and “People who are "pro-choice" believe that individuals have unlimited autonomy with respect to their own reproductive systems, as long as they don't breach the autonomy of others” (Head, 2025, para. 5). The last two terms in this green highlighted section also show a stance, albeit not directly visible to naked eyes. Clair Smith from the Birthing Parents Club expresses her opinion on this topic and finds the word “birthing person” more inclusive than the term “woman” by stating “Birthing person - a person who is carrying a baby; in labour; giving birth. A pretty straightforward way to make the way you communicate about birth accessible to more than just women” (Smith, n.d.).

Next, I would like to focus on two legal terms: “abortion ban” and “abortion law”. Although they hint to legal consequences if the law isn’t abided, both hold different connotations that are worth exploring. When we look at these two words, it is interesting to know what they precisely mean. The term “ban” signifies to “To officially or legally forbid something” (This vs That, n.d., para. 2). Although the word “law” might seem similar, it differs in the sense that it is “a system of rules and regulations enforced by a governing authority” (This vs That, n.d., para. 2). The difference between them lies in the generalisation of both terms and the connotation they hold. While they are both commonly used, they are perceived differently. According to the This or That website (n.d.), “ban is often viewed as a more drastic and authoritarian measure compared to prohibit. Banning something can be seen as an infringement on personal freedoms or rights, especially if it is perceived as unnecessary or unjust (This vs That, n.d., para. 7) whereas “law” simply relates to the laws enforced by the government that everyone has to follow.

Then, I want to analyse the blue highlighted section above. These terms have been grouped together as they are all medical terms that are sometimes inaccurately used as the ACOG Guide to Language and Abortion suggests (American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, n.d.). This could educate us on the right terms to use and also explain why the alternative words used are incorrect and the reason why they are employed. I’ve decided to divide this into two paragraphs: one referring to clinically incorrect terms and another one on purposefully misused terms to generate some kind of emotional reaction and express opinion on abortion.

When it comes to abortion, some collocations such as “late-term abortion” are medically insignificant, since “late-term” refers to a few weeks after birth is supposed to take place. Instead, ACOG suggests using “abortion later in pregnancy “or directly citing the numbers of weeks of pregnancy. Another clinically incorrect term is “surgical abortion”. This shouldn’t be used since an abortion is technically not surgery. That’s why using “abortion procedure” is more adapted to the matter. What poses a problem in “heartbeat pill” is the fact that a heartbeat can’t be heard in the first stages of pregnancy. The heart isn’t yet developed at that moment. The sounds of the ultrasound machine that people might confuse with a heartbeat are only “electronic impulses that signify fetal cardiac activity” (American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, n.d., para. 9). Therefore, ACOG advises to replace it by the exact number of weeks or referring to it as “gestational age bans” when linking it to abortion bans. Another misuse of the word “heartbeat” can be seen in “fetal heartbeat”, which is incorrect as the development of the heart is a continuous process throughout the pregnancy. If we take this into

account, an embryo or fetus cannot be described as having a heartbeat. One should favour the use of “embryonic cardiac activity” before ten full weeks of pregnancy and “fetal cardiac activity” after ten weeks of pregnancy. The last inaccurate term I would like to give my attention to is the usage of “baby”, “unborn child” and “preborn child”. This presents medical inaccuracy since the embryo or fetus isn’t a baby or child until he or she is born. To avoid confusion, the term “embryo” should be used until ten full weeks of pregnancy. After this period, the word “fetus” is the correct one to employ.³

As for collocations holding an influential intent, aiming at people’s emotions, the term we are going to look at is “chemical abortion”. This presents bias because the addition of “chemical” makes the process of abortion sound unsafe and scary. A preferable expression would be “medication abortion”. This term can also replace “abortion pill”, which depreciates “the role of medication abortion as a part of comprehensive health care” (American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, n.d., para. 8) as there is no such thing as one pill that generates abortion (American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, n.d.). The medication is carefully prescribed by gynaecologists and should be taken with an exact dose and at precise periods. Another term, whose aim is to generate an emotional reaction, is “dismemberment ban” or “partial-birth abortion”. If the abortion takes place after 12 to 15 weeks, the physician performs what is called “dilation and evacuation” or “intact dilation and evacuation” in which the cervix is enlarged, and the fetus is extracted by a vacuuming device. Instead of using the clinically correct term mentioned before, “dismemberment” has the purpose to emphasise the operation on the fetus rather than the patient that is being treated by a clinician. Speaking of clinicians, their competences as medical care professionals are often undermined by terms like “abortionist”. This serves to ignore the complete medical care patients receive. To value their work and knowledge, one could instead address them as “physicians who provide abortion” or “clinicians who provide abortions”. Not much explanation is given for the difference between “self-induced abortion” and “self-managed abortion” besides the fact that with a more accessible care, an abortion can be self-managed and is not self-induced. When speaking about induced, one should speak of “induced abortion” or simply “abortion” instead of treating it like an “elective abortion”. The use of “elective” might question the reasons for an abortion and express some bias on the topic. Another term, which openly critiques the procedure and could be replaced once again by “abortion” is “abortion-on-demand”. It abates the medical procedure and the person’s need for it to take place. Finally, other inaccurate or non-existent medical

³ This is a statement religious people might disagree with.

words include “post-birth abortion”, “womb” and “maternal-fetal separation”. All three of them are used to ignore or undermine the grief of loved ones in necessity of “perinatal palliative care” and add an emotional connection with “a human organ” (American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, n.d., para. 18).

Finally, the last section in my table highlighted in orange refers to the question of rights. Is abortion a reproductive right? According to the website Stand to Reason, which supports Christianity and the writer of this article, Alan Shlemon, abortion couldn’t be considered as a reproductive right as an abortion is the complete opposite of reproduction because it seeks to end a pregnancy (Shlemon, 2020). However, the National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice thinks otherwise as mentioned on their website which states that “Reproductive rights focuses on protecting the legal rights to reproductive healthcare services with a focus on keeping abortion legal and increasing access to family planning services. Reproductive rights organizations and advocates focus on the courts, the laws, and advocacy” (National Latina Institute for Reproductive Justice, n.d., para. 2) We can conclude that each term is used in accordance with one’s personal beliefs.

3 Overview of the US political system: federal and state government

Now that bias in the media along with CNN and Fox News’ history and political affiliation have been covered, I want to turn my attention to the political system in the U.S. This overview will first go over the two main political parties in the U.S and what they stand for. Afterwards, the separation of power in the federal as well as state system will be presented to get a sense of how the political system actually works. This includes a sub-chapter on initiatives and referendums, which will help us understand better the ballots that will be presented later on in the thesis and how they came about.

3.1 A bipartisan system

The U.S is known for its bipartisan system, a two-party system, compared to other countries, namely European countries. These two parties are called the Democratic party and the Republican party, also named the “GOP”(the Grand Old Party) (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Although “third parties” exist, such as the Green Party, the Libertarians, the Constitution Party and the Natural Law Party (U.S. Embassy & Consulate in the Kingdom of Denmark, n.d., para.

1), they are not well enough represented or voted for to make a difference or to ever get elected. Therefore, the American political system is considered to be bipartisan. To understand both parties, it is important to look at their history, their ideology and their policies.

3.2 Democratic party

Chronologically speaking, the Democratic party was created first by Thomas Jefferson in 1792 and had opposing ideas to the “Federalist Party”, created by George Washington (Bal-lotpedia, n.d.). In 1848, a new and reformed party was created and named the “Democratic National Committee”. The new party originated from a conflict between supporters of slavery and abolitionists during the Civil War and created what is the current Democratic party(Bal-lotpedia, n.d.). Although the causes the Democratic party supports have evolved over time, namely with the colour that it was associated with, their earlier convictions led them to fight for “states’ rights and agrarian policies” (PoliticalScience, 2024, para. 2). Speaking of colour, the Democratic party was originally red, associated with “radicalism” (Holland, 2024, para. 9). On the contrary, the Republican party used to be blue to represent the colour of “wealth and conservatism” (Holland, 2024, para. 9). This persisted until the presidential elections in 2000 between George W. Bush and Al Gore, when networks started to switch colours although the reasons are still unclear (Holland, 2024).

