

Bias of American Media Amid the Bipolar Political Circumstances

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Abstract

The author of this Journal article discusses existing political polarization between Republicans and Democrats in the United States and reviews the negative effects of existing political and ideological division on mass media in the country. In the article there is discussed the challenges mainstream American media corporations face today and the author suggests the solution for outstanding problems.

Keywords: CNN, Democrats, mainstream media, Media, politics, pro-liberal, pro-Trumpist, Republicans, social media, Trump

Introduction

The subject of our interest in this article is the American media and analysis of its problems amid the political escalation in the country. The focus will be on American media in given bipolar conditions: on the one hand “pro-liberal” or “pro-democratic” platform and the other hand “pro-conservative” or “pro-Trumpist” platform. Presence of these two poles in the American media is apparent even to the naked eye.

The main source of our analysis is the online media, because in combination with social networks, it is the largest media giant and the great influencer on the society.

This topic is actual due to the factor that the attempts of manipulating by media has always and almost everywhere been part of political life, especially in pre-election canvass. during the pre-electoral period attempts of manipulating by media raises, starts literally hunting on media outlets. Media and political manipulations is the issue that affects every citizen, changes our live and maintains the future of country. In Georgia, as usual, the ruling elites manage to claw mainstream media platforms, while the opposition affords only the small-scale media resources. But if we look at the USA, we can find that the situation is opposite.

In this article, we cannot avoid discussing media topics without reviewing political aspects, as they both often orchestrate common interests. Unfortunately, doctrines about 100 percent independent, impartial, objective media reporting are only used as a theoretical material to educate journalists at universities. In reality, in most occasions have complete bias, and at best, imitation of objectivity.

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Political Situation in the USA

Before we start discussing media issues, we have to overview current political situation in the USA. The leader of the country Donald Trump represents The Republican Party. At lawmaking level, in the House of Representatives of the Congress, “Democrats” have the majority. Therefore, they are the initiators of a number of steps against the president, including launching impeachment procedures against him. (Clare, Jeremy, Alex, & Haley, 2019) or to rein in Trump’s ability to wage war with Iran (Zengerle, 2020). Usually, Senate gets in their way, as “Republicans” bear the rule in this upper legislative house. The President has administration and federal agencies under control and is trying to establish conservative political agenda, via erasing liberal traces of former Democratic President Barack Obama, for example: President Donald Trump’s Interior Department removed “sexual orientation” from a statement in the agency’s ethics guide regarding workplace discrimination” (D’Angelo, 2019).

Trump has his proponent states, where Republicans have a majority in the state legislatures and are trying to establish a conservative agenda. In 26 states Trump has Republican governors (while, in 24 states are Democratic governors) and also Republican attorneys general hold 26 seats across the country (Association, Republican Attorneys General, n.d.). As for judiciary system, the President also makes effort to strengthen his positions. This direction is quite sensitive for the conservative leader, because the court often stands in his way, for example, last year, a federal judge has “temporarily blocked an abortion ban in Alabama that would criminalize the procedure at any stage of a pregnancy in most cases” (BBC, 2019).

The opposite political pole - the Democratic Party, as already mentioned, has dominance in the House of Representatives. Democrats have influences in judiciary to overcome rules adopted by Republican lawmakers. As well, Democrats have powerful NGO lobby which strikes the President from third sector.

The main squabbles between Democrats and Republicans are about:

#1. Abortions – Trump calls it “Killing” and pledges to protect “innocent life”. “The Democrat position on abortion is now so extreme that they don’t mind executing babies AFTER birth! It is now up to us to protect innocent human life” (Trump, Donald J. Trump, 2019).

Last year in some Republican state lawmakers initiated legal challenges to overturn the U.S. Supreme Court’s 1973 Roe v. Wade ruling that legalized abortion at 22 to 24 weeks of pregnancy. Also Trump makes effort to pressure abortion clinics, for example, Planned Parenthood gave up millions of dollars in federal funding in 2019 after the Trump administration said “the group would need to comply with a new rule banning it from referring women for abortions if it wanted to continue receiving government dollars” (HELLMANN, 2019). Also, in July 2019, the Trump administration abortion restrictions went into effect. According to the new regulation, planning clinics that are funded by taxpayers must stop referring women for abortions. The Health and Human Services Department formally notified clinics that “it will begin enforcing the ban on abortion referrals, along with a requirement that clinics maintain separate finances from facilities that provide abortions” (CBSNEWS, 2019).