As for their ideology, today, the Democratic party advocates for “liberal ideologies, focusing on social justice, equality, and government intervention to address societal issues” (Jain, 2024, para. 5). These civil issues include aiming for higher taxes on wealthy citizens and enterprises to finance the education and healthcare system. This party also seeks to protect labour rights by guaranteeing minimum wage and trying to increase it. When fighting for healthcare, the Democrats fight for “universal healthcare coverage to every American” (PoliticalScience, 2024, para. 10) through programs like the “Obamacare” (PoliticalScience, 2024, para. 10). Concerning education, the Democratic party swears by “increased federal funding for public schools and making college more affordable” and want to reduce student debt (PoliticalScience, 2024, para. 10).

Other policies such as their stance on immigration and climate change can be observed as open-minded. The topic of immigration creates conflict between the two parties because of their opposing opinion. Democrats seek a more lenient immigration policy and an easier access

to citizenship for immigrants in the U.S, more specifically those who arrived at a younger age. When it comes to the environment, this party fights for policies, which would help cut back on carbon emissions and which would promote a more sustainable approach. Something the blue party is very strict on is gun control. According to its supporters, laws should be put into place to decrease gun violence by doing more background checks and banning certain types of weapons (PoliticalScience, 2024).

Lastly, the main difference that divides both parties is their values. The Democratic party and the Republican party disagree on social issues such as “abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and racial justice” (PoliticalScience, 2024, para. 24). Democrats openly support abortion, stand up for gay marriage and other LGBTQ+ rights and seek to fight against racial inequality. This shows us that the Democratic party builds its ideology on liberal values.

3.3 Republican party

The Republican party was founded in 1854, little time before the Civil War started. This party came to be because of its stance against slavery and its desire to abolish it. It was a small party until 1860, when their representative Abraham Lincoln became president of the United States (Ballotpedia, n.d.). Their ideology and policies evolved since then to what we know today: a prominent political party which supports “free-market capitalism, limited government, and conservative social values” (PoliticalScience, 2024, para. 2). As mentioned before, the colour that represents them today is red although it used to be blue.

As far as ideology and policies go, the Republican party takes a different stance on civil issues. Its supporters strive for privatised healthcare, limiting the government’s role in economy and private schools. Concerning the schools and more particularly tuition, the Republicans are convinced that one should take care of its own finances and be responsible for them and not ask for funding (PoliticalScience, 2024).

As for immigration, Republicans “prioritise border security and stricter enforcement of immigration laws” (PoliticalScience, 2024, para. 16) in order to protect the job market in the United States .Another topic, upon which both parties don’t agree on is climate change. Republicans don’t necessarily refuse to acknowledge it but don’t believe the economy or the government should intervene. When it comes to gun control, the Republican party is very clear on

the fact that the Second Amendment, which allows the bearing of arms, should be respected (PoliticalScience, 2024).

To conclude on the policies presented by the Republican party, let's look at their point of view on social issues. Their stance can be seen as conservative and traditional as "many oppose abortion and advocate for pro-life policies" (PoliticalScience, 2024, para. 25) as well as same sex marriage or other LGBTQ+ rights .

3.4 Current situation

The difference between both parties is also reflected in polls. According to a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2022, 57% of Americans believe there to be a big difference in ideology and policies between the Democratic party and the Republican party. Although this divide is noted, more than half of the Americans interviewed for this study (55%) express satisfaction as at least one candidate seems to represent their values. This sentiment seems to be shared more by older voters than younger ones. Nevertheless, the number of independent voters has increased in recent years. Their dissatisfaction with the lack of representation by candidates has grown as well and pushes them to lean towards a party that doesn't fully represents their views. Out of the independents voting for one of the two main parties, the study shows that this tendency has increased from 50% to 61% from 2018 until 2022 for independents voters leaning left. For the same period of time, independent voters leaning to the right increased from 39% to 57% (Pew Research Center, 2022, p. 3). Despite this, the Democratic party and the Republican party hold a lot of importance amongst voters as they dominate American national politics (Jacobson, 2024). This can be seen on last year's electoral maps as the states are either predominately blue or red, reflecting the presence of presidential candidates Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. This is also true for state governments as there is an almost equal distribution between Republican and Democratic governors in the country (Ballotpedia, n.d.).

3.5 The founding principles of American government:

the separation of powers and federalism

In this second chapter of the overview on the U.S political system, I will start from top to bottom, meaning that I will first focus my attention on the federal government and how its three

branches are structured. When observing how the federal government is organised, the US federal government is divided into three branches: legislative, executive and judicial. It is set up this way in order to give equal power to each branch and to allow one branch to check on the other through the system known as checks and balances.

3.6 The federal government

3.6.1 The Legislative Branch

As mentioned in Article 1 of the Constitution (Kurland & Lerner, 2000), the legislative branch consists of two houses that make up Congress: The House of Representatives and the Senate. This bicameral system has the power of passing bills and drafting laws amongst other functions such as declaring a war. Congress is the only body in the U.S that is directly elected by the people. Although they work together to form the Congress, the House of Representatives and the Senate hold some notable differences that need to be underlined.

The first difference between the House of Representatives and the Senate lies in the number of people being elected and at what frequency. Each state elects two Senators every six years who will represent the state's interests in the Senate. Furthermore, a third of the Senate is elected every even year. A senator needs to fill some criteria to be elected. He or she must be at least 30 years old, must have been a US citizen for nine years and be an inhabitant of the state they represent. In total, the Senate consists of 100 Senators. Its leader is the Vice President of the United States. He or she casts a vote only when there is a tie (The White House, n.d.).

On the other hand, the number of representatives elected by the US citizens depends on the state's population. This means that the House of Representatives has 435 representatives elected every two years as well as 6 non-voting delegates who represent the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico and other U.S territories (History.com Editors, 2017)). Just as the senators, members of the House of Representatives need to check some boxes to be part of this chamber of Congress. He or she must be at least 25 years old, must have been a U.S citizen for seven years and be an inhabitant of the state they represent. The leader of the House of Representatives is the Speaker of the House who is elected by the other members of this chamber (The White House, n.d.).

In order to make a law, both House of Representatives and Senate must pass the same version of the bill with a 2/3 majority vote. The bill will then be sent to the President. If different

versions of the bill are approved, the text will be passed back and forth between the two chambers with each of them proposing additional amendments or by finding a consensus with the help of a conference committee.

Some of their collective powers as Congress allow the members to “lay and collect taxes” (Nolan, 2016, p. 1), “regulate foreign and interstate commerce“ (Nolan, 2016, p. 1) and “dispose of and make all needful Rules and Regulations respecting the Territory or other Property belonging to the United States” (Nolan, 2016, p. 2).. However both chambers also hold separate and distinctive powers. The Senate has the power to approve by a 2/3 majority vote the treaties proposed by the President. This body is also responsible for trying the President in case of impeachment. On the flip side, the House of Representatives holds the authority to impeach a government official (U.S. Senate, n.d.). The House also casts the final vote if no presidential candidate gets the majority of the votes in the electoral college (USA.gov., n.d.).

These powers illustrate the American system of checks and balances which enables the three branches of government to have authority over one another. A notable example for the legislative power is the fact that Congress can override a presidential veto if two-thirds of the votes are obtained in both houses.

3.6.2 The Executive Branch

The executive branch has three key players: the President, the Vice President and the Cabinet. Each of them holds specific powers and tasks they need to accomplish.

3.6.2.1.1 The President

The President of the United States, which is currently Donald Trump, must meet some requirements as the aforementioned roles of the legislative branch. To be able to run for president, he or she must be at least 35 years old, be born in the United States and must have been an inhabitant of the U.S for 14 years (The White House, n.d.).

The President is not elected directly by the people but through a system called the electoral college. The president’s term lasts 4 years. He or she is allowed to hold office only for two consecutive terms (The White House, n.d.).

This position holds an enormous amount of importance in the country as the President is head of the government and Commander in Chief of the U.S army. According to Article II of the Constitution (Kurland & Lerner, 2000), the president is responsible for executing and enforcing the laws created by the Congress (The White House, n.d.). Moreover, s/he oversees foreign policy and relations. This means that s/he can sign treaties, but they need to be approved by 2/3 of the Senate.

On top of their responsibilities, the President can grant clemencies and pardons for crimes, veto bills and give out executive orders that can be overruled by the judicial branch (History.com Editors, 2017). Furthermore, s/he holds the power to nominate federal and Supreme Court judges.

3.6.2.1.2 The Vice President

The Vice President, currently JD Vance, is first in line to replace the President if s/he is not in capacity to hold office anymore or is impeached. The Vice President's main role in addition to being the head of the Senate is to support the President and fill in for him/her if s/he is unable to attend or is temporarily incapacitated. He or she is elected together with the President via the electoral college system (The White House, n.d.).

3.6.2.1.3 The Cabinet

The Cabinet consists of 15 heads of executive departments who serve as advisors to the president. There are all called Secretaries except for the head of Justice Department who has the title of Attorney General. These heads are appointed by the president but must be approved by the Senate. This is another prime example of the system of checks and balances (The White House, n.d.).

As far as departments go, the Department of Defence is the biggest one in the U.S government. Its head office is the Pentagon, located in Virginia. Another important department is the Department of State. Its head, called the Secretary of State, takes care of foreign policy and is the President's primary advisor on this topic. He or she is also fourth in line to replace the President (The White House, n.d.).

3.6.3 The Judiciary

The U.S federal court system is made up of three different types of courts: the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, and the District Court.

The Supreme Court is the highest court in the country. This explains why no appeal can be made after the Court's decision is made.

The number of Justices, as the Supreme Court judges are known, is decided by Congress. As of 1869 with the Judiciary Act (Kurland & Lerner, 2000), the Supreme Court consists of the Chief of Justice and 8 other judges, making up a total of nine Justices. They all are appointed by the President but must be confirmed by the Senate. They are not re-elected and remain in the Supreme Court until they pass away, resign or are impeached by Congress (The White House, n.d.).

Their responsibility is to determine if laws are constitutional or not. Furthermore, they can “grant certs”, which is when four of the nine Justices vote that a case should be heard. Very few cases appear before the Supreme Court (i.e., 150 cases out of 7,500 per year) (The White House, n.d.).

Below the Supreme Court in the federal court system are the Courts of Appeal. These courts consist of three judges and no jury. Their task is to evaluate if the law was applied correctly during trials. In total, the U.S has 13 Courts of Appeal (History.com Editors, 2017).

The last notable court in the federal court system are the District Courts. These courts are made up of a District judge and a jury. Their role is to try cases on a district level. There are 94 District Courts in total. They are divided into 12 regional circuits each one with its own Court of Appeal (History.com Editors, 2017).

3.7 State Government

The state governments might be even considered more important than the federal governments as most Americans have more contact with them. Furthermore, state governments hold some importance as “under the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, all powers not granted to the federal government are reserved for the states and the people” (The White House,

n.d., para. 1). Each state has its own constitution and maintains the same structure and separation of powers as the federal system: the legislative branch, the executive branch and the judicial branch.

3.7.1 Legislative

The first branch to make up the state government is the legislative branch. This branch is one of the three branches that assures the system of checks and balances to avoid any abuse of power or any wrongdoings from one of the three branches of government. This is another example of comparison and resemblance between federal and state governments.

The legislative branch is the same in every state as “all 50 states have legislatures made up of elected representatives, who consider matters brought forth by the governor or introduced by its members to create legislation that becomes law.” (Indivisible, n.d., para. 3). However, each state is different as the numbers of representatives can vary. A common responsibility for every state is that the legislative branch is responsible for approving the state’s budget, managing tax legislation and writing articles of impeachment.

Structure wise, all states except Nebraska are made up of a bicameral system, with two chambers: a smaller or lower house, also called the “Senate”, and the upper house, also named “House of Representatives” in 41 states, the “Assembly” in five other states and the “House of Delegates” in the three remaining states. (Ballotpedia, n.d.).

These two houses work together to “make state laws and fulfill other governing responsibilities” (The White House, n.d., para. 6), but also hold differences in terms of duration of office and functions (Indivisible, n.d.). Members of the Senate usually serve a term of four years compared to a shorter term of two years served by members of the House of Representatives.

An important role of the state legislature is the passage of bills. “Bills must pass both chambers and then be signed by the Governor in order to become law” (Indivisible, n.d., para. 13). In certain states, if the bill isn’t vetoed by the Governor, it still becomes law without an official approval. The bills also go through three readings before passing through the chambers. “The first reading is when a bill is first introduced into the chamber. The bill is then usually assigned

to policy committee(s) which will assess the bill. After the bill is reported out of policy committee to the floor, it undergoes the second reading. which is often when amendments to the committee-reported bill are allowed. The third reading is when the bill is voted on by the legislators for final passage” (Indivisible, n.d., para. 12).

3.7.1.1.1 Initiatives and Referendums

State legislature is of big importance, by its passing of bills and making of laws that make up the state constitution. These laws or bills aren’t always spontaneously proposed by the legislative branch but are rather suggested and challenged by the citizens through initiatives and referendums. This following sub chapter will dive into these two citizen led actions, explaining how they work, what makes them different from one another and the impact they can have.

3.7.1.1.2 Initiatives

Initiatives give citizens the opportunity to put laws directly on the ballot or present them to the legislature for them to vote on. This system was first introduced in South Dakota in 1898 and still continues until this day but only in 24 states. Two different types of initiatives exist: direct and indirect initiatives. Direct initiatives, which are permitted in 19 states, entail that proposed measures, if they qualify, can go directly onto the ballot. In contrast to direct initiatives, indirect initiatives, present in 9 states, need to be presented to the legislature. The legislature will then either approve the measure or present a similar one. This doesn’t apply to every state but if the legislature doesn’t put the measure into law, this measure can be put on the ballot for a citizen vote. In the indirect procedure, state legislature can also put a disputing measure as well as the initial submission on the ballot.

As mentioned above, the proposal can only go on the ballot if qualified. Every state has a different criterion to qualify but some requirements are common within the 50 states. The process to put a measure on the ballot starts by presenting a proposal to the state government and waiting for it to be reviewed to confirm if it is constitutional, falls into state legislature and in some cases if the language used in this proposal is adequate. If this is approved, the citizens can start collecting signatures showing support to the proposal for it to be put on the ballot. After the minimum number of signatures is reached, these will be sent to the local or state government for inspection. This check happens to make sure that the signatures were counted properly and are real. If the numbers add up and the validity is confirmed, the measure is put

on the ballot or is submitted to the state legislature, when it comes to indirect initiatives. In order for a ballot to be put into law, the “passage is a majority vote, though a few states have higher thresholds“ (National Conference of State Legislatures, n.d., para. 9).

3.7.1.1.3 Referendum

“Referendums are pieces of legislation that are put to a ballot vote” (Hahn, 2025, para. 13) and exist under two categories: legislative and popular. Legislative referendums are bills that the state legislature passed and that need to be voted on by the citizens. This procedure is allowed in all 50 states. Contrary to this, popular referendums are employed to repeal laws. This also goes through a process of signatures. If these signatures are collected within 90 days, the law can be halted until the citizens vote on it. If this time limit isn’t reached, a referendum can take place after the proposal has already been put into law, to overturn it. Unlike legislative referendums, popular referendums are only allowed in 24 states (Hahn, 2025) .

The main difference between referendums and initiatives is that “popular referendums are different from initiatives in that they are in response to an action taken by the state legislature. Initiatives, on the other hand, are used to prompt action by the state legislature” (Hahn, 2025, para. 14).

3.7.2 Executive

The Executive branch is the second branch in the state’s separation of power. Its role is to execute the laws made by the legislature. The structure is different in every state, but one thing remains the same in all 50 states: the governor. The governor, “the chief executive of the state’s government” (Ballotpedia, n.d., para. 23), is amongst 7 executive offices to appear in every

state in the US. All executive offices report to the governor. These include the lieutenant governor⁴, the attorney general⁵, the secretary of state⁶ as well as treasurer⁷ and superintendent of schools⁸.

3.7.2.1.1 Governor

The Governor, the chief executive of state, holds office in all 50 states and is directly elected by the people every four years. S/He is in charge of “implementing the laws created by the legislature and the ruling of state courts” (Ballotpedia, n.d., para 24). “He has the power to veto bills passed by the state legislature and may use a line-item veto to strike certain parts of a bill without rejecting it wholesale in certain states” (Ballotpedia, n.d., para. 27). Besides this important responsibility, the governor supervises the executive offices, which include the lieutenant governor, secretary of state as well as the rest. He or she is also the commander-in-chief of the state’s National Guard and has the power to use it during an emergency. Speaking of state of emergency, the Governor possesses other emergency powers such as “convening extraordinary legislative sessions, declaring a state of emergency and officially asking the federal government for assistance, spending funds set aside for emergencies, and relocating the seat of government if needed” (Ballotpedia, n.d., para. 25). Other powers of the Governor, that resemble those belonging to the president, include pardoning convicted felons or reducing their sentence. Usually, these powers need to be approved by the Senate but in certain situations, the governor, in certain states, is allowed to “make recess appointments and issue executive orders during legislative recesses that will stand until the legislature reconvenes” (Ballotpedia, n.d., para. 25).