In turn, Democrats discuss abortion as women’s right and named it reproductive health. Democrats believe, that it is all women’s right to have access on safe abortion. In this battle Democrats’ frank is backed by the pro-liberal advocacy groups, in the role of women rights defenders.

#2. **LGBT rights** – Much has been done in this direction during the Obama era, numerous orders have been issued and protections have been given to this group, including in healthcare, employment and housing directions. In ultra-liberal Democratic states, like in New Jersey and California, LGBTQ history lessons will soon be mandatory in classrooms (Adely, NorthJersey.com, & TODAY, 2020). Trump works hard to replace Obama era rules with new ones here as well. For example, last year The Department of Housing and Urban Development announced a new rule proposal to roll back Obama-era protections for transgender people living in homeless shelters (PASCUS, 2019).

#3. **Adoption** –Obama-era policy about adoption prohibited federally funded agencies from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, so adoption agencies had no rights to refuse giving baby to the same sex couple families. On the other hand, religious organizations contradicted that policy, arguing that they are being forced to act against their beliefs. Trump's administration plans to let adoption agencies reject same-sex parents. Last year The Department of Health and Human Services announced a new rule “that would allow adoption agencies and other programs that receive HHS grants to reject same-sex couples and rainbow families on the basis of religious freedom” (Ring, 2019).

#4. **Immigration** – Democrats' and Republicans' viewpoint about immigration differs as well. Democrats have liberal approaches about immigration policy and believe that their advanced country have duty to let persecuted or vulnerable asylum seekers in their country, but Trump absolutely contradicts that kind of attitude and he is the man known for his popular idea about building the wall at Mexico border in order to keep migrants from entering in the United states. This year information was leaked from the White house, that it is considering the issue of expanding travel ban to additional countries, mostly on Islamic states (NBCnews, 2020).

#5. **Foreign policy** - Inside the country the President was sharply criticized almost for every single steps in foreign policy. Latest topic of contradiction was Syria, when Trump withdrew troops from northern Syria and he was accused by Democrats that, the United States was abandoning Syrian Kurds, who have been “the closest U.S. partner in counter terrorism operations against the Islamic State” (Lamothe, 2019). Also, Democrats seek ways to interment in Trump's relation with Iran, as US House of Representatives voted to limit the President's ability to declare war on Iran (France24, 2020).

In sum, Donald Trump had to be engaged in the battle for both fronts foreign and domestic.

Situation in American Media

Like contradictions on the US political field, mass media is polarized as well and we have to discuss those crossing fields dealing with one another. The United States differs from other countries and from our country where mainstream media outlets are monopolized in the hands of ruling political power. In the United States, ruling party does not enjoy the support from major media organizations. Conservative Republicans and Trump are constantly attacked from pro-liberal mainstream media channels and the President often complains about it, accuses them for spreading fake news. “So funny to watch the Fake News, especially NBC and CNN. They are fighting hard to downplay the deal with North Korea. 500 days ago they would have “begged” for this deal-looked like war would break out. Our Country's biggest enemy is the Fake News so easily promulgated by fools!” – he wrote (Trump, Twitter, 2018). “I am extremely pleased to see that @CNN has finally been exposed as #FakeNews and garbage journalism. It's about time!” – he said in another tweet (Trump, Twitter, 2017) and one more: “A very big part of the Anger we see today in our society is caused

by the purposely false and inaccurate reporting of the Mainstream Media that I refer to as Fake News. It has gotten so bad and hateful that it is beyond description. Mainstream Media must clean up its act” (Trump, Twitter, 2018).

Mainstream media is the huge recourse which chose liberal agenda and often backs “Democrats”. For example, in May 2019 Georgia's Republican Governor Brian Kemp has signed banning abortions legislation once a fetal heartbeat is detected (Bloomberg, 2019). Soon mainstream media giants threatened to leave the state if the bill went into effect. NBC Universal said that if the Georgia law was upheld after legal challenges, “it would strongly impact our decision-making on where we produce our content in the future.” (Victor, 2019) Also, WarnerMedia, the parent company of HBO, CNN and other major channels, had the similar position. Netflix stated to continue filming in Georgia, but the company said it would rethink its investment in this state if the bill goes into effect (Graham, 2019).