⁴ In state governments, the lieutenant governor can be compared to the vice president in federal government. It is the second highest executive role in state office. The main role of the lieutenant governor is to take over as governor if the governor is either absent or no longer able to perform his duties (Ballotpedia, n.d.).

⁵ This executive office exists in all 50 states and its attorney general “serves as the chief legal advisor and chief law enforcement officer for the state government and is empowered to prosecute violations of state law, represent the state in legal disputes and issue legal advice to state agencies and the legislature” (Ballotpedia, n.d., para. 1).

⁶ The responsibilities and duties of a secretary of state vary and are different in every state. The duties are generally administrative and include “keeping state records” and “recording the official acts of the governor” (Ballotpedia, n.d, para. 2.) “The officeholder also often serves as the chief election official in their state, administering state elections and maintaining official election results” (Ballotpedia, n.d, para. 2.).

⁷ The treasurer holds an important role in state government a he or she is responsible for “overseeing revenue and finances and generally acting as the state’s chief banker” . (Ballotpedia, n.d. para. 1) The main tasks include debt policy, payroll for employees in the public sector, the investing of public funds and many more.

⁸ The superintendent of schools is a statewide executive office, who’s duty is to supervise and harmonise the state’s school system (Ballotpedia, n.d.).

3.7.3 The Judiciary

The structure of the judicial branch in state governments is settled by the State Constitution. This configuration includes three levels of courts: the Supreme court, the Court of Appeals and the trial courts. These three courts all serve different purposes and only deal with state laws and matters.

Much like the federal Supreme Court, the State Supreme Court is the highest court in the judicial system. The court's main role "focuses on correcting errors made in lower courts and therefore holds no trials" (The White House, n.d., para. 7). The Supreme Court's ruling is usually final, which means that no appeals will be made after this decision. When matters concern and question the U.S Constitution, they bypass the other courts and are directly submitted to the Supreme Court. The State Court judges are elected in different ways such as an appointment by the governor with a fixed term, appointment with undetermined duration and through elections.

Below the Supreme Court level, there is the Court of Appeals. As the name says, this court gives another chance at trial for citizens unsatisfied with the hearing in the trial court. The lowest level in the judicial branch is the state trial court, which tries all sorts of cases that relate to state laws.

3.8 The Fourth Branch: The Press

Although the U.S federal and state system is divided into three branches of government mentioned before, there is a fourth unofficial branch that many people don't consider: the press. As a fourth branch of government, the press is responsible for informing the citizens and contributes to the democratic system by giving them the necessary tools to form their own opinion.

Even if it isn't considered as an official branch of government, the Founding Fathers cited it in the Constitution and wrote their First Amendment about it. "The First Amendment guarantees freedoms concerning religion, expression, assembly, and the right to petition. It forbids Congress from both promoting one religion over others and also restricting an individual's religious practices. It guarantees freedom of expression by prohibiting Congress from restricting the press or the rights of individuals to speak freely. It also guarantees the right of citizens

to assemble peaceably and to petition their government.” (Legal Information Institute, n.d., para. 1). This indicates that “the First Amendment provides the press with a constitutional safeguard” (Luberda, 2008, p. 513) and limits the powers of the other three branches from interfering with press freedoms.

The media fulfils two main functions: “the gatekeeper”(Luberda, 2008, p. 509)and “the watchdog”(Luberda, 2008, p. 509). As a gatekeeper, the press filters and decides which information to share with the public. Some topics deemed unimportant might not be shared or some information might be omitted from the news. This impacts the public’s knowledge of these issues. On the other hand, in the role of watchdog, the press serves as a fourth branch of government and acts in the system of checks and balances as it keeps an eye on what the government is doing and exposes its wrongdoings by reporting on them(Luberda, 2008).

Seen as threatening to some, the press is able to heavily influence public opinion based on how they report on the government and other federal or state related issues. One of its most noticeable examples in exposing the government wrongdoing was that of Watergate⁹related to the Nixon scandal (FBI Records: The Vault, n.d.). After that, the public’s trust in the government was broken and would never be the same as before.

In conclusion, we must not underestimate the power of the press. In the words of Bill Samon, a reporter for the *Washington Post*, “The press, for all its problems -- and they are legion -- and for all its shortcomings, and for all its liberal bias, and for all its wrongheadedness, it serves a vital role in our society in terms of checks and balances. ... Without the press, I really don't think America works. I think you absolutely have to have the press to ferret out information. ...” (PBS, n.d., para. 93).

4 Analysis

As I explained in the methodology chapter at the start of my thesis, the aim of this analysis is to determine the answer to two questions: Are news outlets partisan? What impact does it have on citizens’ partisanship? To answer these questions, my analysis will be split in two parts:

⁹ The Watergate scandal started when on June 17 1972, burglars were discovered and arrested in the Watergate offices of the Democratic National Committee. During the trial that took place the next year, the convicted burglars were suspected to have a connection to re-elected president Richard Nixon. The president denied these claims. After further investigation, it was revealed that President Nixon approved the cover-ups to this burglary and other government scandals during his presidency were uncovered. This resulted in him resigning from office for fear of impeachment (FBI Records: The Vault, n.d.).

a first part focusing on statement bias, using word count and labelling, and publishing frequency and a second and final part observing and making conclusions on a quantitative study: a survey.

In the first part, I will start by explaining each ballot in order to contextualise the situation. After each summary, I will present the results I have found regarding the number of times the words in my list appear in the articles I have selected and will use that to compare the two news outlets. Another point of comparison will result in an analysis of frequency of articles published at specific times. I have selected a total of 44 articles, 11 for each media outlet and for both states of Arizona and Florida, to make the comparison balanced and fair. These articles can be found in appendix 1 and 2. The words selected in the articles will be extracted from direct writing from the author of the content when talking about abortion in Arizona and Florida or in general in the U.S or when quoting the ballot and will not include words that appear in direct quotes and statements made by people interviewed for the article. The second part of my analysis will be based on a survey I have drawn up. The detailed content of this survey will be discussed in the last part of my thesis. Something to take into consideration when analysing these articles is its recurrent authors and its recycling and modifying of articles published by the Associated Press. This might justify some results regarding bias.

4.1 Ballot initiative on abortion: Arizona

First, let's look at the referendum on abortion that was put on the ballot in November 2024. The Arizona Proposition 139: Right to Abortion states that "This ballot initiative would provide the fundamental right to abortion that the state of Arizona may not interfere with before the point of fetal viability (defined as the point of pregnancy when there is significant chance of the survival of the fetus outside of the uterus without the application of extraordinary medical measures) unless justified by a compelling state interest (defined as a law or regulation enacted for the limited purpose of improving or maintaining the health of the individual seeking abortion care that does not infringe on that individual's autonomous decision making)" (NBC News, 2024, para. 2).

The proposition required 50% of votes and it passed with 61.6% (NBC News, 2024). This referendum was put into place because of previous changes in legislation that sparked outrage from the citizens of the state of Arizona.

Since 2022, the Supreme Court’s repeal of Roe vs Wade, the topic of abortion and more specifically its legality or prohibition became a matter of the states. From then on, the former Governor of Arizona, Doug Ducey, decided on a 15-week limit for women to get an abortion. This all changed, when in April 2024, the Arizona Supreme Court brought back a “near-total abortion ban” (Jones, 2024, para. 3), from 1864, which preceded the Civil War and was first put into place when Arizona wasn’t a state yet. This sparked outrage and led the current Governor of Arizona, Katie Hobbs, a member of the Democratic party, to overturn this ban. This meant that the state would go back to its former limit of 15 weeks, which wasn’t agreed upon by all citizens of Arizona. To push this law and extend the number of weeks, a referendum was put into place to determine the right to an abortion until “fetal viability” (Jones, 2024, para. 1) or 24 weeks.