In sum, we can note, that that mainstream media channels use standard methods of combat.

So, the question is: what kind of communication tools is flexible for the President? Trump frequently uses social media platforms to reach the American audience and even to spread information about very important decisions. During the recent tensions with Iran, (when in Iraq as a result of the air strike ordered by Trump killed Iranian military commander Qassem Soleimani) Trump tweeted a threat against them “Iran has been nothing but problems for many years. Let this serve as a WARNING that if Iran strikes any Americans, or American assets, we have targeted 52 Iranian sites (representing the 52 American hostages taken by Iran many years ago), some at a very high level & important to Iran & the Iranian culture, and those targets, and Iran itself, WILL BE HIT VERY FAST AND VERY HARD” (Trump, Donald J. Trump, 2020). “The United States just spent Two Trillion Dollars on Military Equipment. We are the biggest and by far the BEST in the World! If Iran attacks an American Base, or any American, we will be sending some of that brandnew beautiful equipment their way... and without hesitation!” he threatened again (Trump, Donald J. Trump, 2020).

Interestingly, Trump uses social media, but social media giants are against the President, like traditional media entities. Main social platforms – like Google+Youtube, Twitter and Facebook have liberal agenda and another big battle is between them. Last December Google and YouTube removed 300+ ads promoting Trump (Vogt, 2019). In June investigative platform Project Veritas has released a new report about Google, with undercover video of a Senior Google Executive, leaked documents and testimony from the insider - “The report appears to show Google’s plans to affect the outcome of the 2020 elections and “prevent” the next “Trump situation” (Veritas, 2019). In May Facebook have banned several conservative persons from both Facebook and Instagram, including Infowars host Alex Jones, Laura Loomer, Paul Joseph Watson, and Milo Yiannopoulos (NOLAN, 2019). In turn, the leader of the country warned Silicon Valley giants to tread carefully: “I think what Google and what others are doing, if you look at what’s going on with Twitter, if you look at what’s going on with Facebook, they better be careful because you can’t do that to people. So, I think that Google, and Twitter and Facebook, they are really treading on very, very troubled territory and they have to be careful. It’s not fair to large portions of the population”(Reuters, 2018).

Republican President and his agenda is mainly backed by smaller, far-right syndicated online media platforms, like Breitbart, Infowars and Politico. In 2016 pre-election campaign Hillary Clinton’s communications director, Jennifer Palmieri said: “It would be laughable that the Republican nominee for president has allowed his campaign to be overtaken by Breitbart and Infowars” (GOLDMACHER, 2016).

What about traditional media resources, openly pro-conservative strong media channel is the Fox News, which is good anchor for Republicans.

The Trump phenomenon, whose largest share of information in pre-election campaign was on social networks, bloggers, YouTube channels and far-right syndicated online media, proved that just conventional media outlets are ineffective in the ideological struggle.

It is interesting to observe how the media outlets of both poles report about the same fact differently, how they structure the news, how they make accents, which respondent adverts, what kind of political undertones are created, what influences are intended to make on audience, how media is manipulating by journalistic tricks, how they sometimes forget about objectivity, how media organizations with high ethics and standards try to manipulate with texts, headlines, quotes and so on - and it happens in the country, which is the standard of media development for rest of the world.