4.2 Word choice and labelling: results on CNN and Fox News articles

CNN		Fox News
0	anti-choice	0
0	pro-choice	2
4	anti-abortion	0
1	pro-abortion	2
6	Birthing person/ pregnant person	0
3	Woman/ pregnant woman	16
0	Pro-life	6
75	Abortion ban	41
60	Abortion law	18
0	Abortion later in pregnancy/ abortion at X weeks of gestation	0
0	Late term abortion	0
0	later abortion	2
4	Medication abortion	0
0	Chemical abortion	0
9	(Abortion) procedure	4
0	Surgical abortion	1
4	Abortion pill	0
0	Gestational age bans	0
0	Heartbeat bill	0
0	Embryonic cardiac activity/fetal cardiac activity	0
0	Fetal heartbeat	0
0	Dilation and evacuation ban	0
0	Dismemberment ban	0
4	Physician	1
15	provider	0
9	doctor	5
0	Abortionist	0
2	Embryo/fetus	5
0	Baby	1
0	unborn child	0
0	preborn child	0
0	Self-managed abortion	0

CNN		Fox News
0	Self-induced abortion	0
78	Abortion	58
0	induced abortion	0
0	Elective abortion	0
0	Intact dilation & evacuation	0
0	Partial-birth abortion	0
0	Perinatal palliative care	0
0	Post-birth abortion	0
0	Uterus	1
1	Womb	3
0	Abortion-on-demand	0
0	Maternal–fetal separation	0
11	Reproductive rights	3
49	Abortion rights	17
5	right to an abortion	3
Total: 340		Total: 189

As seen in the table displaying my results on word count, some differences in numbers can already be observed. To facilitate my observations, I will split my table in the same order as my word list in a previous table. I will first have a look at terms that clearly indicate bias, next at legal terms, then at medical terms and finally at the terms regarding people’s rights.

First, let’s have a look at the top of the table with the following words: “anti-choice”, “pro-choice”, “birthing person/ pregnant person” and “pro-life”. The term “anti-choice” doesn’t appear in any of the news sources but the word “pro-choice” does. This isn’t all that surprising since this term indicates a favourable stance on abortion. That’s why it appears twice in the entirety of the CNN articles and 0 times in Fox News content. CNN expressing liberal views associated with the Democratic ideology in support of abortion, it is no surprise this word would appear in their content. Another term, which reflects inclusive values related to this party, is “birthing person/ pregnant person”. Although “birthing person” doesn’t appear in any of the CNN articles, its alternative “pregnant person” is mentioned 6 times compared to 0 times for Fox News. In contrast, Fox News lets its views be known through other terms such as “woman/ pregnant woman”, which appear 16 times versus 3 times in CNN. This indicates that this news outlet wants to put emphasis on the term “woman”, expressing that only women can get pregnant. The final term I would like to focus on is “pro-life”. This word shows support to traditional and conservative values shared with the Republican party, which isn’t in favour of abortion.

Next, I will turn my attention to the legal terms “abortion ban” and “abortion law”. The results that can be observed in the table above include instances of the words “abortion” and

“ban” / “abortion” and “law” together or alone without the word “abortion” at the front but still referring to the topic of abortion. When looking at the statistics, both news outlets alternate between “ban” and “law” although the former is the predominant one. As pointed out previously, “ban” indicates a prohibition of a specific thing and generally is perceived as something negative to be feared. On the contrary, the term “law” references legislation every citizen has to follow and obey to. If we keep this in mind, the word “ban” or the combination “abortion ban” might be used to generate an emotional reaction in readers. On one hand, CNN might emphasise this word to show that banning abortion is a violation of human rights. On the hand, Fox News might make use of this word or combination of words to instead express the severity of this legislation and what breaking the law would implicate.

Now, let us consider the list of medical words we can see on the table above. As seen through the statistics, a lot of the medical terms aren’t used in the articles I have selected. Since these are very technical terms that aren’t usually used in day-to-day life, it isn’t really surprising to find them absent since Fox News and CNN aren’t specialised news outlets. Nevertheless, some inaccuracies can be observed in both news outlets with the words “later abortion”, “surgical abortion”, “abortion pill”, “baby” and “womb”. Although most of these words can be found in Fox news articles, CNN uses the term “abortion pill”, misinforming readers on a complex procedure followed by the physician with strict timings and use. Using this word generalises the topic and makes it part of general health care, trivializing abortion. Some differences in frequency can be noted in other words used by one of the news outlets only or by both. This includes words such as “procedure”, different variations referencing medics, “fetus”, and “abortion”. The term “procedure”, a synonym to “abortion”, is used 9 times by CNN and 4 times by Fox News. This presents a more accurate term in contrast to the term “surgical abortion”, since an abortion isn’t technically a surgery. Concerning medical staff, both outlets make use of “physician” and “doctor”. The main distinction can be seen with the term “provider”, which is exclusively used by CNN. An explanation for the lack of use by Fox News could be that the definition of the verb “to provide “ is to supply or make available (something wanted or needed)” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Since Fox News is aligned with the Republican Party, it might make sense that they don’t use this term.

Another term used at different frequencies is “abortion”. Whilst both news sources make correct use of the word, CNN uses it more, 78 times, as opposed to Fox news with 58 times. This could be explained with the meaning of the technique of framing, which was mentioned in a previous chapter. Because the aim of this technique is to put some topics on the

forefront or downplay others, it makes sense that CNN would use it more to show support to the procedure.

Finally, I want to focus on terms referencing human rights. These collocations are “reproductive rights”, “abortion rights” and “right to an abortion”. When observing the results, “reproductive rights” is mainly used by CNN, which is logical as Fox News, representing traditional Christian values, doesn’t consider an abortion to be a reproductive right. CNN varies between “reproductive rights”, “abortion rights”, and “right to an abortion” emphasizing that it is a human right to get an abortion. On the contrary, Fox News used these three combinations of words less, probably because of their possible opposition to abortion.

4.3 Publication frequency: results on CNN and Fox News articles

	CNN			Fox News	
Month	Frequency	Dates		Frequency	Dates
April	6	9 th of April 9 th of April 12 th of April 15 th of April 18 th of April 25 th of April		6	3 rd of April 9 th of April 10 th of April 10 th of April 12 th of April 24 th of April
May	1	1 st of May		1	2 nd of May
August	1	13 th of August		1	13 th of August
September				1	14 th of September
October	1	12 th of October			
November	2	6 th of November 8 th of November		2	5 th of November 6 th of November
TOTAL	11			11	

To give my analysis more depth, I decided to have a look at the time frames at which these articles were published. As seen on the table above, both CNN and Fox News follow the media news cycle by publishing content key moments in the year. In this case, we can observe that both news outlets focus most of their content in the month of April and November. This doesn’t come as a surprise as the 1864 law on abortion was reinstated at the beginning of April. The difference between what both news sources published at that time lies in the content of the articles and the information that is highlighted. CNN informs on the progress that was made in April on the topic of abortion with the overturn of the 1864 law, the reinstatement of a 15-week

limit and the gathering of signatures to put an amendment for the right to abortion on the November ballot. On the contrary, Fox News emphasises the legal consequences behind this new restriction and informs on who would be prosecuted when breaking the law.

Furthermore, in November, both media outlets published two articles in the same week: one on the day of the presidential elections and another one a couple of days after. The articles published on the 5th of November present two sides of the same story. On one hand, the Fox News article explains that putting abortion on the November ballot might not have such a big impact on presidential elections results and insists that pro-abortion voters might still vote for the Republican party and vice versa. On the other hand, CNN celebrates Arizona's win but still show discontent and disappointment in states that didn't pass the amendment or didn't participate in the voting. In the second article published in November, Fox News takes a more neutral approach by simply explaining the amendment results on abortion for the ten states that put it on the ballot. In contrast, CNN states an opinion by talking negatively about what lies ahead with Donald Trump as president.

Compared to the content published in these two months, both media outlets take on the same neutral approach by publishing content on key date, which is used to inform readers, such as on 13th of August, when the amendment was approved to appear on the ballot in November. Nevertheless, a subtle bias can be observed in the article published by CNN on October 12. The content includes testimonials from Democrats approving the ballot and Republicans, who are against abortion, still voting "yes" on the amendment, to support women's rights. This can be seen as an elusive way to influence readers as CNN pushes the positive narrative of abortion through the quotes.

In conclusion, this demonstrates that there is a strategy behind the frequency of articles published by these two news sources. They both publish articles at key moments, in this case on the topic of abortion and both manage to take a different stance, overt or not, on the same topic. It proves that frequency isn't enough to determine bias and that the content and the way the information is framed, needs to be taken into account. Nevertheless, frequency shows a certain want from CNN and Fox News to make their opinion known on the matter, by creating relevant content for voters and citizens in Arizona.

4.4 Ballot initiative on abortion: Florida

Florida was one of many states along with Arizona to put abortion on the ballot in November 2024. In order to understand this decision, it is important to understand the history Florida has with abortion and how it got to that point.

The Florida Amendment 4: Right to Abortion ballot initiative states that

“The initiative would provide a constitutional right to abortion before fetal viability or when "necessary to protect the patient's health, as determined by the patient's healthcare provider". The following language would be added to the state constitution: "Except as provided in Article X, Section 22, no law shall prohibit, penalise, delay, or restrict abortion before viability or when necessary to protect the patient’s health, as determined by the patient’s healthcare provider."

The initiative would not change the state legislature's authority to enact a law requiring the parents of a minor to be notified if their child is seeking an abortion, with exceptions that can be attained through a judicial waiver” (NBC News, 2024, para. 2). In contrast to the abortion ballot in Arizona, this ballot would need 60% of voters to approve this text to pass and be put into law, which wasn’t the case. The initiative only received 57.2% of votes, thus failing and making Florida one of the states with the strictest laws on amendments (NBC News, 2024).

Now, let’s have a look at the timeline of abortion in Florida. Similar to Arizona, the Governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, signed a law limiting abortion at 15 weeks two months before *Roe vs Wade* was overturned in June 2022. Nevertheless, this law was to be reviewed by the State Supreme Court. Meanwhile, the state legislature put further restrictions into place, in 2023, by proposing a law, which banned abortion after 6 weeks. The particularity of this law was that it could only be executed 30 days after the Supreme Court had made its final decision on the 15-week limit. The transition was made between these two laws because “The Florida Supreme Court in early April upheld the 15-week ban, clearing the way for the more restrictive, six-week law to take effect” (Quinn, 2024, para. 7) a month later, on May 1 2024. This created discontent amongst citizens which lead to a referendum. This referendum was first questioned and reviewed for its vague language and was later approved and put on the ballot in November 2024 (Myrie, 2024).

4.5 Word choice and labelling: results on CNN and Fox News articles

CNN		Fox News
0	anti-choice	0
0	pro-choice	1
3	anti-abortion	1
1	pro-abortion	6
0	Birth person/ pregnant person	0
2	Woman/ pregnant woman	6
0	Pro-life	7
56	(Abortion) ban	20
13	(Abortion) law	18
1	Abortion later in pregnancy/ abortion at X weeks of gestation	0
0	Late term abortion	2
0	later abortion	0
4	Medication abortion	0
0	Chemical abortion	0
8	(Abortion) procedure	4
0	Surgical abortion	0
4	(Abortion) pill	0
0	Gestational age bans	0
0	Heartbeat bill	0
0	Embryonic cardiac activity/fetal cardiac activity	0
0	Fetal heartbeat	0
0	Dilation and evacuation ban	0
0	Dismemberment ban	0
3	Physician	0
15	(health care) provider	7
1	doctor	3
0	Abortifacient	0
1	Embryo/fetus	1
0	Baby	0
1	unborn child	0
0	preborn child	0
0	Self-managed abortion	0
0	Self-induced abortion	0
98	Abortion	92
1	induced abortion	0
0	Elective abortion	2
0	Intact dilation & evacuation	0
0	Partial-birth abortion	0
0	Perinatal palliative care	0
0	Post-birth abortion	0
0	Uterus	1
0	Womb	0
0	Abortion-on-demand	0
0	Maternal–fetal separation	0
10	Reproductive rights	1
31	Abortion rights	11
8	right to an abortion	3
Total: 261		Total: 186

As explained in my previous analysis on CNN and Fox News articles on the abortion ballot in Arizona, I will divide the table above into different categories: words expressing direct bias, legal terms, medical and technical terms and words relating to human rights. Compared to the coverage on the Arizona abortion ballot, the articles talking about the abortion ballot in Florida show slightly different tendencies for certain terms.

First, let's concentrate on the first part of the table. Unsurprisingly, the results indicate a similar use of the words "anti-choice", "pro-choice", "anti-abortion", "pro-abortion", "birthing person/pregnant person", "woman/pregnant woman" and "pro-life". Some words are used by Fox News, as expected, demonstrating an aversion to abortion and employ the term "pro-choice" when referring to people in favour of the procedure. While CNN does the same, using a combination of words used to cover the Arizona ballot, "birthing person/pregnant person", doesn't appear in CNN's vocabulary when talking about the referendum in Florida.

Now let's have a look at the legal terms. As with the previous ballot, the table indicates that the word "ban" or the combination of "abortion ban" is mentioned more than "law" or "abortion law" by both news outlets. The justification remains the same. The connotation behind the term "ban" indicates a drastic decision with the aim to prohibit a specific action. Both news outlets must have chosen to emphasise the word for different reasons; one fighting against the legislation and the injustice of it while the other accentuates it by reminding readers of the legal implications and consequences as can be seen in this following example "Abortion is illegal in Florida after the first six weeks of pregnancy under a law that took effect May 1" (Mulvihill & Kruesi, 2024, para. 15).

Next, let's take a look at the terms covering the medical aspect of abortion. While most terms on the list aren't used because of their technicality, some inaccuracies as well as correct usage of words can be detected. As far as inaccuracies are concerned, CNN still uses the wrong collocation "abortion pill" or "pill" alone when referencing medication for abortion as well as the term "unborn child" once instead of calling it a "fetus" or an "embryo". Fox News also employs terms such as "late-term abortion" instead of citing the number of weeks the abortion takes place at and also uses "elective abortion", criticizing patients who seek an abortion, for their choice. As for other terms showing little difference in terms of frequency, the vocabulary used to reference medical workers is employed almost identically except for "provider" or in this case "healthcare provider", which appears most times in Fox news when quoting directly the content of the abortion ballot in Florida. The numbers of times "abortion" is mentioned is superior in CNN coverage than in Fox News coverage, although the difference is very small, which indicates a change compared to the coverage on the abortion ballot in Arizona.

Lastly, I will explain the results I found regarding the use of words expressing a stance on human rights. It is no surprise that CNN employs the term "reproductive rights" more than Fox

News as the latter, because of their conservative views, might not consider abortion a reproductive right. “Abortion rights “and “right to an abortion” are also used distinctively more by CNN, perhaps as a way to indicate support for the severe measures the state of Florida took concerning abortion; something the Republicans have an entirely different opinion on.

4.6 Publication frequency: results on CNN and Fox News articles

	CNN			Fox News	
Month	Fre- quency	Dates 2024		Frequency	Dates 2024
January	1	5th of January			
February				1	7 th of February
April	3	2 nd of April 6 th of April 24 th of April		1	3 rd of April
May	2	1 st of May (x 2)		1	2 nd of May
June	1	21 st of June			
August				3	30 th of August (x 3)
September	2	9 th of September 12 th of September			
October				1	22 nd of October
November	2	6 th of November 8 th of November		4	5 th of November 5 th of November 6 th of November 11 th of November
TOTAL	11			11	

Similar to my analysis on frequency for the Arizona abortion ballot, some tendencies can be observed in the content published by CNN and Fox News on the abortion ballot in Florida. To start, let’s have a look at the general frequency of the published articles. This one is much more unbalanced and sporadic than was seen with the AZ ballot initiative. In order to make some sense of this timeline, I will analyse month per month.

First, as seen on the table above, CNN published an article on January 5th informing that signatures were being gathered to put abortion on the November ballot. The article also cites that, a month later, “oral arguments” (Royal & Suarez, 2024, para. 10) would take place “in front of the Florida Supreme Court” (Royal & Suarez, 2024, para. 10) . CNN also underlines that this action could help Biden’s chances of winning the elections. No content was published that month by Fox News However, the following month, Fox News published an article the day that the amendment would be argued before the State Supreme Court. Besides explaining

how the current situation was in other states, this news source also emphasised that the State Attorney General didn't think the amendment should be on the ballot because of its ambiguous language.

Next, it can be observed that, in April and May, CNN published more content than Fox News. This can be justified by the fact that in both months, restrictions on abortion would be put into place: first a 15-week limit and afterwards a ban after 6 weeks of pregnancy. CNN published many articles in that period of time to inform of the changes and also insists that, because the Supreme Court approved for the amendment to be put on the November ballot, a win could overthrow both bans. This news outlet also expressed some discontent by highlighting the health consequences these restrictions could have on patients. Two articles were published on May 1st, which isn't a coincidence as it is the day the 6-week limit went into effect. In contrast, Fox News only published one article a month expressing that this abortion ballot could hurt Trump's campaign for the presidential elections and continued to point out that the language in the amendment was ambiguous.