Conclusion

Last 10 years was named as a “decade of social networks”. A lot of media entities has integrated into the social media platforms and now, even the largest media organizations have to be productive in this direction. Only traditional methods for spreading information and making influence on public opinion are not enough. Trump, with his partisan communication style and unpredictable methods reached more success than huge and powerful mainstream media as a whole, and this is not just my opinion. In 2016, the world was observing how radical and eccentric candidate won presidential election, despite the fact, that major media resources were biased against him. Even more, during his presidency his ratings continue to raise. According to Hill-HarrisX poll in December, 2019, Trump’s approval rating has neared 50 percent heading into the 2020 election year - Forty-nine percent of surveyed Americans said they approve of the president’s job performance, up from 46 percent from the previous poll (Bonn, 2019). “President Trump’s job approval rating is the highest it’s been in two years, boosted by voter optimism about the economy, according to the latest Harvard CAPS/Harris Poll survey. The survey found that 48 percent approve of the job Trump is doing, compared to 52 percent who said they disapprove. That’s up from 45 percent approval in March” – says another source (EASLEY, 2019). And majority of registered voters expect Trump will be re-elected. According to a POLITICO/Morning Consult survey, “56 percent of voters expect the president to be reelected next year, including 85 percent of Republicans and 51 percent of independents. By comparison, more than a third of Democrats (35 percent) say the same” (OPRYSKO, 2019). As the Newsweek reports: “Trump raised more money than all top Democratic presidential opponents in the last quarter of 2019” (Ramsey, 2020). Democrats have no prominent presidential candidate yet for 2020. (Democratic hopefuls are: Sen. Bernie Sanders, South Bend Mayor Pete Buttigieg, former Vice President Joe Biden, entrepreneur Andrew Yang and Sen. Elizabeth Warren).

In Obama era dominant liberal media corporations were confident that their ideological basis was the only one and it had no alternative, and against this ideology were only small marginal groups. But Trump’s appearance on political field proved that opponents’ positions were mistaken and reality was different – he was purposely breaking all standards and set liberals views at defiance, his rating was proportionally increasing. At first, Trump’s inconceivable claims to build the wall on the border, was considered as nonsense and groundless jokes from mainstream media. They could not believe that it was possible to gain votes due such promises in the country where majority are descendants of immigrants. So, what was the problem? Why liberal leaning media giants failed to evaluate the situation adequately? And why did this mistake further lead to a radical decline in their confidence? For them the key problem was how they reacted when they discovered that conservative nationalist America was still alive. At first, their reaction

was shock, liberal establishment was surprised to see first exit poll results on Trump's behalf. Then was the second phase of rejection, when they started proving that Trump's victory was product of Russian interference in the US elections and those blames insulted voters', which consciously made their choice. And the third phase was aggression, when liberal pro-democratic media attacked Trump's supporters. For example, House Budget Committee chair Democratic Rep. John Yarmuth called for a bar on wearing "Make America Great Again" (MAGA) hats (POLLAK, 2019).

In sum, mainstream media made crucial mistake when started war against the audience, when they deified their ideological narrative over Journalistic standards. The consequences were brutal – CNN lost trust and Fox news (loyal to Trump) topped the ratings. As Forbs reports: "CNN saw its prime time lineup drop 26% in April compared to the same month one year ago. CNN's total audience in prime time was well under a million viewers--767,000--while competitors MSNBC and Fox News finished the month far ahead: MSNBC in second place overall with 1.660 million total viewers, and Fox News leading all of cable with a total audience of 2.395 million" (Joyella, 2019).

Latest statistic proves the same: "Fox News averaged 2.5 million viewers per night in 2019, the most in its 23-year history, making the network the most-watched channel on basic cable. According to Nielsen Media Research, Fox News beat out ESPN, with its 1.78 million viewers, and third-place MSNBC, which drew an average of 1.75 million viewers in prime time. Fox topped its cable competitors for a fourth straight year. CNN finished 22nd, with an average of 972,000 viewers per night" (CONCHA, 2019).

In conclusion, we can say, that the mainstream media should admit that ignoring the majority's opinion is not the profitable position and it should return to its common place – close to people, otherwise it will promote the dissemination of the public and, as it is predicted due to such tension, situation, may even lead to civil war in the country. According to Rasmussen Reports survey, 31% of respondents think it is likely the United States will experience a second civil war in the next five years (rasmussenreports, 2019). And American comedian, political commentator, and television host Bill Maher stated that, he is changing his tune on HBO's Real Time- "he plans to tone down his comedic routine mocking President Donald Trump and his supporters over fears that the political division in the U.S. could lead to a second civil war" (AHMED, 2019).

American mainstream media should return the authority and trust to become again the example of high professional standards for the rest of the world. Its duty is to be a band between the people and the government, not the tool of ideological manipulation in the hands of certain political groups.

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