In August and November, Fox News predominated quantity wise. On the 30th of August, Fox News published three consecutive articles to defend and justify candidate Donald Trump's comments on the 6-week limitation. He found it too short, but the news outlet insisted on clarifying and rectifying his statement. CNN didn't publish anything on this topic, which indicates Fox News's support for Donald Trump. Similarly to this, twice as much content was published by Fox News in November; two articles the day of the presidential elections, one the day after and the last one a week later. The content of these articles and the frequency indicate a stance on the topic of abortion because Fox News praises Governor DeSantis for his fight against the amendment as it failed to pass. Other content includes a testimony of a former football player, showing his joy for the loss concerning the amendment. Overall, a positive reaction towards this loss can be sensed in Fox News' articles. On the other hand, CNN informs of the results while showing disappointment for the abortion ballot results in Florida. The news outlet also takes the opportunity to throw a jab at DeSantis by underlining his wrongdoings and complementing the Democrat's efforts throughout this battle for abortion.

Following this, articles were published on important dates depending on the political party. For example, on September 9, CNN posted an article accusing Republicans of wanting to intimidate and scare voter into retracting their vote for the amendment by having police officers

knock on their doors. Similarly, Fox News took the chance to support DeSantis' arguments on why people should vote "no" on the amendment following his press conference in late October.

In conclusion, as in Arizona, the content and frequency of publications in Florida, similar observations to the analysis on the Arizona ballot can be drawn here. The nature of the content followed by the frequency at which it is published is even more important than before. The technique of framing is even more visible than before as both news outlets frame the situation in their favour by insisting on some aspects such as the health consequences the ban would have, expressed by CNN, or by repeating multiple times that the language in the ballot is considered ambiguous, this time reported by Fox New. Both outlets also chose key moments to express their political affiliation, in a overt way, as one published three consecutive articles to defend candidate Trump's comments on the 6-weeks restriction and the other reported on a scandal related to the Republican party on the abortion ballot in Florida. As main observation, it can be detected that both news outlets express visible bias, when looking at these two factors. Similar to Arizona, both news outlets chose relevant content for the voters and citizens in Florida and urge it on by heightening the frequency or by publishing at key moments.

4.7 Survey

As I explained in the introduction of this last chapter of my thesis, my analysis not only included observations and results based on word count, focusing on the technique of labelling and word choice but also on a survey sent out to U.S citizens and answered by 31 participants. While the sample is small it is an instructive sample because it illustrates some compelling potential trends. The aim of the survey was to discover the impact that the news outlets had on citizen partisanship. It was between 29th of March and 15th of April and composed of 4 sections and 8 questions. Responses were anonymous. As we will see in the next sections, I took several variables into account when analysing my participant sample.

First, I will go over the demographics I defined when drafting this survey. Although, I didn't include it as a question, the participants come from 6 different states: New York, Kentucky, Ohio, Minnesota, Illinois and Arizona. My choice wasn't deliberate per se as these states include people I have contact with and who were willing to answer the survey and spread it around. Nevertheless, these 6 states represent an interesting variety as it includes long-time blue states, red states and swing states such as Ohio or Arizona (Reuters, n.d.).

The next factor I wanted to focus on and also incorporate in my examination is political affiliation. I made a point of it to let participants choose the party or ideology they identified themselves with the most. That is why I added four options to the question about this topic. Participants had the liberty to choose between Democrat, Republican, Independent or none of the above. I found it important to include independents as well as the possibility of not feeling represented by any of these ideologies as the political climate is constantly changing. I also decided to take in age groups as well, ranging from 18, which is the legal age to vote, to 55+ years. Including this factor was also significant as voter behaviour varies based on age; something I will explain more in detail in my observations.

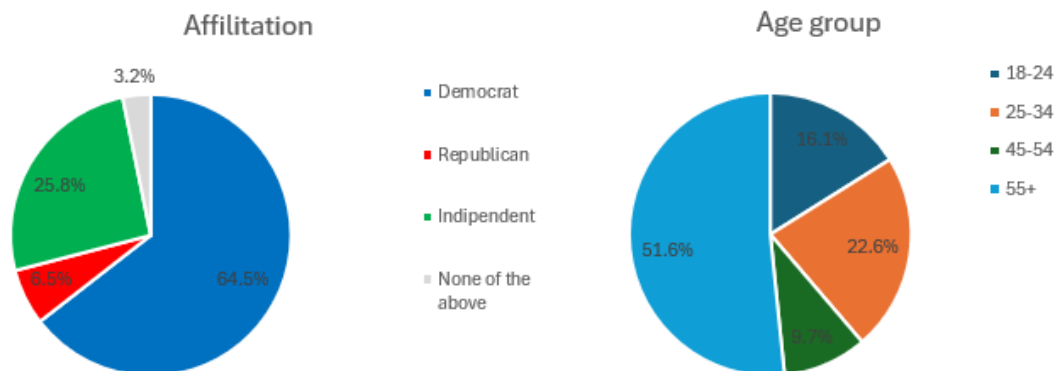
Lastly, I didn't want to limit my survey to participants that are college graduates or are currently pursuing a higher education. It didn't seem fair as higher education is not accessible to everyone in the United States, because of finances or other problems. Why would education come into play? The ballots I have displayed in this survey sometimes contain complex legal language or are expressed in a difficult manner. That means that well-educated people might have an easier experience when answering the survey. Even so, since every citizen in the U.S is encouraged to vote, I wanted to offer the same liberty to the participants.

To give respondents an overview of the context, I inserted the official text of each abortion ballot, one in Arizona and the other in Florida. I then added a question about their opinion of these ballots to get an idea on their stance on abortion before asking questions about the news articles excerpts. After the abortion ballot texts and opinion questions, I selected 4 news articles in total, half of them being from CNN and the other half belonging to Fox News. These were presented one after the other, with, one excerpt from CNN and the other from Fox News, in the form of two separate questions. The participants were then asked to select the news article excerpt that appealed to them the most. Possible responses included either one of the excerpts or "none of the above". I added the "none of the above" option to see how critical participants were of the content they read and at the same time, to give them the opportunity to express themselves fully.

4.7.1 Observations and results

Now, I want to turn my attention to the results of this query and more specifically to the observations I was able to draw from these results. You will find the complete overview of the

results in appendix 3. First, I'd like to point out a few observations regarding each political party or ideology.



As seen on the chart above, Democrats represent the majority of the participants, with a percentage of 64,5%. Within this majority, some predominant factors can be observed. First of all, all Democrat-affiliated participants at least agree or strongly agree with both ballots. This means that their stance on abortion corresponds to the opinion the Democrat party has on this topic. Another significant factor worth mentioning is that, even though most participants from this group belong to the 55+ age category, all age groups are represented with an almost equal distribution within the other three age groups. This allows me to see if age has an impact on the rest of the answers. In the case of Democrats, I've noticed that age doesn't influence the participant's choice between CNN and Fox News. Almost all participants seem to be non-committal critical of the coverage that was presented to them. Fourteen out of 20 voted at least once "none of the above", four selected at least once news articles excerpts belonging to Fox News and only the remaining two were completely satisfied by CNN content. This goes to show that not all Democrat appreciate or agree with coverage published by CNN. This finding coincides with a Pew Research Center study conducted in 2020 which showed that, compared to Republicans, Democrats have a tendency to consult other left-leaning news sources other than CNN such as MSNBC, NPR and The New York Times. In addition, the study showed that 24% of Republicans also consulted content from CNN. This statistic is almost the same for Democrats (23%) who rely on Fox News as a media source (Walker, Jurkowitz, Mitchell, & Shearer, 2020). This could explain why the Democrat participants were critical or unsure of CNN content by not selecting its news article excerpt or by selecting "none of the above" or a Fox News article excerpt instead.

Finally, I would like to underline that of the news article excerpts selected, the CNN excerpts tended to include the term "reproductive rights". This term seems to strike a chord amongst the

Democrat participants as 16 of them chose at least once a CNN news article excerpt mentioning it. The choice of news article containing this term shows how important this term is to Democrats, which explains why it was used so many times in the articles that were previously analysed. This can be justified by the fact that the Democrat participants, who showed themselves non-committal regarding certain news articles excerpts, clicked on the news articles excerpts containing the term “reproductive rights” when choosing CNN.

Next, I want to turn my attention to the results coming from Republican participants. This is the smallest group out of the whole sample, with only two participants belonging to this political party. The age group is also quite limited as only participants aged between 25 and 34 years said they identified with the Republican party. Nevertheless, I was able to identify two types of profiles within this group. The first profile includes a Republican who approves both ballots. The other represents a Republican being completely opposed to abortion. What is particularly interesting to observe with these two types of participants is that both mainly or exclusively chose CNN coverage. Furthermore, the respondent who clicked only on CNN is the one who disagrees with both ballots. This goes to show that some type of change of opinion is visible. This claim can be supported by the 2022 study conducted by UC Berkley, which indicates that Fox News viewers having watched CNN for a whole month changed their opinion on certain topics but not on their core values linking them to the Republican party (Lempinen, 2022). The persuasion is only partial but shows us how much being confronted with other news sources stimulates our critical thinking.

Then, let's have a look at the independent voters, which make up 25,8% of the whole sample. This shows an increase in third-party voters, which isn't all that surprising if we look at the statistics presented in the political overview chapter. Similarly to the Democratic sample, all age groups are represented in this group except for participants belonging to the 45-54 years category. However, a predominant presence of young voters can be observed, more specifically withing the category of 25 to 34 years old. This correspond to reality as, according to the Pew Research Center, “younger voters are more likely to be partisan ‘leaners’ than older voters” (Pew Research Center, 2024, p. 4). Regarding opinions on the ballots, some variation can be observed for both age groups. Regarding abortion, five out of the eight independent voters of this sample agree or strongly agree with both ballots. Yet, the remaining three either agree on one ballot and disagree on the other or disagree on one ballot and are neutral on the other. Their selection of news article excerpts also denotes variation and critical thinking as 5 out of 8 voted at least once for “none of the above”. The same amount alternated between Fox News and CNN

and the remaining 3 didn't vote for Fox News at all. This reflects the independent voters' do behave independently. as "independents often are portrayed as political free agents with the potential to alleviate the nation's rigid partisan divisions. Yet the reality is that most independents are not all that "independent" politically" (Pew Research Center, 2019, para. 1). Most independents lean towards one of the two main political parties, which might explain why some participants didn't select any Fox News article excerpts, as they lean towards the Democratic party.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that only one participant answered with "none of the above" when asked which political party h/she identified the most with. Despite not identifying with any political party, this participant agreed with both ballots. This respondent mainly answered with "none of the above" for the remaining questions which supports their non-identification to any political party.

Conclusion

I began this thesis with two central research questions:

- 1) Are news outlets partisan?
- 2) What impact do news outlets have on citizen's partisanship?

My assumption was that news outlets were all partisan to some extent and present bias. This could depend on multiple factors such as historical background, the news outlet's political affiliation as well as the journalist's own views. When it comes to impact on partisanship, the answer is trickier. A lot of elements come into play. The impact might depend on the topic covered in the news, the public's perception and the news outlets selected by the audience.

Because of the complexity of these questions, the observations and results of my discourse analysis are important to take into consideration. First let's look at the theoretical part of my thesis. As I discussed in the chapter on the U.S political system, not three but four branches of government exist, the last one being the press. This fourth branch might be unofficial but is as important as the other three because it acts as "gatekeeper" and "watchdog" at the same time. This can be confirmed when looking at the content I selected for CNN and Fox News. On the one hand, as "gatekeepers", both outlets chose to put certain topics and stories on the forefront and set others aside. They chose what to show to their audience. On the other hand, these two media outlets acted as "watchdogs", CNN in particular, when covering the voting scandal in Florida caused by Republican governor DeSantis. Although they both played those roles, it is not certain if they did it for the sake of journalism or with other reasons in mind.

Next, I looked at the factors that attract an audience to the media, particularly psychographics which is based on consumer's attitudes, beliefs and values. This clearly comes into play in the content published by CNN and Fox News. By looking at the consumer's beliefs and values (liberal or conservative), both outlets reflect their political affiliation in their content by the words they use or choose to ignore. The technique of framing, is also used to express some bias when covering the same story in two different ways. Then, the two techniques I chose to base my analysis on, word choice and labelling, are clearly visible. As seen in my discourse analysis based on the word bank I drew up, both news outlets choose certain words rather than others for their coverage on abortion. If we base it on the definition of these two techniques, the choice of terms aims to give a negative connotation to the topic at hand and to create an emotional reaction within the reader. Nevertheless, it isn't certain the statement bias, which

includes word choice and labelling, is enough to determine complete bias as the factors that define the concept of bias aren't all present. Despite the recurrence of the authors of these articles, the journalist's intent to express his/her desire to write a memorable story can't be tested. In order to detect that, the articles should be submitted to a different kind of analysis. Even if two of the three factors determining bias need further research, the bias is recurrent in multiple articles as CNN and Fox News use different words and choose to cover the same topic differently.

If we dive a bit deeper into the analysis, CNN and Fox News present similar tendencies when it comes to statement bias for both ballots. They both use certain words more than others, which indicates a link to the ideology of either the Democratic party or the Republican party. Furthermore, by omitting the use of certain terms, which indicate their stance on abortion, the technique of framing pops up again. Something I was surprised by is the inaccuracy found in articles posted on both outlets. By supporting abortion, you would think CNN would use the proper terms to talk about it but that isn't the case. Fox News also uses inaccurate terms. It isn't clear why or proven why these media outlets use inaccurate terms but it might be to generate an emotional reaction out of the reader, as stated by the American College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. This need to generate an emotional reaction might make sense for news outlets sharing the same view on abortion, as the Republican party, but this assumption doesn't add up for a liberal media outlet.

Both CNN and Fox News also take a stance on abortion with a noticeable and more significant bias for the Florida ballot, when looking at the frequency of publication. Both outlets are strategic by publishing at key moments in the timeline of both ballots. The articles also tell two sides of the same story by framing the coverage in a way that favours one of the two political parties. Some aspects regarding abortion and more specifically the referendums are either downplayed or completely ignored. The main difference in coverage between the two ballots is that of insistence. Although the coverage on the Arizona ballot presents clear bias, especially in the way the content is framed, both outlets publish more articles at certain dates regarding the Florida ballot, to express satisfaction or disappointment, or to defend or accuse a certain political party.

Concerning the survey, the answers surprised me. The survey showed that almost all participants were unsure of the content that was presented to them. Nevertheless, I was able to detect a possible influence when looking at the answers of the Republican participants. The Democrat

participants also showed a certain sensitivity to a particular term used more by CNN in their coverage: reproductive rights, as the majority of Democrat participants who showed their uncertainty towards at least one CNN news article excerpt, clicked on a snippet containing the term “reproductive rights” in at least one of the other questions. Despite their uncertainty, voter behaviour is visible, especially within independent voters as the survey showed independent participants who leaned towards a more liberal or conservative ideology, depending on the coverage they clicked on. The choice of news article excerpts reflects the voter behaviour of independent voters nicely as they tend to lean towards the Democratic or Republican party more often than not.

In conclusion, my research finds that these two news outlets are biased because of the language they choose to include in their coverage, as well as the way that their content is framed by insisting on certain topics and choosing not to talk about others. To the naked eye, this might mean that CNN and Fox News simply express their opinion on abortion, but because this topic is included in the pillars of the Democratic and Republican party, I consider these two news outlets to also be partisan. At the same time, I recognise that my findings are limited to two American media outlets. To determine a more complete and definitive answer, future researchers could include other news outlets, such as a deeper look into the Associated Press and conduct an analysis on other topics.

When looking at the second research question of this thesis, I can conclude that the coverage has an impact on partisanship but not to the extent or magnitude I expected. Although some persuasion in partisanship is visible, the majority of participants remain critical or wary of the content presented to them. At the same time, I recognise that my small sample size limits the generalisability of my conclusions. Future research could use a bigger sample and more news article excerpts to evaluate the full extent of this impact. However, despite these limitations, my research has been able to confirm what most of us have known all along: the media is biased. I was able to dissect one of the ways that the media influences or at least tries to influence its audience. I decided to conduct a linguistic research on two very well known media outlets. This type of research isn't very popular or conducted by many. Hopefully, this will help you develop a more critical eye when reading news articles and make you reflect on your own values and how they might be expressed in the media. It might push you to consult other media outlets to gather information on abortion or other topics. I will certainly use my better judgement and be more wary when reading news articles, be it American media or not.

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